



AP[®] European History 2002 Sample Student Responses

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Absolutism affected the power + status of the European nobility depending on the country in which they lived. In ~~Great Britain~~ ^{England}, the power of the nobility increased due to a victory in the English Civil War and the Glorious Revolution of 1688. However, in France, Louis XIV's absolutist regime decreased the power of the nobles, but heightened their material status. In Russia and in ~~Russia~~, the absolutist leaders of those countries modernized their nations, ~~but the nobles~~ + the nobility underwent a change, but it retained prestige + power.

Charles I considered himself to be an absolute monarch in England in the 1690s. A large ^{portion of the} ~~parliamentary~~ ~~group~~ disliked him because they wanted more of a say in the government and because the Protestants of the group disagreed with his Catholicism and ruling of the Anglican Church. The English Civil War ensued + the parliament won, however, through Cromwell's Protectorate, and the return of the Stuarts, Charles II and James II. It was not until 1688 that the Glorious Revolution placed William + Mary of ~~Orange~~ Orange on the

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throne. ~~They~~ ^{pro} They signed a Bill of Rights, which gave Parliament more power, and thus gave the nobles a greater influence + responsibility in the government. It also stated that a ^{new} tax could not be passed w/o parliamentary consent, another example of their increased power.

However, in France, the absolutist regime of Louis XIV took power away from the nobles. Although the nobles were exempt from taxes, they had no responsibility or say in the government. Louis XIV and his ministers, particularly Colbert, ran the country. He built Versailles, a beautiful palace outside of Paris for his nobles. Lined with gardens and filled with fountains + opulent architecture + decorations, Versailles was a veritable playground for the nobles. There were balls, fancy clothes, + huge numbers of servants, and most of the nobles' incomes were spent on these luxuries. Thus, the status of the nobles was high and they were wealthy, + lived an indulgent lifestyle, but they had no political power in the French government.

During this same time Peter the Great sought to "westernize" Russia. An ~~autocratic~~ autocratic tsar who had absolute power, he did not wish to share it with his royal court. He moved the capital to St. Petersburg, ^{absorbed} ~~incorporated~~ western intellectual and cultural trends. He forced all his nobles to cut off their beards and instructed them to learn modern western dances. Russia historically has an autocratic tsar like Peter, + the nobles have no political clout in the government. However, the nobles in Russia are huge landowners and had enormous power over the serfs on their estates. This economic power, the serfs were almost like slaves, made them wealthy + prosperous. Thus, although Peter the Great ruled without the input of anyone else, the nobles were westernized under his rule + enjoyed power over their serfs and economic gains.

In Prussia, a similar situation emerged. Frederick William, "The Great Elector", wanted to increase the power of Prussia. He achieved this goal by building up a huge army, one that ~~was~~ was enormous in proportion to

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Prussia's population. Nobles were required to serve in the army in exchange for protected control over the serfs on their estates. These "Junkers", as they were called, did not mind serving in the Prussian army for the received so much power over their serfs. Frederick William + his successors continued to centralize the power of Prussia into their own hands, forming an absolute monarchy. The nobility (Junkers) had ^{real} political influence in the government, but they contributed to the success of the state by agreeing to serve in the army in exchange for those manorial rights over their serfs.

Overall, the European nobles gained different privileges and rights according to the country in which they lived. England, with its ~~longstanding~~ long-standing tradition of parliamentary government, established a limited monarchy after the English Civil War and a strong parliament, which increased the political power of the nobles. Louis XIV "divine right of kings" absolutist rule allowed the nobles luxurious economic gain but no political privileges. Russia and Prussia, in attempts

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to strengthen their nations, consolidated all of the political power into the hands of autocratic rulers, and obtained the support of the nobility by allowing them unrestrained power over their serfs. Clearly, the position of the nobility entirely depended on the political & cultural traditions of the country in which they resided.

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In the period of Absolutism from 1650 - 1750 the power of the nobles in many countries decreased. In France under Louis XIV and in Prussia under Frederick William the power of the nobility was greatly reduced by the absolute monarchs.

In France the "Sun King" was able to ~~bring~~ nullify the activities of the French nobles. The main way that Louis XIV achieved this was by creating the 100 million dollar Palace of Versailles. At this Monarchical mansion of epic proportions the nobility was encouraged by force to live for a certain amount of the year. While at his own home Louis XIV was able to control the nobles by knowing their plans through an effective pseudo-spy system. By knowing what the various nobles were planning Louis XIV was able to curb any planned insurrection and keep himself in complete control. By the end of Louis XIV's 72 year reign over France the power of the nobility

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was insignificant compared to the power of the monarchs.

Another case of a monarch curbing the power of the nobility was in Prussia. Under Frederick William the German nobility, called the junkers, ~~loses~~ ^{effectively} lost the majority of their power in the government. In order to subdue the junkers

Frederick William made a deal with them. In exchange for the noble's complete support

in all political matters Frederick William would grant the junkers tax exempt status, allow them places of prestige in the Prussian military, and grant them complete control ~~of~~ over their serfs. The junkers accepted this deal and virtually gave absolute control

to Frederick William. Using this newfound absolute control Frederick William set about solidifying his gains. Frederick William

~~set~~ set Prussian policy towards educating the young and gradually building up the military. With a new generation of children indoctrinated in the belief of absolutism and the growing strength of the Prussian military the ability for

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the junkers to reclaim their ancestral rights were gone. Frederick William had within his lifetime effectively negated the role of the junkers in formulating Prussian governmental policy.

The period of absolutism led by many very powerful monarchs had effectively reduced the power of the nobility to being dubious at best. The policy of keeping the nobles directly under the monarch's thumb, which was employed by Louis XIV, squashed the nobles power by keeping them inactive with matters of state. Whereas in Prussia the nobles willingly gave up power for certain concessions to be made by the monarch, only to have that monarch institute policies that would further erode the power and ^{status} of the nobility.