

PART VIII REASON, REVOLUTION, ROMANTICISM: THE EIGHTEENTH AND EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURIES

Chapter 24 The European Enlightenment

I. A Prerevolutionary Movement

1. The scientific revolution taught reliance on individual experience and reason over tradition and authority.
2. Within the age of absolutism, ideas germinated and grew that would undermine everything that age stood for.
3. France, which dominated Europe culturally and politically in the eighteenth century, began with Louis XIV who ruled by divine right and ended with Napoleon who ruled through public acclamation.
4. The revolutionary ideas that originated in France would also have a profound impact on the formation of the United States.

A. The Philosophes

1. The Enlightenment was led by a diverse group of individualistic Frenchmen.
2. They were propagandists who wanted to shed “light” on their generation.
3. They tended to be middle class and made use of the burgeoning print medium to spread their message.

B. The Salon

1. Salons were small gathering places in eighteenth-century Paris.
2. Woman generally ran them and they were places where the sexes exchanged ideas on an equal footing.
3. The Salons provided an important social context for the exchange of ideas.
4. Educated men and women wanted to be thought of as enlightened at this time.

C. Foundations of the Enlightenment: John Locke (1632–1704)

1. The philosophes claimed to be empiricists but also espoused a belief in natural rights.
2. They were strongly influenced by John Locke.
3. The natural rights espoused by Locke could not be proved by experience but were deduced by an examination of conscience.

D. The Philosophes’ Political and Religious Doctrines

1. Empiricism and a rationalistic doctrine of natural rights formed the core of the Enlightenment.
2. Enlightenment thinkers believed in human equality.
3. They opposed religious intolerance.
4. The Church was viewed as an instrument of oppression, ignorance, and superstition.
5. They had little respect for Christianity and for many, the exercise of reason was a kind of religious rite.
6. Although they influenced democratic revolutions and reform, the philosophes were actually advocates of *despotism*.

E. Diderot (1713–1784) and the Encyclopedia

1. The philosophes believed in education as an instrument of progress.
2. To this end Diderot compiled a vast encyclopedia.

3. French authorities twice suppressed the encyclopedia.
4. It was full of information about science and technology.

F. Voltaire (1694–1778)

1. Voltaire was the giant of the French Enlightenment.
2. He was not a profoundly original thinker but a great writer who could see through pretense and hypocrisy.
3. He was sent into exile in England and was favorably impressed with conditions there compared with France.
4. He also encountered the works of John Locke and introduced Locke's ideas to France.
5. *Candide* is the most famous of his "philosophical tales."
6. Voltaire's outlook was profoundly affected by the Lisbon earthquake; one of the worst natural disasters to strike Europe in centuries.

G. Montesquieu (1689–1755)

1. Montesquieu believed that constitutions should be tailored to meet the conditions and historical traditions of a particular society.
2. Montesquieu's *Persian Letters* (1721) is the fictitious commentary of a Persian visitor to Paris on what appear to him to be the strange customs of the city.
3. His reliance on giving history strong consideration when drawing up political reform made him a political conservative.
4. Montesquieu developed a theory on the separation of powers which was very influential in the United States.

H. Rousseau (1712–1778)

1. Rousseau's first two essays that brought him literary recognition attacked the corruption of society and blamed advances in science and the arts for contributing to humankind's degeneration.
2. Rousseau believed the deepest part of human beings was at the level of instincts and that humans were instinctively benevolent and good.
3. Rousseau idealized the lower classes as well as people from pre-literate societies who live in a "state of nature."
4. His most important work on political theory was *The Social Contract*.
5. At various times and for valid reasons, Rousseau has been called the father of democracy, socialism, fascism, communism, nationalism, and fascism.

I. Enlightenment Feminism: Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797)

1. Educated women who considered themselves equal to men were a rarity during the Enlightenment.
2. Rousseau, who challenged many fundamental assumptions about society, nonetheless maintained that women should be educated for a subservient role to men.
3. Still, the rhetoric of revolutionary France and of Rousseau stoked the fire of feminism as several women writers began challenging the inferior social status of women.
4. Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) prefigures some of the feminist ideas of contemporary times.
5. Wollstonecraft provided a dismal portrayal of women's lives in her time while advocating for domestic virtue and education and professional achievement.

II. Aspects of Painting in the Enlightenment

1. In both England and France, painters turned to scenes from contemporary life.
2. William Hogarth (1692–1764) was interested in recording the foibles and failings of the English and their manners and morals.
3. Painted with extreme verisimilitude, Joseph Wright's (1734–1797) *Experiment with the Air Pump* reflects an earnest middle-class interest in science and experimentation at home.
4. In France, the *rococo* style of Antoine Watteau and later François Boucher overtook the classicism of Le Brun and his school.