Why study Absolutism?

1) Understand 17th → 18th centuries
2) Understand 20th century
3) Understand 21st century?

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See in terms of the end-game --- i.e., 1789 French Revolution

A) Politics: Absolutist monarchy of 17th century

B) Social: Combines with newly-invented social class: “merchants”
[bourgeoisie… “middle-class”]

C) Intellectual/cultural: produces “Enlightenment”
value/idea of “toleration” // rights-bearing individual (citizen)

⇒ LEADS TO REVOLUTION of the “Rights of Man”

2) Understand 20th century:
Totalitarianism is appealing! And “modern”!

3) Understand 21st century?
PARIS (Reuters) - French prosecutors said Monday they were opening a judicial investigation into comments by a leading far-right politician who questioned whether the Nazis used gas chambers in the Holocaust. Justice Minister Dominique Perben called for the inquiry after Bruno Gollnisch, a professor of Japanese at the University of Lyon, questioned how the gas chambers were used in the wartime slaughter of Jews and how many Jews were killed.

Prosecutors in the southern city of Lyon said the investigation would focus on “denying crimes against humanity.” France anti-racism laws have made denying the Holocaust a crime, punishable by fines and even prison.

Prosecutors last month had already opened a preliminary investigation into the comments by Gollnisch, a European deputy who is also the number two man in the National Front party of extreme-right leader Jean-Marie Le Pen.

Gollnisch told a news conference last month he recognized gas chambers had existed but said he thought historians still had to decide whether they were actually used to kill Jews.


Japan minister decries textbooks critical of war

TOKYO, Nov 28: Japan’s education minister said this weekend that Japanese history textbooks have had a “self-tormenting” view of World War II and that he is relieved current texts have cut back on criticism, reports said Sunday.

“There was a time when Japanese textbooks were full of nothing but extremely self-tormenting things saying that Japan was bad,” Education Minister Nariaki Nakayama told a town hall meeting in southern Oita prefecture on Saturday, the Asahi and Nihon Keizai newspapers reported.

“We have tried to correct that,” he said. “I’m really glad that recently there are fewer words such as ‘comfort women’ and ‘forced relocation’ used in textbooks, he said.

Historians say at least 200,000 young women, known as “comfort women”, mostly from Korea but also from Taiwan, China, the Philippines and Indonesia, were forced to serve as sex slaves in Japanese army brothels during the war.

The ministry is in the process now of approving junior high textbooks for the year to March 2007.

Nakayama told his audience that it was damaging to make Japanese youth take the blame for the acts of their forebears.


November 2004 Cathy Young: Defending Repression: In Defense of Internment and the Japanese internment? . . . . So it takes some nerve to pen a defense of this reviled policy -- which is exactly what the author and syndicated columnist Michelle Malkin did recently, in a new book titled In Defense of Internment: The Case for “Racial Profiling” in World War II and the War on Terror. Malkin’s argument is closely tied to post-September 11 debates about ethnic, racial, and religious profiling as a "homeland security" measure. September 11 debates about ethnic, racial, and religious profiling as a "homeland security" measure.

To counter this guilt complex -- peddled, according to Malkin, by high school textbooks, universities, ethnic activists, politicians, and the media -- Malkin sets out to debunk what she describes as politically correct myths about internment: that it was motivated primarily by racism and hysteria, that there was no national security justification for it, and that the relocation and internment camps were Nazi-style death camps. (It’s not clear who has ever made that last claim. Malkin asserts simply that such images are evoked today by the use of the term concentration camp, a phrase that was actually used by U.S. authorities at the time.)

http://www.reason.com/0411/co.cy.defending.shtml

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In a way, In Defense of Internment follows in the footsteps of another recent famous (or infamous) right-wing tome: last year’s Treason, by Ann Coulter, which undertook the rehabilitation of Sen. Joseph McCarthy and a debunking of “the myth of ‘McCarthyism.’” McCarthy, Coulter proclaimed, was a true hero in the struggle against communism, and the only unjust persecution was that of Tail Gunner Joe himself by his left-wing, America-hating enemies.

. . . . As the revisionists plow ahead, sometimes one wants to ask, "Have you no sense of decency, folks, at long last? Have you left no sense of decency?"

http://www.reason.com/0411/co.cy.defending.shtml

3) Understand

21st century?

"Modernity" = “rationalization”

efficiency

centralization

bureaucratization
Why study Absolutism?

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1661-1715: Reign of Louis XIV
[Thirty Years’ War: 1618-1648]
- 1638: b. Louis XIV; 1643: d. Louis XIII
- 1643-1661: Anne of Austria [Spain] and Cardinal Mazarin [Italy] rule in his place ['regency']
  - La Fronde --- 1648-1653 – nobles try to overthrow monarchy
  - Court in hiding at Fontainebleau
- 1661: 23 yr. old Louis XIV: creation of the ‘Sun King’ [i.e., center of universe!] at Versailles
  - Versailles court culture: total centralization and surveillance of powers
  - absolutist culture of patronage/dependence

17th century: THE AGE OF ABSOLUTISM

Invention of racial slavery < --- > 1618-1648: Thirty Years’ War
- 1632: Rembrandt
  Anatomy Lesson
- 1641: MASSACHUSETTS becomes first colony in North America to recognize slavery as a legal institution:
- 1650: Connecticut
- 1661: Virginia
- 1663: Virginia law: if a child is born to a slave, that child also enslaved
  - NB: BLOOD INHERITANCE

Definition of Absolutism:
“The ruling power is not subject to regularized challenge or check by any other agency – e.g., judicial, legislative, religious, economic, or electoral.”

NB: MODERN NOT MEDIEVAL!!! Pope/bishops/nobility (castles)
No “checks” on absolute power

- Judicial --- law courts
- Legislative --- “congress” or “parliament”
- Religious --- bishop-lords, papacy
- Economic --- unlimited right to tax/spend
  - “taxation without representation”
- Electoral --- elections

17th-c. absolutist government: “Modern”

- 1) “Scientific rationality” and “mathematical certainty” extended to politics
- 2) New passion for “centralization”, “bureaucracy,” and “efficiency”
- 3) Eliminate opposition voices
- 4) Destroy all other allegiances: everything owed to central ruler

17th-century Absolutism:
Five elements

1. Legislative: rule without consent and counsel
   of nobility [i.e., “Second Estate”]
   - 1614: last meeting of the Estates General
   - Eliminate possibility of being checked by nobility/aristocrats
     [e.g., our “Senate”]

What’s the problem with the Estates General not meeting since 1614?
Because they’re changing!!! And they’re your source of money!!!

And more than that --- the “Third Estate” is now the “class”
that has the fluid capital!!! You need their taxes!!!
“Three Orders [Estates]”:
13th c. → 18th c.

How did the Third Estate get to be like this???

2. RELIGIOUS: 1685
Revocation of Edict of Nantes (1598)

- Abolish religious toleration and opposition
- Appoint all its bishops; make them absolutely dependent on you [and not, e.g., the Pope]
Mediation: Louis XIV
follows the example of James I:
“No bishop, no king.”

Remember Fontainebleau! And la Fronde…

1685: Revocation of Edict of Nantes

(III) *Lettre de cachet* = “sealed letter”
*cacher = “to hide”*: a letter signed by the king
- used to authorize someone’s
imprisonment [e.g., in Bastille]
  indefinitely without due process
- NB: against our principle of “writ of
  habeas corpus” [you have the body]


commands recipient to obey orders
without delay and without
explanation

[Cf. “Man with the Iron Mask” — fictional
brother of Louis XIV [novel of Alexandre
Dumas]: imprisoned for the rest of his life
without legal representation]
L: Deliverance of the Count de L’Orges / R: Discovery of the Iron Mask

Enlightenment!
Liberation of the Count de Lorges after 32 years of imprisonment!!

• Dungeon as metaphor for tyranny / darkness of pre-Enlightenment
• Light = liberation from tyranny

“Discovery” of the Iron Mask!

(IV) Versailles:
Louis XIV abandons the Louvre for Versailles

– Gather everyone out in the country [away from Paris and possibility of uprising]
– Put them under surveillance
– A culture of absolute dependence on / revolving around the sun-king
Key to Versailles:

**SURVEILLANCE**

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Am I on campus camera?
Schools say videos are deterrents, security measure

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In the Name of Security, Privacy for Me, Not Thee

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In the spring of 2001, Chief Justice William H. Rehnquist sounded an alarm.
“Technology now permits millions of important and confidential conversations to occur through a system of electronic networks,” he wrote in a First Amendment case. “These advances, however, raise significant privacy concerns. We are placed in the uncomfortable position of not knowing who might have access to our personal and business e-mails, our medical and financial records, or our cordless and cellular telephone conversations.”

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Milwaukee Sentinel Journal 29 May 2001

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Modernity as Rationalization / Mathematics:

“Cartesian Geometry”

“Plot x on vertical and 1,2,3,4,5 on horizontal …”

Versailles Architecture: Cartesian Geometry

Versailles Landscape:
palace approach
What is the *cultural meaning* of this architecture / landscape?

Versailles as the global center of MODERN RATIONAL ORDER

Château of Vaux-le-Vicomte; Home of Nicholas Fouquet, finance minister of Louis XIV
NB: Fouquet not a noble!!! newly-rich Third Estate

Vaux-le-Vicomte :: U.S. Capitol

RATIONALITY!!!
Lawmakers reason: rational discussion [neo-classical, not Gothic]
V: LEGITIMATION
“Sun King” Cultural Ideology

- Thanks to Copernicus: a heliocentric universe!
- 17th-c. representation [cf. Newton]: the world revolves around Louis!!! [and Versailles]
- What is legitimation???

JFK and Jackie as royals

JFK as warrior

Kennedys as “family”:
suburban?
aristocratic?
Nantucket?
definitely photogenic!

Ronald Reagan: man of the “West”
plain-spoken;
transparent;
not-Nantucket

LE ROI SOLEIL: POURQUOI?
LOUIS XIV REPOND.
Triumph of Louis XIV, Joseph Werner [1664], Versailles

- Louis as Apollo, god of the sun
  - Classical but not “humanist” / renaissance
- Heliocentrism
- Classical imagery: roots monarchy in Ancient ROMAN EMPIRE [for greater legitimacy]

- Neo-classical symbols:
  - Muscular body
  - [the real Louis had a stomach “three times the size of ordinary men” at his death]
  - Laurel wreath: victory
  - Roman toga
  - Lyre in left-hand: Apollo god of music, i.e., “harmony”
  - Horses: ancient myth of sunrise - sunset [four corners of earth]

A young Louis XIV

Dance as a marker of status
i.e., rationality / grace / civilization

RIDICULE

“Monsieur Stumblebum”: not to be able to dance is to be uncivilized / irrational.
1) Understand 17th \( \rightarrow \) 18th centuries

See in terms of the end-game --- i.e., 1789 French Revolution

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B) **Social**: Combines with newly-invented social class: “merchants”
   [bourgeoisie… “middle-class”]

C) **Intellectual/cultural**: produces “Enlightenment” \( \rightarrow \)
   value/idea of “toleration” // rights-bearing individual (citizen)

\( \Rightarrow \) **LEADS TO REVOLUTION of the “Rights of Man”**

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**1715: Death of Louis XIV: crumpling of Absolutist 17th c.**

- Louis XIV: 1643-1715
- **Louis XV**: 1715-1774
- Louis XVI: 1774-1792 [guillotined 1793]

Introduces the 18th-century
“Age of Enlightenment”

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**NB irony**: The **Enlightenment** is directed against the “dark ages” of the absolutist and intolerant **Sun King** !!!

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Death of old order: not only political but also economic:
“The Three Estates”: Clergy, Nobility, **Third Estate**
VOLTAIRE: one of two most famous of the Enlightenment philosophes [other is ROUSSEAU]

Most important of Enlightenment values: TOLERANCE

NB: Should be read in contrast with Revocation of the Edict of Nantes [i.e., edict of toleration] and the “Age of Reason”

Read the meaning of “tolerance” from perspective of V’s skepticism: an “epistemological modesty” → a recognition that human reason is limited/fallible.

We do not have absolute [mathematical] certainty about religious truths → hence, it is in accordance with natural law that we should be tolerant of what we do not know. And human law should follow natural law.

REVIEW: Rousseau: “Social Compact”:

The foundation of society is not given “in nature” --- rather, we create society by mutual agreement

--NB: atomistic individuals come together to form society

Short-term Crisis

- 1783:
  - American Revolution ends: USA free; France broke!!

- 1787:
  - Monarchy on verge of bankruptcy: needs support from moneyed classes
    - Calls “Assembly of Notables”
    - Backfires: monarchy in more debt than imagined; they demand calling of Estates General

- 1788 July:
  - Louis XVI agrees to convok Estates General next year (1789)

Problem: Last meeting of Estates General had been 175 years earlier!!! (1614)

Louis XIV

- abolished it
- Absolute monarchy: eliminate possibility of being “checked” by nobility
  - “L’état, c’est moi”

Dunn:

- this is why the French had no “experience” of governing
- no “checks” or balance against monarch

Think chess: insure that neither “bishops” nor “knights” and “castles” — i.e., clergy nor nobility — can “check” the king!
• Problems: Estates General not met since 1614
  – a) No records: how did they used to do it?
  – b) How to meet?
    • “Traditional” society = Three Estates
    • Clergy + Nobility + “Everyone else” [The “Third Estate”]
      – Cf. Abbé Sièyes: What is the Third Estate?
    • If vote by order, Third Order [95% of population] out-voted 2-1 by the other
      5% of population
    • NOTE: problem of REPRESENTATION, i.e., “representative govt”

REVIEW: Abbé Sièyes: What is the Third Estate?
1. Mathematical view of society: atoms equidistant from center (“law”)
   --- “Imagine the face as being at the center of a
   large globe; we the citizens, without
   exception, stand equidistant from it and
   occupy equal places.”
2. What should we do with “privileged orders” [nobility and clergy] who do not want to be
   stripped of privileges and become citizens like everyone else?
   --- “This is the equivalent of asking what place
   one wishes to assign to a malignant tumor
   that threatens and undermines the health of
   the body of a sick person. It must be neutralized”
   --- NB analogy: EXCOMMUNICATION of dissenters

Note shift in meaning of “Revolution”:
17th c.: “revolution of planets” [static/eternal]
18th c.: “turning world upside down” [temporal]
• “I maintain that it is
   impossible to accept
   the claim of the Third
   Estate... without
   turning some sure and
   certain ideas upside
   down... What is the
   Third Estate?
   EVERYTHING.”
   --- Abbé Sièyes,
   What is the Third Estate?

Three sacred moments:
create a “social compact”
and “General Will”
One nation: a “sacred unity”

“Unity”
United in concrete: allegiance to
THIS constitution
Factions / dissenting in visions
Unity is mathematical
Dissent not logically permitted
  -- or else no “compact”
System of checks and balances:
REMARKABLY INEFFICIENT!!!
HENCE: THE RECURRENT APPEAL OF CENTRALIZED (ABSOLUTIST?) GOVT—ESPECIALLY IN TIMES OF DANGER.

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The Terror of 1792-1794
A desperate effort to stabilize subjective individualism into a community where they will be interconnected and care for one another.

**John Adams 1735-1826**
Constitution of Mass. Commonwealth
Constitutional Convention 2004

Robert O. Paxton
THE ANATOMY OF FASCISM

hamlet