

# Impact of the Enlightenment

**Directions:** Examine the documents below and answer the questions on loose leaf. Be sure to include the title!

## DOCUMENT 1: Major Ideas of the Enlightenment

Major Ideas of the Enlightenment		
Idea	Thinker	Impact
Natural rights—life, liberty, property	Locke	Fundamental to U.S. Declaration of Independence
Separation of powers	Montesquieu	France, United States, and Latin American nations use separation of powers in new constitutions
Freedom of thought and expression	Voltaire	Guaranteed in U.S. Bill of Rights and French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen; European monarchs reduce or eliminate censorship
Abolishment of torture	Beccaria	Guaranteed in U.S. Bill of Rights; torture outlawed or reduced in nations of Europe and the Americas
Religious freedom	Voltaire	Guaranteed in U.S. Bill of Rights and French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen; European monarchs reduce persecution
Women's equality	Wollstonecraft	Women's rights groups form in Europe and North America

1. Which enlightenment philosophers do you feel had the biggest impact on the world? Explain why.

## DOCUMENT 2: Enlightened Monarchs

The spirit of optimism and change was not confined to the salons and the coffeehouses of Europe. Enlightenment ideas quickly spread throughout Europe to Prussia, Russia, Austria, and beyond. Many philosophes appealed directly to European monarchs for change. As a result, a few monarchs developed a system of government in which they ruled according to Enlightenment ideas. These monarchs became known as enlightened despots.

**Prussia** Frederick II, the king of Prussia from 1740 to 1786, believed that his duty was to rule with absolute power in order to build Prussia's strength. But he was also strongly influenced by the ideas of Voltaire. While Frederick was building Prussia a military power in Europe, he also introduced a number of reforms.

Frederick ambitiously tried to establish a system of elementary education for all Prussian children. He abolished torture and supported most forms of religious tolerance. Frederick also reduced censorship.

Frederick's reforms were limited, however. For example, he did not extend religious tolerance to Jews; he tried to limit the number of Jews that could live in Prussia. Frederick also opposed serfdom, but he did not abolish it because he needed the support of the aristocracy. Like other enlightened despots, Frederick did not make reforms simply to achieve justice. He did so to build Prussia's strength and make his own rule more powerful.

**Russia** When Catherine II became the ruler of Russia in 1762, she dreamed of establishing order and justice in Russia while supporting education and culture. Catherine not only read the works of the philosophes also corresponded with both Voltaire and Diderot.

Inspired by the philosophes, Catherine set about reforming Russia. She drafted a Russian constitution and a code of laws, but they were considered far too liberal and were never put into practice. Before Catherine came to power, she intended to

free the serfs but quickly realized that she would lose the support of wealthy landowners if she did. Catherine had no intentions of giving up power and she became a tyrant. During her reign she actually imposed serfdom on more Russians than ever before.

**Austria** The most radical enlightened despot was Joseph II, the son of Maria Theresa of Austria. When he became emperor in 1780, Joseph embarked upon an ambitious reform program. He eliminated torture and the death penalty and provided free food and medicine for poor citizens. As a Catholic emperor, he granted religious tolerance to Protestants and Jews. His most significant reform was abolishing serfdom and requiring that laborers be paid for their work. These dramatic changes were resisted by the nobility and the church. They forced Joseph to revoke some of his reforms shortly before his death in 1790.

Source: Susan Ramirez, et al., *World History: Human Legacy*, Holt

2. How did the enlightened rulers try to put enlightenment ideas into practice in their countries?
3. What do you think motivated these monarchs to bring in enlightenment philosophy?
4. Do you feel they were successful? Why or why not?

### DOCUMENT 3: Declaration of Independence

Thomas Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence in June 1776. The Declaration proclaimed the political philosophy of the American people—a philosophy drawn from Enlightenment ideals—and listed a set of grievances against the British king George III. The document was intended to justify the breaking of ties with Great Britain and the establishment of a newly independent United States.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.

Source: Thomas Jefferson, *Declaration of Independence*, 1776

5. Identify two examples of Enlightenment influence on Thomas Jefferson in his Declaration of Independence.

### Global Impact

#### The French Revolution

The American Revolution inspired the growing number of French people who sought reform in their own country. They saw the new government of the United States as the fulfillment of Enlightenment ideals, and longed for such a government in France.

The Declaration of Independence was widely circulated and admired in France. French officers like the Marquis de Lafayette (shown here), who fought for American independence, captivated his fellow citizens with accounts of the war. One Frenchman remarked about this time period, "We talked of nothing but America." Less than a decade after the American Revolution ended, an armed struggle to topple the government would begin in France.



6. How did the American Revolution influence the people living under the French Monarchy?
7. Do you think the ideas of the Enlightenment could ever work with Monarchy? Why or why not.