

Enlightened Despots DBQ

Explain how the “enlightened despots” reflected the principles of the Enlightenment, yet they still reflected the ideals of despotism. Include how their attempts at reform affected the countries they ruled.

DOCUMENT #1

... we have clear indications that the field has now been opened wherein men may freely deal with these things and that the obstacles to general enlightenment or the release from self-imposed tutelage are gradually being reduced. In this respect, this is the age of enlightenment, or the century of Frederick.

A prince who does not find it unworthy of himself to say that he holds it to his duty to prescribe nothing to men in religious matters but to give them complete freedom while renouncing the haughty name of tolerance, is himself enlightened and deserves to be esteemed by the grateful world and posterity as the first, at least from the side of government, who divested the human race of its tutelage and left each man free to make use of his reason in matters of conscience...

But only one who is himself enlightened, is not afraid of shadows, and has a numerous and well-disciplined army to assure public peace, can say: "Argue as much as you will, and about what you will, only obey!" A republic could not dare say such a thing... A greater degree of civil freedom appears advantageous to the freedom of mind of the contrary, provides the mind with room for each man to extend himself to his full capacity.

SOURCE: Immanuel Kant's *What is Enlightenment?*, 1784.

DOCUMENT #2

Catholics, Lutherans, Reformed, Jews and other Christian sects live in this state, and live together in peace. If the sovereign, actuated by a mistaken zeal, declares himself for one religion or another, parties spring up, heated disputes ensue, little by little persecutions will commence and, in the end, the religion persecuted will leave the fatherland, and millions of subjects will enrich our neighbors by their skill and industry.

It is of no concern in politics whether the ruler has a religion or whether he has none. All religions, if one examines them, are founded on superstitious systems, more or less, absurd. It is impossible for a man of good sense, who dissects their contents, not to see their error; but these prejudices, these errors and mysteries, were made for men, and one must know enough to respect the public and not to outrage its faith, whatever religion be involved.

SOURCE: Frederick II (the Great)'s *Political Testament*, 1752.

DOCUMENT #3

Consequently, [the sovereign] is guilty if he wastes the money of the people, the taxes which they have paid, in luxury, pomp and debauchery. He who should improve the morals of the people, be the guardian of the law, and improve their education should not pervert them by his bad example...

They have not been placed at the head of the State to keep around themselves a crowd of idle loafers whose

uselessness drives them towards vice...

The sovereign is the representative of his State. He and his people form a single body. Ruler and ruled can be happy only if they are firmly united. The sovereign stands to his people in the same relation in which the head stands to the body. He must use his eyes and his brain for the whole community, and act on its behalf to the common advantage. If we wish to elevate monarchical above republican government, the duty of sovereigns is clear, they must be active, hard working, upright and honest and concentrate all their strength upon filling their office worthily, that is my idea of the duties of sovereigns.

SOURCE: *Essay on Forms of Government*, Frederick II (the Great) of Prussia.

DOCUMENT #4

...To promote the interest of their State is a law to them, a law which is inviolable. If a ruler must be ready to sacrifice his life for the welfare of his subjects, he must be still more ready to sacrifice, for the benefit of his subjects, solemn engagements which he has undertaken if their observance would be harmful to his people...

The word of a private person involves in misfortune only a single human being, while that of sovereigns can create calamities for entire nations. The question may therefore be summed up thus: Is it better that a nation should perish, or that a sovereign should break his treaty? Who can be stupid enough to hesitate in answering this question?

SOURCE: Frederick II's *Memoirs*.

DOCUMENT #5

We grant to all foreigners coming into Our Empire the free and unrestricted practice of their religion according to the precepts and usage of their Church... None of the foreigners who have come to settle in Russia shall be required to pay the slightest taxes to Our treasury, nor be forced to render regular or extraordinary services, not to billet troops... All foreigners who settle in Russia either to engage in agriculture and some trade, or to undertake to build factories useful for the future, especially of such as have not yet been built in Russia... We leave to the discretion of the established colonies and village the internal constitution and jurisdiction, in such a way that the persons placed in authority by Us will not interfere with the internal affairs and institutions. In other respects the colonists will be liable to Our civil laws... Foreign capitalists who build factories, plants, and concerns in Russia at their own expense are permitted to purchase serfs and peasants needed for the operation of the factories. We also permit all foreigners who have settled in colonies or villages to establish market days and annual market fairs as they see fit, without having to pay any dues or taxes to Our treasury.

SOURCE: Empress Catherine II's *Manifesto*, July 1763.

DOCUMENT #6

... The sovereign is absolute; for there is no other Authority but that which centers in his single Person, that can act with a Vigour proportionate to the extent of such a vast Dominion... What is the true End of Monarchy? Not to deprive People of their natural Liberty; but to correct their Actions, in order to attain the supreme Good... The Intention and the End of Monarchy, is the Glory of the Citizens, of the State, and of the Sovereign... The Laws ought to be so framed, as to secure the Safety of every Citizen as much as possible. The Equality of the Citizens consists in this; that they should all be subject to the same Laws... No Man ought to be looked upon as guilty, before he has received

his judicial Sentence; nor can the Laws deprive him of their Protection, before it is proved that he has forfeited all Right to it. What Right therefore can Power give to any to inflict Punishment upon a Citizen at a Time, when it is yet dubious, whether he is Innocent or guilty?... Of whatever Kind Subjection may be, the civil Laws ought to guard, on the one Hand, against the Abuse of Slavery, and, on the other, against the Dangers which may arise from it.

SOURCE: Catherine II's *Proposals for a New Law Code*, 1767.

DOCUMENT #7

The Governing Senate...has deemed it necessary to make known that the landlords' serfs and peasants...owe their landlords proper submission and absolute obedience in all matters according to the laws that have been enacted from time immemorial by the autocratic forefathers of Her Imperial Majesty and which have not been repealed, and which provide that all persons who dare to incite serfs and peasants to disobey their landlords shall be arrested and taken to the nearest government office, there to be punished forthwith as disturbers of the public tranquillity, according to the laws and without leniency. And should it so happen that even after the publication of the present decree of Her Imperial Majesty any serfs and peasants should cease to give the proper obedience to their landlords . . . and should make bold to submit unlawful petitions complaining of their landlords, and especially to petition Her Imperial Majesty personally, then both those who make the complaints and those who write up the petitions shall be punished by the knot and forthwith deported to Nerchinsk to penal servitude for life and shall be counted as part of the quota of recruits which their landlords must furnish to the army. And in order that people everywhere may know of the present decree, it shall be read in all the churches on Sundays and holy days for one month after it is received and thereafter once every year during the great church festivals, lest anyone pretend ignorance.

SOURCE: Catherine II's *Decree on Serfs*, 1767.

DOCUMENT #8

... Science and the arts will be encouraged to flourish in the empire, projects useful for the domestic economy will be undertaken. She will endeavor to reform the administration of justice and to invigorate the laws; but her policies will be based on Machiavellianism... She will adopt the prejudices of her entourage regarding the superiority of her power and will endeavor to win respect not by the sincerity and probity of her actions but also by an ostentatious display of her strength... Cunning and falsity appear to be vices in her character; woe to him who puts too much trust in her.

SOURCE: Letter of Baron de Breteuil, a French diplomat in Moscow, mid-18c.

DOCUMENT #9

By the grace of God We, Peter the third, Emperor and Autocrat of all Russia...grant them the ancient cross and prayer, haircut and beard, freedom and liberty, and they are to be Cossacks forever, not liable to recruitment into the army or to the soul tax or other money taxes... and we liberate all the aforementioned from the villainous nobles and from the bribe takers in the city-the officials who imposed taxes and other burdens on the peasants and the whole people...We accordingly do ordain by this personal *ukaz*: those who formerly were nobles living on estates are enemies to Our power and disrupters of the empire and oppressors of the peasantry, and they should be caught, executed and hanged, they should be treated just as they, who have no Christianity, dealt with you peasants.

SOURCE: Pugachev's last *ukaz*, June 1774.

DOCUMENT #10

...We [Your] slaves, all the peasants of the aforementioned ward, most humbly request the tsar's mercy from the officers and do not wish to oppose them in any way... We also have a great hope that His Tsarist Majesty will mercifully spare us from the vicious, wild poisonous animals, the boyars and officers, and break off their sharp claws-for example, Mikhailo Ivanovich Bashmakov at the Iugov State Factories, also Aleksei Semenovich Elchanov, and, in the town of Kunguy, Aleksei Semenovich Elchanov, Dmitrii Popov. These lords make us angry with their declarations that whoever invokes the great name of Petr Fedorovich shall be treated like a great evildoer and done to death... May the humble petition of us slaves receive the gracious attention of Your Majesty, so that we humble folk shall not suffer any harm at the hands of your troops.

SOURCE: Petition of Serfs in Kungur District, Perm' Province, to "Peter III".

DOCUMENT #11

Since coming to power, We have been most particular to ensure that all Our subjects, without distinction of nationality and religion, should share in the public prosperity which We hope to increase by Our care, and that they may enjoy freedom according to the law and find no obstacle to earning their living in every honourable way and contribute to the general industriousness.

Since Our gracious intention can definitely not be reconciled with the existing laws against the Jewish People in Our Patrimonial Margravate of Moravia and the so-called Jewish laws, We wish to modify these by virtue of the present Edict..

SOURCE: Joseph II's *Toleration Edict for the Jews of Moravia*, 1782.

DOCUMENT #12

... I granted toleration, and removed the yoke which has oppressed the protestants for centuries.

Fanaticism shall in future be known in my states only by the contempt I have for it; nobody shall any longer be exposed to hardships on account of his creed; no man shall be compelled in future to profess the religion of the state if it be contrary to his persuasion...

Tolerance is an effect of that beneficent increase of knowledge which now enlightens Europe and which is owing to philosophy and the efforts of great men; it is a convincing proof of the improvement of the human mind....

SOURCE: From the *Ideal* of Joseph II of Austria.