Louis The 14 Essay, Research Paper

Louis XIV was only four years old when he succeeded his father to the French throne. Often uncared for, he nearly drowned because no one was watching him as he played near a pond. This began to shape in his young mind an early fear of God.

Louis’ character was also shaped by the French Civil War. In this, the Paris Parlement rose against the crown. For five years, Louis would suffer fear, cold, hunger and other spirit-breaking events. He would never forgive Paris, the nobles, or the common people.

Finally, in 1653, Cardinal Jules Mazarin was able to end the rebellion. He began to instruct Louis on his position as king. Even though Louis XIV was now of age, the Cardinal remained the dominant authority in French politics.

French kings gained respect as a soldier; Louis served with the French army during France’s war with Spain. His biggest battle, however, was sacrificing his love for Mazarin’s niece for politics. In 1660 he married the daughter of the king of Spain to bring peace between the two countries.

Mazarin died March 9, 1661. On March 10, Louis claimed supreme authority in France. Not since Henry IV had such a claim been made. Louis saw himself as God’s representative on earth, therefore, infallible. He oversaw roadbuilding, court decorum, defense, and disputes within the church.

He had the support initially of his ministers, then that of the French people. He had given France the image it desired-youth and vitality surrounded by magnificence. Louis won the favor of the nobles by making it evident that their future depended on their ability stay on his good side. This weakened the nobility, and would eventually weaken France.

Louis had among his supportors a wide spectrum of individuals. Writers such as Moliere were ordered to glorify him. Monuments rose throughout the country and Louis had palaces built in his honor. The most elaborate was Versailles, located outside Paris. Away from disease, Versailles also isolated the king from his people. The aristocracy became mysterious.

France was also undergoing an economic revolution. Exports were increased, and a navy, merchant marine, and police association emerged. Roads, ports and canals were being built. He invaded the Spanish Nederlands in 1667. The restarted war between France and Spain would be on again, off again for the remainder of Louis’ reign.

In 1668, the French army retreated under pressure from Dutch and English forces. Louis swore to defeat the Dutch and ruin their Protestant mercantile republic. He allied himself with his cousin, Charles II of England, and invaded the Netherlands in 1672. Louis was victorious when the Treaty of Mijmegen was signed in 1678. When the Dutch were defeated, he had also defeated its allies, Spain and the Holy Roman Empire. France’s borders had expanded to the north and the east. His navy had become as as large as that of England and Holland.

His private life was not as fortunate. Friends had been implicated in the Affair of the Poisons, where eminent people had been accused of sorcery and murder. Louis ordered his court to become discrete. The seat of Government was transferred to Versailles in 1682. When the Queen died, he married her Mme de Maintenon, who had been governess to the King’s children.

Louis did not understand the reformation, and he viewed French Protestants as threats to the throne. He revoked the Edict of Nantes, which had granted them freedom of worship. Many left France, those that remained were persecuted.

England, the Dutch, and the Holy Roman Empire united in 1688 in the Grand Alliance to stop French expansion. This war ended in 1697 with the signing of the Treaty of Rijswijk. France lost part of its territory, and Louis lost public support. He was forced to recognize William of Orange as king of England. This went against his belief that the Stuarts had divine right to the throne.

Charles II, the last Habsburg king of Spain died in 1700, and bequeathed his kingdoms to Louis’ grandson, Philip of Anjou (Philip V). Although initially opposed to the inheritance, Louis finally went along with it in order to prevent Spain from falling into the hands of the Holy Roman emperor, Leopold I, who disputed Philip’s claim.

In the War of the Spanish Succession the anti-French alliance was reactivated by William of Orange. By 1709, France was near to losing all it had gained over the past century. Louis’ private life was also a wreck: his son, two grandsons, and a great grandson died. Instead of breaking down as was expected, he held himself together. He bore not only his personal losses, but also the losses France had suffered with remarkable grace.

The Treaties of Utrecht, Rastatt and Baden in 1713-1714 finally ended the war. The hard-fought victory cost France its status as a world power, but its territories were untouched. Not even future defeats would cause France to lose its land in the Rhine or Flanders.

Louis died in 1715, at the age of 77. His body was carried to the Saint-Denis basilica. His heir, the last son of the Duc de Bourgogne, was a sickly five-year-old child. Louis had distrusted his nephew, the Duc d’Orleans, and wanted to leave actual power in the hands of the Duc du Maine. He left orders in his will to make it so. The Parlement of Paris convened to fight the will and, in doing so, rediscovered its own power. This would set in motion a series of events that would lead to revolution.

Though praised within his country, outside of France Louis had a vicious reputation. He allowed his armies to commit atrocities, and countries were reduced to slave states. Although credited with bringing France to the status it achieved, his policies concerning religion, his isolation of the throne at Versailles, and his last will combined to lead to the downfall of the monarchy.

Though seen as a strong ruler, France lost power under him. So connected to the image of king, historians have difficulty in examining Louis the individual. He wanted France to prosper, and its citizens suffered. Still considering himself infallible, he only saw the glorious image of France he ordered his artisans to develop.