

**THE ENLIGHTENMENT AND THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION****Primary Source**

Frederick II, known as Frederick the Great, ruled Prussia from 1740 to 1786. He was strongly influenced by Enlightenment thinkers. Frederick was also a leading example of an enlightened despot—an absolute ruler who used power to bring about political and social reforms. ♦ *As you read, think about how Frederick viewed his role as a monarch and how he expressed Enlightenment ideas in his rule. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, answer the questions that follow.*

**From Essay on the Forms of Government by Frederick II**

Rulers should always remind themselves that they are men like the least of their subjects. The sovereign is the foremost judge, general, financier, and minister of his country, not merely for the sake of his prestige [standing or influence]. Therefore, he should perform with care the duties connected with these offices. He is merely the principal servant of the State. Hence, he must act with honesty, wisdom, and complete disinterestedness in such a way that he can render an account of his stewardship to the citizens at any moment. Consequently, he is guilty if he wastes the money of the people, the taxes which they have paid. . . . He who should improve the morals of the people, be the guardian of the law, and improve their education should not pervert [mislead] them by his bad example.

Princes, sovereigns, and kings have not been given supreme authority in order to live in luxurious self-indulgence. . . . They have not been elevated by their fellow-men to enable them to strut about and to insult with their pride the simple-mannered, the poor and the suffering. 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 bad administration which may be found in monarchies springs from many different causes, but their principal cause lies in the character of the sovereign. . . .

The sovereign is the representative of his State. He and his people form a single body.



**Frederick II**

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 [representative] 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: *The Foundations of Germany*, trans. J. Ellis Barker (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1916).

**Questions to Think About**

1. What does Frederick think makes a good ruler?
2. To what does Frederick compare a monarch and his or her subjects?
3. **Predict Consequences** Do you think Frederick's subjects were satisfied with the limited independence he offered them?
4. **Activity** How does Frederick's description of what makes a good ruler express Enlightenment ideas? Create a word web showing how Frederick's ideas relate to the Enlightenment.