Absolutism and France

Keywords
absolutism
divine right
Edict of Nantes
Political Testament

Essential Questions
• What are the essential characteristics of an absolutist state?
• What are the differences between an absolutist and a totalitarian state?
• What caused absolutism to develop?
• What impact did the Duke of Sully, Cardinal Richelieu, and Cardinal Mazarin have on France's development?
• Who was Thomas Hobbes?
• What was Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* about, and how does it figure into absolutism?
Set the Stage

Religious tensions and border disputes had plagued Europe for several decades. In addition, European grain yields declined as winters became colder and wetter, shortening the growing season. Chronic food shortages and famines led to population losses or stagnation. Spain, France, England, and Germany suffered terrible economic hardships as a result. Europe’s newly emerging nation-states began to maintain large standing armies, even in peacetime, which required heavy taxation. The peasants shouldered most of the tax burden and many peasants revolted in protest. The chaos and instability in European society prompted many citizens to call for strong leadership. In France, Henry IV, Louis XIII, and Louis XIV—along with their advisers—filled this need. These strong monarchs developed a new type of rule called absolutism, which was soon the most prevalent form of government in Europe. Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century France became the best example of an absolutist state.

A New Type of Government

**Absolutism** developed during the seventeenth century and differed from medieval political and economic systems in a number of significant ways. Absolute monarchs believed they ruled by **divine right**, an idea set forth by Bishop Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet (1627–1704) in his *Politics Drawn from the Very Words of Holy Scripture*. Medieval kings ruled by the “grace of God,” meaning that God was the source of their earthly power, but they were at least nominally subject to the rule of law. Absolute rulers, however, represented the central and all-powerful authority of the state and answered to nobody except God. Because the monarch’s power was a God-given right, obedience to the monarch was a religious obligation, as well.

Absolute rulers wielded considerably more power and control over their subjects than medieval rulers. Their territories were more vast and diverse than those of their medieval counterparts, too. These leaders also exhibited more control over the church than their predecessors. Some monarchs even established national churches, such as England’s Anglican Church. During the Middle Ages, such central and far-reaching power was not possible due to the influence of the Roman Catholic Church, the power of the nobles, and the rulers’ own lack of financial resources.

During the seventeenth century, however, the business of raising money in these newly emerging nation-states changed. Government economic control and revenue building became more centralized and bureaucratic. Although taxes had existed in the Middle Ages, rulers in that era had relied primarily on financial gifts from the nobility and, in exchange, had exempted nobles from future taxation. Such exemptions were few in the new absolutist state, which relied more heavily on taxes and often increased taxes to generate more revenue. Absolutist leaders also looked for other ways to generate income, such as by implementing mercantilist policies and undertaking more international trading agendas.
The expanded economic system of absolutism depended on the growth of the bureaucracy. Bureaucrats differed by region according to the existing social structure and the particular philosophy of the nation’s ruler. In areas where a significant middle class existed, it was the middle class and lower aristocracy that made up the bureaucracy. The ruler could depend on the loyalty of these people since they were dependent on the monarch for their bureaucratic positions. In France, leaders such as Louis XIV did not trust the aristocracy, so France’s bureaucracy was primarily composed of members of the middle class. In other regions, such as Russia, Prussia, and Austria, there was virtually no middle class, and the social structure consisted largely of peasants and an aristocracy. There the bureaucrats came from the aristocracy.

Unlike medieval kings, absolute rulers usually maintained professional armies, even during peacetime. Some monarchs maintained these armies by establishing a draft. Keeping a standing army was expensive and accounted for one of the main reasons taxes became so important and such a large burden during this time period. Medieval kings had called upon vassals during times of need, but the armies quickly disbanded when the threat was gone or the conflict over. Absolutist rulers believed it was necessary to have an army ready at all times to defend far-off territories or suppress regional uprisings. The use of secret police to efficiently handle dissenters also became common in absolutist regimes.

Although absolute monarchs retained a large degree of control over the state and its citizens, absolutism was not the same as the twentieth-century system known as totalitarianism. Totalitarian states exercise complete control over every aspect of life through the unquestioned and unchallenged power of a dictator. Stalin and Hitler were totalitarian dictators. In totalitarian regimes, the state controls every facet of society, including cultural, political, and economic life. Absolute rulers did not have the money, manpower, or technology to achieve such total control. However, they valued the power of the state above all else and pursued aggressive expansionist foreign policy like the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century.

**Absolutism in France**

Absolutism developed most completely in France and reached its climax with the reign of Louis XIV (r. 1643–1715). However, French absolutism had its origins with the beginning of the Bourbon dynasty, which commenced in 1589 with King Henry IV (r. 1589–1610), also known as Henry the Great. The French people were ready for a strong leader after years of religious conflict and devastating famine. Henry worked to reduce the religious tensions that had plagued France since the Reformation began in the early sixteenth century. Henry succeeded in establishing some degree of religious tolerance toward France’s one million Huguenots (French Protestants) through the *Edict of Nantes* (1598). The proclamation granted Huguenots the right to worship as they pleased in fortified towns. Henry had been a Protestant himself, and he only converted to Catholicism after taking the throne because it was the major religion in France.

Henry also set out to improve the French economy, and for this massive task he enlisted the help of adviser Maximilien Bethune, Duke of Sully (1560–1642).
Sully served as Henry's finance minister and made great strides in improving the revenue and efficiency of the state. Sully levied new taxes on the nobility, who had traditionally been exempt from taxes, with the paulette—an annual fixed-rate tax for those nobles who purchased royal offices. The bulk of the tax burden, however, fell on the bourgeoisie, working class, and peasantry. Sully increased oversight of the nobility by sending royal representatives to the provinces. Sully and Henry succeeded in balancing the state budget and reducing the royal debt. They also encouraged economic development throughout France by building roads, including a national highway system, clearing land for additional agricultural use, and encouraging international trade. Sully favored colonization and subsidized a company that developed trade with the Indies.

Sully's strong leadership proved invaluable to the nation when a fanatical Catholic assassinated Henry IV in 1610. At the time of the assassination, Henry's son Louis XIII (r. 1601–1643) was only 10 years old, so he ruled through his regent and mother Marie de’ Medici. Marie initially relied on the wise council of Sully in the years following the assassination, but Marie was not a strong or effective leader. She gradually came to trust a group of anti-Sully advisers. Eventually, Marie removed Sully from his position and France suffered from a lack of strong leadership until Louis XIII became old enough to assume control. During this period of political turmoil, Protestants and the aristocracy succeeded in gaining back some of the power they had lost during Henry's reign, prompting Marie to call the Estates General together in 1615.

Like his father, Louis XIII utilized the help of a strong adviser. Armand Jean du Plessis, Cardinal Richelieu (1585–1642), served as Louis XIII’s chief adviser until his death. Louis and Richelieu continued to struggle with religious tensions in France. The Huguenots rebelled in 1625, prompting Richelieu to retaliate in 1627 with an attack on the Huguenot fortified town of La Rochelle. A 14-month siege ensued. After the Huguenots finally surrendered, Louis rescinded the provision of the Edict of Nantes that allowed for city fortification. However, he still allowed the Huguenots to freely practice their Protestant religion. It was a politically savvy move by Louis and Richelieu that avoided more religious wars.

After the period of monarchical weakness following the death of his father, Louis XIII had to regain control of the nobility. Richelieu built upon the policies of Henry IV to reestablish royal control in the provinces. Richelieu sent intendents to each region to enforce royal authority and implement the king’s policies. These intendents could not be native to the province—to ensure no vested interests—and usually came from the middle class or lower nobility. Louis could count on the loyalty of these people because
their positions depended on the patronage of the king. *Intendents* served in various capacities. They kept a close eye on the nobility and reported provincial happenings back to the king. They also served in a judicial capacity, ensured that taxes were collected, and recruited soldiers. Richelieu and Louis also raised taxes, both the *taille*, a direct tax, and the *gabelle*, an indirect tax.

In matters of foreign policy, Richelieu and Louis faced the task of rebuilding French power and prestige. France’s reputation had suffered during the years of weak leadership before Louis XIII took control of the government. Richelieu and Louis looked to recapture France’s former power by renewing hostilities with the Catholic Hapsburgs. Although Richelieu—like most of France—was Catholic, he and his countrymen sided with the Protestant nations of Sweden and Germany in their opposition to the Hapsburgs. Richelieu defended this action in his *Political Testament*, which stated that the safety and security of the nation superseded any other concerns. He felt that France needed to stop the growing influence of the neighboring Hapsburgs. These tensions and ambitions resulted in the Thirty Years’ War (1618–1648), which ended with the Treaty of Westphalia. France succeeded in gaining territory—Alsace and Arras—and emerged from the war as the most powerful nation in continental Europe. The treaty also set out important French ideals by establishing sovereign nation-states, such as Switzerland, that included religious tolerance.

When Cardinal Richelieu died in 1642, Cardinal Jules Mazarin (1602–1661) assumed his position. Louis XIII died the next year, when his son Louis XIV was only five years old. Louis XIV’s mother, Anne of Austria (1601–1666), served as regent, but it was Mazarin who was largely responsible for governing the country until he died in 1661. Mazarin mostly continued Richelieu’s policies. He pursued an aggressive foreign policy of expansion, and the nation remained in conflict with the Spanish Habsburgs. The French acquired the Spanish Netherlands in 1659, shortly before Louis XIV assumed power in 1661 and became the ultimate absolute ruler.

**The Political Philosophy of Thomas Hobbes**

Political philosophy grew in the wake of Machiavelli’s extremely influential work in the early sixteenth century. Englishman Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) articulated the absolutist political philosophy of the seventeenth century. Like Machiavelli, Hobbes believed in the necessity of strong leaders, such as Henry IV or Louis XIII. He put forth his ideas in *Leviathan*, published in 1651. Hobbes was deeply influenced by his experience living through the English Civil War (1642–1649), which had been a struggle between the king and Parliament for power.
Hobbes’s political philosophy drew on his view of human nature. He believed men were inherently selfish, motivated by a sense of entitlement, and naturally prone to conflict. According to Hobbes, man lived his life with a simple goal—to minimize pain and maximize pleasure—and achieving this goal brought men into conflict with one another. Hobbes presented his pessimistic outlook in the summary to *Leviathan*:

*In such a condition there is no place for industry, because the fruit thereof is uncertain; and consequently no culture of the Earth; no navigation nor use of the commodities that may be imported by sea; no commodious building; no instruments of moving and removing such things as require much force; no knowledge of the face of the Earth; no account of time; no arts; no letters; no society; and, which is worst of all, continual fear and anger of violent death; and the life of man solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.*

Hobbes didn’t think that humans had descended into this grim state from some earlier state of grace. Instead, he argued that this was how man behaved in a state of nature—a state without order, or government, or rules.

Because of his views, Hobbes believed in the need for a strong absolute ruler, one who could ensure that society did not devolve into a state of perpetual conflict. For Hobbes, effective leadership could only occur when the governed entered into a contract with their government. People had to agree to place full power in their ruler or rulers and set aside personal self-interest to advance the greater good. People could not question this absolute rule, because if they did, society would collapse into chaos as people grabbed for power. People had to sacrifice some personal freedoms in exchange for the stability provided by an absolute government:

*The greatest [unhappiness] that in any form of government can possibly happen to the people in general is scarce sensible in respect to the miseries and horrible calamities that accompany a civil war or that dissolute condition of masterless men, without subjection to laws and a coercive power to tie their hands from rapine and revenge.*

*Leviathan* by Thomas Hobbes
Hobbes believed this style of absolute power could come from either a monarch or a legislative body, but he knew that rhetoric alone would not be sufficient to maintain absolute power. Hobbes believed rulers might have to rely on force to maintain control. For Hobbes, anarchy presented a much greater threat than tyranny.

**Extensions**
- Read Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan*. How does Hobbes describe a man’s life in the state of nature? What evidence does he provide to support his description?

**Summary**
Absolutist states developed in Europe as feudalism waned. In contrast to the monarchs of the Middle Ages, absolute monarchs believed they ruled by the “will of God”—divine right—as opposed to the “grace of God.” These kings centralized their power, often with the help of bright and trusted advisers. They also increased state revenue and assumed greater control of the church. Absolutism developed most completely in France, as citizens looked to a strong leader to quell religious tensions and improve the nation’s financial situation. Henry IV was the first Bourbon king of France and he, along with his adviser the Duke of Sully, tried to ease religious tensions with the Edict of Nantes. Henry balanced the French budget in just 12 years and paid down the royal debt. His murder in 1610 threw France into more than a decade of political turmoil that resulted in Henry IV’s son, Louis XIII, revoking a portion of the Edict of Nantes to punish the Huguenots for taking advantage of the situation. Louis XIII had his own adviser: Cardinal Richelieu. Louis and Richelieu drew France into the Thirty Years’ War in an attempt to increase French power and prestige at the expense of the Spanish Hapsburgs. The plan worked, making France the most powerful nation in Europe. When Richelieu died, Cardinal Mazarin took over as chief adviser to Louis XIII, but quickly assumed the nation’s leadership role when Louis XIII died a short time later, leaving his five-year-old son, Louis XIV, the throne. Justification for absolute rulers like those in France came from political scientists like Thomas Hobbes. He wrote *Leviathan* to justify his belief in an absolutist state.

**Looking Ahead**
Young Louis XIV learned a valuable lesson about trusting the French nobility during the *Fronde*. This event forever colored Louis’s view of the aristocracy and shaped the government he ruled. Louis also earned earn his designation as the Sun King by ruling boldly in terms of financial policies, revoking of the Edict of Nantes, going to war multiple times, and building the opulent palace at Versailles 10 miles outside of Paris and making it the seat of French government.
1. Medieval kings believed they ruled by the “grace of God” and were answerable to the laws. Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century kings believed they ruled by the “will of God” and were only answerable to God.

2. The edict was issued by King Henry IV of France to protect the Huguenots living in France. It allowed them to practice their religion freely and live in fortified towns.

3. The issuing of the Edict of Nantes, sending royal officers to the provinces to oversee the nobility, the paulette tax on offices, the building of infrastructure such as roads and canals.

4. The revoking of a portion of the Edict of Nantes, an alliance with the Protestant Swedes and Germans (in spite of France being Catholic) to fight against the Spanish Hapsburgs in the Thirty Years’ War, the expansion of the taille and the gabelle taxes, the development of intendents to oversee the nobility in the provinces.

5. Thomas Hobbes was a British political scientist who believed man was inherently selfish and without a strong leader would live perpetually in a state of war and misery.
The Sun King

Essential Questions

- What effect did the Fronde have on Louis XIV and on his reign?
- What wars did Louis XIV fight, and what were the results?
- How would you describe Louis XIV’s economic policies?
- How would you describe Louis XIV’s court at Versailles?
- Why did Louis XIV revoke the Edict of Nantes, and what was the result?
- Who was Jacques Bossuet?
- Who was Jean-Baptiste Colbert?

Keywords

- asiento
- balance-of-power principle
- Blenheim
- Gallicanism
- Gibraltar
- Jansenists
- natural frontiers
- Peace of Westphalia
Absolutism began to develop during the late sixteenth century in France, but conditions were ripe for absolutism to reach its height in the seventeenth century under Louis XIV, the Sun King. France had a large population, almost three times that of England by 1700, which put pressure on the available resources. However, France had good soil, too, and its agricultural success made for an economy that was stronger than most. France had also developed a trade network in the Indies and around the world. The resulting influx of wealth widened the gap between the rich and the poor, and tensions rose as the tax burden fell disproportionately on the peasants. Religious tensions also escalated during the seventeenth century. Although the Estates General hadn’t met since 1615, regional courts called parlements exercised considerable control and often refused to comply with the king’s demands. French law was hardly a codified set of national legislation. More than 300 regional law systems governed the various French provinces, and those systems changed often.

Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) provided the philosophical argument for absolutism in *Leviathan* (1651). Published just 10 years before Louis XIV was old enough to rule France without a regent, *Leviathan* set out Hobbes’s ideas about human nature. Hobbes believed that man was motivated only by the pursuit of pleasure and power and the avoidance of pain. To Hobbes, man was essentially selfish, brutish, and combative. In a natural state, men would constantly fight each other to pursue their own interests. With this view of human nature, Hobbes believed that an absolute government was the only way to prevent chaos and anarchy. Hobbes argued that man must give up some of his personal liberties in exchange for the stability and protection of an absolute government. Louis XIV came to embody Hobbes’s absolute government.

**Louis XIV’s Upbringing and the Fronde**

Louis XIV (r. 1643–1715) became king when his father Louis XIII died in 1643. Since the young king was only five years old, his mother, Anne of Austria
(1601–1666), and Cardinal Jules Mazarin (1602–1661) took charge of the French government. Louis grew up learning various languages and excelled in many of his studies. Mazarin, however, made sure that Louis also received a practical education that would help him become an effective ruler. Under Mazarin’s guidance, Louis studied government documents and attended official meetings as preparation for his personal rule. Louis grew up as a devout Catholic in his mother’s religious household.

Although France had emerged from the Thirty Years’ War (1618–1648) as the most powerful nation in continental Europe, tensions were rising among French citizens. Absolutism had developed during the previous reigns of Henry IV (r. 1589–1610) and Louis XIII (r. 1610–1643), and the nobility resented the increasing power of the monarchy. When Mazarin proposed new revenue-raising measures, common people and nobility alike revolted in Paris.

Unhappy with Mazarin’s policies, the Parlement of Paris called a meeting of the Estates General in June 1648. Parlements were aristocratic regional law courts, not legislative bodies, that wielded considerable power in French politics and claimed the right to overrule the king’s edicts. Mazarin had the Parlement of Paris’s leaders arrested, and open revolts broke out. The uprisings quickly spread throughout the country and lasted for 12 years, developing into an outright civil war between the monarchy and the nobility. The conflict became known as the Fronde after the slingshot used to hurl stones at the residences of the royal officials, such as Mazarin. Eventually, some factions of the nobility, looking to advance their own interests, began fighting each other. Some nobles even hired Spanish mercenaries to do battle for them. During the rebellion, Anne and young Louis were often threatened and had to flee Paris on at least one occasion. Nobles even stormed into Louis’s bedchambers one night and terrorized him. He never forgot these terrifying childhood memories, which had an enormous impact on his political philosophy and later style of absolute rule. He never trusted the nobility after the Fronde. Instead of working with the nobility, Louis pursued policies to limit their influence.

Overall, the Fronde was a failure for the protesters. The crown had to reiterate the nobility’s exemption from most taxes, but this policy was securely in place before the Fronde. The nobility did not gain any power over the crown. Moreover, the French economy as a whole suffered from the years of rebellion and took a number of years to recover. It was actually the crown that benefited most from the uprising. After witnessing the chaos and instability of the rebellions, as well as that of the recently ended Thirty Years’ War, the French people wanted a strong ruler. They wanted someone to quell the disorder. Louis XIV would soon fill that role.
Louis XIV’s Personal Reign
When Mazarin died in 1661, the 23-year-old Louis XIV took power for himself. Louis did not replace Mazarin and opted not to rely on a primary adviser like his father and grandfather had done. The Fronde had made it difficult for Louis to trust others, and throughout his long reign, he relied on very few people to help him govern. Louis married Maria Theresa (1638–1683) of Spain the year before he took power, and even she remained removed from Louis’s power and policies. Unlike many other monarchs, neither Louis’s queen nor his mistresses had any significant influence in matters of the state.

Louis did rely on the knowledge of Jean-Baptiste Colbert (1619–1683) for financial matters. Colbert served as controller general from 1662 until his death in 1683. Colbert did much to improve French finances and greatly expanded the government’s role in the economy. He built roads and canals, encouraged industrial development, and tried to increase the nation’s gold and silver supply. Colbert promoted mercantilist policies, expanding exports and minimizing imports. He also reduced internal trade barriers and hampered the aristocracy’s ability to meddle with internal trade through the use of tolls and taxes. Most of Colbert’s interventions improved the economy, but his heavy-handed industrial regulation hampered growth and innovation. His policies and tax burdens also hampered the agricultural economy, which was already suffering from poor harvests and population decline.

Although he was able to improve the French economy, Colbert did little to improve the ineffective system of taxes that still fell heavily on the lower classes. The nobility remained exempt from most taxes and adept at evading the rest. The middle class also often succeeded in skirting its tax requirements. The peasants found themselves burdened by government and landlord taxes, as well as tithing requirements to the church. The system also suffered due to excessive corruption within the bureaucracy. Tax collectors, who paid the crown for their job, were infamous for skimming off the top of their collections before sending them to the king. This inefficient system left France as the richest nation on the continent but one without an effective way to transfer that wealth to the state.

With the exception of the financial advising of Colbert, Louis ruled on his own and with absolute power. Indeed, he developed absolutism to its height. In accordance with the concept of divine right, which was initially set forth by French bishop Jacques Bossuet (1627–1704) in Politics Drawn from the Very Words of Holy Scripture (1670), Louis believed that he ruled by God’s will, that everyone answered to him, and that he answered only to God. Complete obligation to him as king became not only the secular duty of his subjects, but also their religious obligation. It was this mentality that prompted Louis XIV’s famous declaration, “L’etat, c’est moi”—“I am the state.”

Jacques Bossuet
**The Palace of the Sun King**

Louis XIV became known as the Sun King because of the grandeur of his court, and he made France the shining example of high culture in Europe. During his reign, French became the language of sophistication throughout the world. French art and literature flourished, and the king was a major patron of the arts. The artistic style during the age of Louis XIV was known as French classicism because it imitated the artistic style of antiquity and the Renaissance. Louis enjoyed French classicism through the paintings of Nicolas Poussin and the dramas of Molière and Jean Racine. However, the most elaborate example of the Sun King's power and prestige was his palace at Versailles, located just outside of Paris.

Versailles was built by Louis’s father as a simple hunting lodge, but Louis remodeled and expanded the lodge, transforming it into a massive and luxurious baroque palace unlike anything Europe had ever seen. Louis announced his intention to move the seat of government from Paris to Versailles in 1678, and four years later he did just that. The building and expansion of Versailles continued after Louis moved his residence there. The entire project took 50 years to complete and carried a price tag equal to one-quarter of the entire French treasury. It served as the French capital until the French Revolution in 1789.

Versailles was unmatched in its opulence, vastness, and grandeur. When complete, the palace had close to 700 rooms. The estate sprawled over 2,000 acres, which included elaborate gardens, fountains, lakes, and walking paths. Louis had swamps drained and forests cleared to build the famous gardens. Inside the palace, one of the most stunning rooms was the Hall of Mirrors. The long gallery celebrated Louis’s economic, political, and artistic accomplishments. Paintings on the ceiling showcased Louis’s political successes, while the marble and bronze architectural details of the columns highlighted French artistic achievement. Louis elaborately called attention to France’s economic triumphs with 357 mirrors on a wall opposite the hall’s windows. At the time, mirrors were a luxury item and Louis believed French mirror production could overtake the monopoly held by Venice.

Louis knew the sheer size and extravagance of Versailles could awe any visitor, and he viewed his palace as a source of French power. It instilled in others a sense of French genius and domination. The palace also became a source of imitation:
both Russia’s Peter the Great and Prussia’s Frederick the Great built palaces modeled after Louis’s luxurious and inspiring palace at Versailles.

**Louis and the Nobility**

The palace at Versailles was not only a residence but a political tool. Louis never trusted the nobility following the traumatic events of the *Fronde* that deeply affected him during his formative years. Since the nobility was traditionally the group the French monarchy could rely on for support, Louis’s distrust left him isolated, cautious, and secretive. He did not want to face another incident like the *Fronde*, so he set about reducing the aristocracy’s power and ensuring they could not revolt against him. One way he did this was to keep the nobles entertained and immersed in court gossip at Versailles. Louis required the nobles to live at Versailles for at least part of the year. There he could keep a close eye on the nobles as they indulged in the luxury of the palace. Louis threw lavish balls, held ceremonies, and offered performances all to keep the nobility busy and uninterested in politics. For their part, the nobles seemed content with their reduced status if it meant staying at Versailles and relishing in their prestigious social standing. One of Louis’s critics described the king’s policy in the following way:

> [He] reduced everyone to subjection, and brought to his court those very persons he cared least about. Whoever was old enough to serve did not dare demur. It was still another device to ruin the nobles by accustoming them to equality and forcing them to mingle with everyone indiscriminately . . . . Louis XIV took great pains to inform himself on what was happening everywhere, in public places, private homes, and even on the international scene . . . . Spies and informers of all kinds were numberless.

Louis also worked in other ways to reduce the power of the nobility. He excluded them from councils and government positions where they were traditionally able to influence the king and the government. He invoked the *lettre de cachet*, a royal decree that allowed the king to imprison people without giving them a trial. While reducing the power of the traditional nobility, Louis increased the power of a new nobility called the “nobles of the robe.” These upper class Frenchmen had bought their offices from the king, so they owed their titles and positions to him. Since their livelihood and status depended on the king, Louis knew he could count on the loyalty of these new nobles. Over the course of his reign, Louis sold more than 40,000 offices.

**Louis and Religion**

Louis was a devout Catholic and came of age during a time when religious tension ran rampant between the Catholics and the Huguenots (French Protestants). Louis’s grandfather Henry IV had granted some degree of religious tolerance in 1598 with the Edict of Nantes. The edict allowed Huguenots to worship freely in fortified towns. Louis’s father revoked part of the edict, still allowing Huguenots to worship, but forbidding them from fortifying their towns. By the time Louis started his personal reign, 10 percent of the French population were Huguenots. Louis XIV, however, believed that political unity required religious unity; he revoked the Edict of Nantes in its entirety in 1685. He also started actively persecuting the French
Protestants. Some converted to Catholicism and others fled the country, despite their being banned from doing so. These refugees relocated to England, Protestant Germanic states, Switzerland, the Netherlands, and English and Dutch colonies around the world. Although Louis profited in the short term from their exodus—he confiscated and sold their belongings—France suffered in the long run from the loss of some 200,000 Huguenots, many well educated and talented at their trades.

Louis made sure his absolute power also extended into the realm of his own religion, Catholicism. While not condoning any challenges to the orthodoxy of the Roman Catholic Church, the king did subscribe to a belief called Gallicanism. Adherents to Gallican thought believed that the monarch should have administrative control over the church within French borders, but they did not challenge papal supremacy when it came to matters of morality or faith.

The Jansenists did present a challenge to traditional Catholicism, which sparked the ire of both Louis XIV and the papacy. Jansenists followed the teachings of Flemish theologian Cornelius Jansen (1585–1638) and believed in predestination, much like the Calvinists. Jansenism found a wide following in France—even within the clergy—after Jansen’s work was published posthumously in 1640. Pope Innocent X (r. 1644–1655) condemned some of the key Jansenist doctrines in a papal bull in 1653. Louis and Mazarin tried to reduce the influence of the Jansenists by imprisoning or exiling prominent followers. Pope Clement IX (r. 1667–1669) established an uneasy peace with the Jansenists through a papal bull in 1668, but by 1679 Louis renewed hostilities with the Jansenists after one of their leaders died. In 1709, Louis shut down the Port-Royal nunnery, which served as the center of Jansenism. Louis also urged Pope Clement XI (r. 1700–1721) to condemn the Jansenists, which he did through a bull in 1713.

**Louis’s Four Major Wars**

Over the course of 46 years, Louis engaged French troops in four wars. The Sun King wanted to expand French power and take advantage of the waning power of the Hapsburgs. The Spanish Hapsburgs were significantly weakened after the Peace of Westphalia (1648) and the Treaty of the Pyrenees (1659). Louis looked to fill this power vacuum and make France the most powerful nation on the continent at a time when other nations wanted to preserve the balance-of-power politics that developed after the Middle Ages. Louis personally commanded France’s modern army made up of professional soldiers employed by the state, not the nobility. The Marquis de Louvois, Louis’s secretary of state for war, created and maintained the army, which was known for its rigid discipline and precise training. Louis also wanted to expand French territory to its “natural frontiers”—the Rhine River in the east. Louis believed these wars would bring him personal glory and prestige. During his 54 years of personal rule, he was at war for 33 of them.

**The War of Devolution (1667–1668)**

Louis launched his first attack against the Spanish Netherlands (present-day Belgium) and the Franche-Comte in 1667. When Louis married Spanish princess Maria Theresa—the daughter of Spanish king Philip IV—she renounced all claims to inheriting any Spanish territory. However, Louis said this renunciation was contingent
upon the Hapsburgs’ payment of her dowry. When Philip IV died in 1665, Louis claimed this dowry was never paid and therefore Maria Theresa was the legitimate heir to the Spanish lands, rather than Philip’s son by a second marriage who had been crowned upon his death. The War of Devolution (1667–1668) followed and resulted in a quick victory for the French. Louis’s 72,000 troops easily overwhelmed the 20,000 soldiers of the Spanish Netherlands. Alarmed by the rapid and decisive victory, England and Holland joined Sweden in an alliance, called the Triple Alliance, against the French. Facing an increasing opposition, Louis negotiated a secret agreement with Holy Roman Emperor Leopold I that would allow France to take the land upon the death of Spanish king Charles II (r. 1665–1700). With this assurance, Louis then agreed to the Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle (1668), which allowed France to keep conquered territory in Flanders if troops withdrew from the Franche-Comte.

**The Dutch War (1672–1678)**

Louis set his sights upon the Franche-Comte again during the Dutch War. The Dutch presented a barrier to French expansion and were a trade rival, which made them a strategic target. The king first broke up the Triple Alliance by signing the Treaty of Dover with Charles II of England in 1670. Sweden and some German princes also allied themselves with the French. The English and French then launched their attack against Holland in 1672. Holland had the support of the Holy Roman Empire, Spain, and Denmark. Dutch leader William of Orange was forced to flood much of northern Holland to defend it against the invaders, but the strategy was largely successful. Louis agreed to the Peace of Nijmegen in 1678, which stipulated that he forfeit some of his conquered territory, but he retained the Franche-Comte and Lorraine.

**The War of the League of Augsburg (1688–1697)**

Louis continued his push to expand his territory and power with the War of the League of Augsburg, also known as the Nine Years’ War. After the Dutch War, other European nations grew increasingly opposed to Louis’s appetite for power. In 1686, Bavaria, the Holy Roman Empire, the Palatinate, Saxony, Spain, and Sweden formed the League of Augsburg to oppose Louis’s expansionist policies. Louis also faced opposition from William of Orange, who became William III, king of England, in 1689 and joined the alliance against the French. The war began in 1688 when Louis again pushed for expansion to the northeast. France dominated most of the land battles, while the League of Augsburg proved victorious at sea. The battles spread to Spanish, English, and French colonial holdings in the new world. As both sides ran out of money to wage the war, they negotiated the Treaty of Ryswick in 1697. Louis had to relinquish much of his conquered territory. With the exception of the Alsace region, France gained very little after nine years of conflict.

**The War of the Spanish Succession (1702–1713)**

Louis’s longest and most costly war was also his final one. When the Spanish king Charles II died in 1700 without any heirs, Europe was left to figure out who should inherit the Spanish throne. Louis had claimed Maria Theresa’s right to
the crown—she was Charles II’s sister—but Maria had died in 1683. However, Maria had a son whom Louis claimed to be the rightful heir. The Holy Roman Emperor Leopold, who had also married one of Charles II’s sisters, asserted that the throne should go to his son. No European nation wanted to see the already-powerful French inherit the Spanish throne and all of Spain’s holdings. Before Charles’s death, the two vying factions agreed to various partitions that would split up the Spanish lands. However, when Charles died, his will indicated his reluctance to break up Spanish territory. Instead, he willed all of the Spanish holdings to Philip of Anjou, Louis’s grandson, who became Philip V, which gave an already-powerful France enormous amounts of land and resources in Europe and the New World. While fundamentally a war over who was the rightful heir to the Spanish throne, the War of the Spanish Succession had even higher stakes. The war was the rest of Europe’s attempt to restore the continent’s balance of power and halt French commercial interests abroad.

Led by England’s William III, European nations formed the Grand Alliance of 1701, made up of England, Holland, and the Holy Roman Empire. Spain sided with the French to honor Charles’s will and prevent the division of Spanish territory. Fighting began in 1702, and though eighteenth-century warfare was slow and strategic, the allies claimed many key victories thanks to the capabilities of their skilled military leaders. General John Churchill, Duke of Marlborough (1650–1722), led the English troops and collaborated with Hapsburg leader Prince Eugene of Savoy (1663–1736) to defeat the French at Blenheim in 1704 with a surprise attack. The English also acquired the important Mediterranean port city of Gibraltar in 1704. After additional allied victories, Louis started negotiations for a peace settlement in 1708. However, his enemies’ demands were too harsh and Louis would not acquiesce. The various warring states continued to fight for their own reasons as the conflict engulfed most of Europe.

The conflict finally ended with the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713 and another agreement at Rastatt in 1714. The Utrecht agreement gave Louis’s grandson Philip V the Spanish throne, but with the understanding that the French and Spanish thrones would never be inherited by the same person. The treaty also parcelled out other Spanish holdings. The Austrian Hapsburgs acquired most of the conquered Mediterranean territories—including Naples, Sardinia, and Milan—as well as the Spanish Netherlands. The Duke of Savoy gained Sicily, and the elector of Brandenburg became the king of Prussia. France was forced to give up many of its North American territories and set aside its ambitions to expand into the Netherlands. The British acquired Gibraltar, the island of Minorca in the Mediterranean, and many of France’s forfeited territories in North America, all of which increased Britain’s power. Britain also acquired from Spain the asiento—the rights to supply Spanish America with African slaves. The treaties restored balance-of-power politics to Europe and the lessons that other European nations learned from the conflict would later prove invaluable in battling Napoleon at the outset of the nineteenth century.

Louis XIV died in 1715, shortly after the treaties severely diminished both French and Spanish power. Though his 72-year reign remains the longest in European history, he is said to have proclaimed on his deathbed that he had
"loved war too much." Louis XIV’s wars, along with his other lavish spending, had brought France to the brink of bankruptcy. Yet he is remembered today as an absolute ruler like no other. He had unprecedented power, and he showcased it in everything he did. For this reason, the philosopher Voltaire dubbed the latter half of the seventeenth century the “age of Louis XIV.” Thanks to the Sun King, the sophistication and brilliance of French culture and language spread throughout the globe, and many historians now call the period the “grand century” and the “age of magnificence.”

**Extension**

- Read the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. What specific actions does this declaration order against the Protestants? Does it offer any incentives for Protestants to convert to Catholicism?
Summary
King Louis XIV was only a child when his father died. He became the king of France at the age of five. For the next 18 years, his mother, Anne of Austria, and his father’s trusted adviser, Cardinal Mazarin, ruled on his behalf. Louis got an early lesson in court politics during the Fronde. This uprising by the nobility taught Louis that the aristocracy was not trustworthy—a lesson he never forgot. When he was 23, Louis XIV took control of France and began his personal rule. He sold titles of nobility to many upper middle class Frenchmen and then awarded them government jobs. These new nobles were blindingly loyal to their king. Ever distrustful of high nobility, Louis built the palace at Versailles and saw to it that the aristocrats were too busy and too distracted to cause trouble. Louis also revoked the Edict and Nantes and allowed open persecution of the French Huguenots. With his financial adviser, Colbert, he tried to get France’s unstable financial situation under control. Louis also fought four wars, three of which gave France new territory. However, the last one, the War of the Spanish Succession, was a loss for France. The nation lost territory and any chance of a single ruler occupying both the French and Spanish thrones as Louis had hoped.

Looking Ahead
The reign of Louis XIV was the highpoint of the artistic style known as French classicism. During this period, the painter Nicolas Poussin and dramatists Molière and Jean Racine produced works that exemplified the highest ideals of French classicism. Their works, and the works of other great French artists, were showcased by Louis XIV, himself a great patron of the arts, at Versailles. Meanwhile, Spain’s fortunes turned in the seventeenth century as ineffective rulers, economic hardship, and the efforts of rival nations diminished the power of the formerly strong nation.

SELF-CHECK ANSWERS
1. Louis never again trusted the nobility and made sure they never served in positions of power in his government.
2. He was a French bishop who wrote Politics Drawn from the Very Words of Holy Scripture, which provided the theological and philosophical basis for the idea of divine right.
3. Life for the nobility at Versailles was so distracting that they didn’t have the time or the opportunity to form intrigues against the king. Louis saw to it that the nobles were kept busy with frivolous activities.
4. Louis was a devout Catholic who believed that political unity required religious unity. By revoking the edict, he allowed open persecution of the Protestants.
French Classicism and Seventeenth-Century Spain

**Essential Questions**
- What are the characteristics of French classicism?
- Who was Nicolas Poussin?
- Who was Molière?
- Who was Jean Racine?
- What form did absolutism take in Spain in the seventeenth century?
- What were the political conditions in Spain in the seventeenth century?
- What were the religious conditions in Spain in the seventeenth century?
- Why is the Peace of Utrecht such an important treaty?
- What were the guiding principles of seventeenth-century European diplomacy?

**Keywords**
caricature
classical antiquity
French classicism
mores
parvenu
**Set the Stage**

At the court of King Louis XIV, the style known as French classicism ruled. French classicism mimicked the style and traditions of antiquity and the Renaissance. Order, discipline, and unity characterized the style. Louis was a great patron of the arts, and his palace at Versailles showcased some of the nation’s finest works. While French art and culture thrived in the seventeenth century, Spain declined from its glory in the sixteenth century. Inbreeding within the royal family produced inept monarchs with limited mental capacities and weak leadership. Spain’s economy suffered as its colonies produced less revenue, costly wars burdened the treasury, and the monarchy failed to curb spending. Other European nations formed alliances to reduce the power of both Spain and France during the War of the Spanish Succession, which, above all, was a war to restore balance-of-power politics to Europe.

**French Classicism and the Age of Louis XIV**

Art and literature during the reign of Louis XIV were characterized by the style known as French classicism. The style got its name for its imitation of the style of classical antiquity—ancient Greece and Rome. Unity, control, and precision characterized French classicism, much like they characterized the meticulous Louis XIV. Louis was a generous patron of the arts and an actor himself. He enjoyed the stage, but he also appreciated France’s finest paintings and music in his court at Versailles.

French classicism had already emerged as an established painting style before Louis’s reign. Nicolas Poussin (1594–1665) best exemplified French classicism in works such as *The Rape of the Sabine Women* (c. 1633). Poussin’s lines were deliberate, orderly, and rational. His paintings were idealistic, rather than realistic, and calculated rather than spontaneous. Poussin was born in France and worked in Paris for a short time, but, like many other artists during this period, he was drawn to Rome and spent most of his career there. Cardinal Richelieu called him back to Paris to serve as First Painter to the king, but Poussin stayed for only a short time before returning to Rome. Poussin’s work often depicted the ancient Romans and their architecture and also portrayed scenes from Greek mythology, such as his *Midas Washing at the Source of the Pactolus* (1624) and *Blind Orion Searching for the Rising Sun* (1658). After Louis XIV began his personal reign in 1661, French art tended to reflect the king’s ambitions and style of leadership. Art glorified the state, which was embodied by the king.

Perhaps no painter glorified the king more than Charles Le Brun (1619–1690), who served as Chief Painter to the king starting in 1664. Le Brun, who spent some time in Rome with Poussin, was responsible for many of the grand paintings and decorations at Versailles. He painted the Hall of Mirrors (1679–1684), which illustrated the political, economic, and cultural successes of Louis XIV. He also painted
the salons of War and Peace in 1685 and 1686. The War Salon depicts the French military victories during the Dutch War (1672–1678). The Peace Salon celebrates the peace Louis XIV believed he brought to Europe. All these works glorified the king. In addition to his Versailles paintings, Le Brun supervised the production of royal furniture and tapestries.

Louis greatly enjoyed the major stage productions of his day. Molière and Jean Racine were the two primary figures in French theater during the age of Louis XIV, but the two were known for different genres. Molière (1622–1673), whose given name was Jean-Baptiste Poquelin, wrote comedies and satires. He was a master of the art of caricature—he used ridiculous exaggeration and comedy to take issue with social mores. Molière took aim at nearly every facet of society, but he stopped short of mocking the nobility and the king, whose patronage he depended on. Molière targeted the hypocrisy of the Roman Catholic Church in Tartuffe (1664). Molière is also known for Le Misanthrope (1666) and Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme (1670), plays which mocked the new aristocracy, or parvenu. He died shortly after collapsing on stage in his production of The Imaginary Invalid. Jean Racine (1639–1699), who served as the king’s historian, also entertained Louis XIV and his court, but Racine wrote great tragedies and dramas, often centered on themes of love or the battle between good and evil. His works were often set in ancient Greece or Rome. Racine wrote many of his plays about women—including Andromaque, Berenice, Iphigenie, and Phedra. Mithridate shows the day in the life of Mithridates VI Eupator, who reigned over...
a kingdom near the Black Sea. The ruler resisted Roman rule and committed suicide upon learning of his son’s betrayal. This play fascinated Louis and became one of his favorite to watch. Another of Louis’s treasured plays, Britannicus depicted the son of the Roman Emperor Claudius and heir to the imperial throne. The intrigues surrounding Britannicus’s usurped throne and battle for love captivated the Sun King.

Music was an important part of Louis’s daily life at Versailles. He enjoyed the compositions of Jean-Baptiste Lully (1632–1687), Francois Couperin (1668–1733), and Marc-Antoine Charpentier (1643–1704). Lully was born in Italy but moved to Paris at the age of 14. He was a dancer and violist, and his talents secured him a place in Louis’s court. Lully was also familiar with Italian opera, which was quickly being exported around Europe. Lully composed the ballet performed at Louis’s wedding. He also worked with Molière to create comedic ballet performances. Later in his life, Lully was known for his prolific production of operas—one almost every year from 1673 until his death in 1687. Couperin played the organ and harpsichord. He became the royal musician in 1701. Charpentier composed hymns that Louis often listened to during meals.

Louis valued France’s artistic and intellectual achievements as another manifestation of French greatness. Along with his patronage of art, he fostered the development of institutions and organizations that supported other intellectual pursuits. He and finance minister Jean-Baptiste Colbert (1619–1683) founded the French Academy of Science. The group started meeting informally in 1666 under the direction of Colbert. Colbert knew that the practical application of science and technology could bring great prestige and wealth to the monarchy. Science became a more disciplined, independent, and credible pursuit of knowledge as these types of institutions sprang up throughout Europe. Louis formalized the institution by providing its first ground rules in 1699 and renamed it the Royal Academy of Sciences. The group met in the Louvre and discussed the most important and up-to-date scientific findings of the period.

**Spain’s Seventeenth-Century Decline**

As France enjoyed an age of magnificence during the seventeenth century, Spain experienced a decline from its golden age of the sixteenth century. Spain’s sixteenth-century successes were especially apparent in the Kingdom of Castille, where absolutism developed in full. The kingdom maintained a professional army, a corps
of trained bureaucrats, and national taxes called *servicios*. Spanish absolutism was international: it depended on the wealth pouring in from the New World.

However, in about 1590, Spanish economic, political, and religious power started to decline. Three primary factors fueled this decline. First, Spain had expelled many Moors and Jews, and their exodus caused a drain in the intellectual and financial resources of the country and effectively eliminated a great portion of the country’s middle class. Second, Spain experienced an agricultural crisis that compounded other problems facing the nation. Third, the Spanish government failed to make the proper investments to fuel the Spanish economy.

These factors coalesced on the heels of a significant Spanish military defeat at the hands of the English in 1588. Emboldened by the nation’s accumulation of wealth from the New World, King Philip II decided to attack Protestant England to stand up for and defend Catholicism. It was the first step in Philip’s plan to defeat the English and Dutch and reestablish control of the Low Countries. Philip spent a small fortune building up the Spanish navy, but Spain’s “Invincible Armada” proved to be anything but unbeatable. Queen Elizabeth’s English navy defeated the armada in the English Channel in 1588 and demoralized the Spanish fleet. The malaise quickly spread to the rest of the nation and continued to fester throughout the seventeenth century.

There were a number of reasons for Spain’s economic collapse. Spain’s foray into the New World had been extremely lucrative for the nation, especially in terms of mineral wealth. But by the end of the sixteenth century, mineral deposits were growing scarce. Spain’s slave labor force of Native Americans and Africans had started dying off from epidemics. While Spain had initially profited from a relative monopoly on exports to Spanish America, now the Spanish colonies began trading with the Dutch and English, as well, which cut into profits for the mother country. In addition, the Spanish colonies started to develop their own economies and businesses, thereby reducing their reliance on Spain itself.

The structure of Spanish society exacerbated Spain’s financial woes. Spain lacked a substantial middle class, partly due to the state’s expulsion of the Jews and Moors. A middle class is a key component of a thriving economy, since members of this class are the ones spurring innovation and investment. The middle class that did exist had adopted a disdain for money that was characteristic of the aristocracy. Dealing with money was seen as vulgar and desirable only to the lower classes. Instead, the middle class sought titles of nobility or membership in the clergy.

The peasants bore the brunt of the financial burden as Spain’s economy suffered. The peasants faced the majority of the taxes imposed on the population. Landlords tried to recoup their own losses by charging higher rents, which drove many peasants off the land and into the city, where they found themselves amid the numerous beggars who also couldn’t find work. The flight of the peasants away from the countryside dealt another blow to agricultural production. Spain failed to develop a mercantilist system to boost the economy in large part because mercantilism was developed by the Protestant Dutch and English, whom Spain shunned as heretics. Spain fell even further behind
when it failed to adopt many of the ideas of the Scientific Revolution that were sweeping Europe.

Despite the decreasing state revenues, the monarchy continued to spend. Expenditures soon exceeded revenue, and Spain declared bankruptcy in 1596. When it was unable to boost the national treasury, the state declared bankruptcy several more times: in 1607, 1627, 1647, and 1680. The government devalued Spanish currency, and inflation ran rampant due to the influx of goods and gold from the Spanish colonies. Government problems were made worse by inept kings, whose inbreeding resulted in mental and physical degeneration and weak leadership. Philip III (r. 1598–1621) generally left his government in the hands of the Duke of Lerma, who used the position for personal gain. Philip IV (r. 1621–1665) relied on Gaspar de Guzman, Count-Duke of Olivares, who insisted on reviving imperialism as the only means to save the Spanish economy.

Despite severe financial problems, Spain involved itself in numerous seventeenth-century wars that it could not afford to fight. De Guzman’s imperial ambitions rekindled conflict with the Dutch in 1622. Spain also engaged in a prolonged war with the French over land in northern Italy that lasted from 1628 to 1659. During this time, Spain also fought in the Thirty Years’ War (1618–1648). In 1640, Spain faced revolts by Portugal and Catalonia. The constant warfare left Spanish citizens war weary and the Spanish treasury broke. Spain’s foreign policy disasters were capped with the Treaty of the Pyrenees in 1659, which ended the French-Spanish wars and marked the end of Spain’s time as a European power.

Literature and art can often provide a poignant and telling look into a particular historical period. One of the most important works of the period is Spanish writer Miguel de Cervantes’s (1547–1616) Don Quixote (1605). In Don Quixote, Cervantes tells the fictional story of a Spanish noble who travels the countryside hoping to find glory and adventures like the chivalrous knights he has read about in books. Yet even when Quixote fails in his quests, he refuses to come to terms with the reality of his situation. Cervantes satirizes the chivalric practices of the Middle Ages and the ineptitude of the nobility. Quixote’s failures are a parallel to Spain’s failure’s and inability to accept reality during this period. As a testament to the reach of Cervantes’s work, quixotic has become an adjective in the English language meaning idealistic or impractical.

After a century of troubles, Spain began the eighteenth century with more warfare, this time allied with France in the War of the Spanish Succession (1702–1713). Spain’s King Philip V died in 1701 with no heir to the throne. His will granted the Spanish throne and holdings to the grandson of French king Louis XIV. The rest of Europe was outraged by the possibility of France dominating so much of the European continent and initiated a war to prevent the French power monopoly and restore the balance of power in Europe. England and the Holy Roman Empire declared war on France in 1702. The war ended in 1713 with the Peace of Utrecht. Although Louis’s grandson became the Spanish king, the treaty established that Spain and France would never unite their thrones. Spain also lost much of its territorial holdings with the treaty.
Spanish Netherlands went to Austria, and Spanish territory in the Mediterranean went to England, Austria, and Savoy. Spain also relinquished a great deal of colonial territory in the New World. Spain’s loss was England’s gain, and the treaty marks a major turning point in European history: the decline of Spain and France and the rise of England as a European and world power. The treaty provided valuable experience that European nations would later call on during the Napoleonic Wars. The treaty also reestablished a balance of power in Europe.

**Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Diplomacy**

Diplomatic relations during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were guided by the idea no single nation-state should wield too much power. Balance-of-power politics developed earlier—during the Italian Renaissance—but flourished during the age of Louis XIV. Louis constantly tried to upset the balance of European power, especially during the War of the Spanish Succession. The French monarch tried to capitalize on the waning power of the Hapsburgs and the opportunity for expansion left in their wake. But each time he tried to grab more power for France, European nations formed alliances to prevent him from doing so.

The ultimate goal in establishing and maintaining a balance of power was not peace, but independence. Nations wanted to maintain their sovereignty and prevent domination by any single great authority. The mechanism to accomplish this goal was the formation of strategic, flexible, and sometimes fleeting alliances. Nations built alliances based on the threat at hand or their needs at the time. Alliances were not based on any sentimental, ideological, or religious grounds, so they were easily disbanded. Each nation acted strategically to protect its own self-interest. Small nations could use alliances to counteract the actions of more powerful nation-states. Small nations also found more prestige and control by being part of an alliance of other small nations or by being a strategic component of an alliance with more powerful nations.

**Extensions**

- Read E.H. Lewis’s *The Splendid Century*. What insight does the book provide about Louis XIV and his court?

**Summary**

In King Louis XIV’s court, French classicism was the only style of art and literature allowed. The style mimicked the aesthetic ideals of ancient Greece and Rome—seen best in the paintings of Nicolas Poussin. Louis was a generous patron of the arts, enjoying paintings, music, and especially theater. Molière and Racine entertained Louis with their plays, while the music of Lully, Couperin, and Charpentier filled the halls of Versailles.

Meanwhile, Spain declined after experiencing a successful sixteenth century, financed by gold and silver from the New World. As the economy suffered from reduced trade and declining precious metals from the colonies, Spain’s Hapsburg rulers were ill-equipped to handle the economic collapse. The monarchy’s primary response—to reinvigorate imperialism—led to numerous costly foreign wars that
only exacerbated their problems. The War of the Spanish Succession cemented Spain’s decline and marked the rise of England as Europe’s dominant power. At the end of the war, Spain lost territory and France lost power. The Peace of Utrecht not only ended the war but restored balance-of-power politics, which served as the dominant diplomatic policy of the era.

**Looking Ahead**

Absolutism had firm roots in Austria and Prussia that resulted from foreign invasion, internal power struggles, and outright war. The authoritarian practice of serfdom remerged in eastern Europe as it declined in western Europe after the Middle Ages. There were political and economic reasons for the consolidation of serfdom in the east.

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**SELF-CHECK ANSWERS**

1. French classicism is a style of art and literature that copied the traditions and subject matter of ancient Greek and Roman art. It was austere, disciplined, and organized.

2. Louis XIV supported many artists financially; some of these artists created works for Louis’s palace at Versailles. These artists include Jean-Baptiste Lully, François Couperin, and Molière.

3. It was an international absolutism based on precious metals from the New World. This wealth funded wars, financed palaces, and allowed monarchs to rely less on nobles.

4. The middle class usually provides the infrastructure for a nation’s economy, and without that infrastructure, the economy declines.

5. Balance-of-power politics is a type of diplomacy that allows nations to form and dissolve alliances based on their own self-interest.
Austria, Prussia, and Serfdom Between 1400 and 1650

Essential Questions

• What was absolutism like in Austria and Prussia during the seventeenth century?
• How did Austria develop after the Thirty Years’ War?
• How did Prussia develop after the Thirty Years’ War?
• What were the roles of the common man and the nobility in western and eastern Europe between 1400 and 1650?
• What were the reasons for the consolidation of serfdom in eastern Europe between 1500 and 1650?

Keywords
hereditary
subjugation
serf
Set the Stage

Serfdom existed in both eastern and western Europe, but it took very different forms in each of these regions following the plague and famine of the fourteenth century. Eastern serfs had far fewer freedoms and lived much harder lives than their counterparts in the west. Absolutism also existed in both western and eastern Europe. In eastern Europe, Austria and Prussia developed strong absolute leaders in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Both regions suffered greatly in the Thirty Years’ War, which resulted in large-scale territorial, financial, and human losses. Absolute leaders were able to strengthen their power in the aftermath of such destruction. In Austria, the Hapsburgs, who had relied on their association with the Spanish throne to give them legitimacy, suddenly found themselves alone as the Spanish Empire declined after the War of the Spanish Succession. However, Austrian monarchs increased their strength and emerged as a European power by the beginning of the eighteenth century. Prussia, ruled by the Hohenzollern family, also developed strong leadership during the latter half of the seventeenth century. Modernizing reforms led to Prussia’s emergence as a European power, as well.

Serfdom in Western and Eastern Europe

With the exception of the European portion of the Ottoman Empire, serfdom existed in both western and eastern Europe during the Middle Ages. Eastern Europe is generally defined as the area east of the Elbe River, which is in present-day Germany. Serfdom throughout Europe had declined by 1300, helped by the growth of towns and trade. Peasants in the east were given land to farm and settle as towns began to emerge east of the Elbe River. With their own land, these peasants enjoyed increased wealth and freedom. However, all of Europe experienced a setback when the bubonic plague and severe famines spread throughout the continent in the fourteenth century. In the face of these disasters, landlords in the east and the west responded differently. Eastern and western European serfdom began to diverge. Serfs in western Europe saw continued improvement in their lot, and by 1500, serfdom was nearly abolished there. In eastern Europe, however, conditions for the peasants began to decline starting around 1400, and serfdom reemerged throughout the region.

In western Europe, landlords responded to the labor shortages caused by famine and plague by granting serfs more freedom. They valued the labor they had and tried to work with peasants to create more favorable conditions. Of course, landlords didn’t necessarily set out on reforms at their own discretion. Rather, it was through revolts that unhappy peasants in western Europe convinced their landlords and the government to address their situation as conditions deteriorated. In general, western Europe’s monarchs were willing to assuage the peasants
and could exercise control over the nobility to restore order. The region also had independent judicial systems where peasants could demand more rights.

The situation in eastern Europe was markedly different, and landlords responded to the labor shortages of the fourteenth century in quite the opposite manner. Eastern European landlords tightened their control of the serfs. Landlords in eastern Europe ruled by force and allowed fewer and fewer freedoms for their serfs as the fifteenth century went on. They restricted peasants’ movements, which prevented them from finding better economic opportunities. Since nobles in eastern Europe had much more political power than those in western Europe—largely because of the absence of strong monarchies in eastern Europe—there was no one to prevent them from strengthening their hold on the serfs. Indeed, monarchs were more likely to improve their own lot by granting favors to the aristocracy, rather than siding with the peasants. These monarchs viewed themselves as part of the nobility and owned serfs themselves, which also left them little incentive to improve the peasants’ situation. In eastern Europe, weak monarchs remained in place into the mid-seventeenth century and nobles retained the majority of the region’s political and economic power.

Eastern European nobles kept their serfs subservient by passing repressive legislation and requiring more mandatory work from them. Legislation became a powerful tool for the nobility and an almost insurmountable obstacle for the serfs, largely because the nobility dominated local judicial systems. Unlike in western Europe, no independent judicial process existed that could arbitrate legal matters in an unbiased way. Nobles had no incentive to make legislation or judicial rulings that would lessen their control over their serfs or decrease their production and profits. Noble landlords also demanded more and more work from the serfs and sometimes took away land as they expanded agricultural operations to accommodate growing markets. Some serfs had to work six days a week on their landlord’s land for no compensation.

From the beginning of the sixteenth century until 1650 as it disappeared from western Europe, serfdom became more entrenched and more repressive in eastern Europe. Serfs faced tougher punishments for trying to flee from their oppressive situations. In Poland, legislation passed in 1574 that allowed a landlord to sentence his serfs to death for any reason and at any time. Fleeing also became more difficult as new laws made the chances of finding refuge more remote. In Russia, any person who found or discovered a runaway serf was required to turn him or her in, regardless of how long ago the serf ran away. Previously, serfs had been able to claim their freedom if they managed to run away and stay away for nine years. The repressive legislation also extended to a serf’s children. In 1653, Prussia introduced the idea of hereditary subjugation—the child of a serf was born as a serf and already obligated to the landlord. Serfs were left with few options other than fulfilling their repressive obligations. And since serfs in eastern Europe were less organized than their counterparts in western Europe, they did not have the same power to rebel or protest.

Serfdom in eastern Europe reflected the particular characteristics of eastern European society and land use. Eastern Europe did not develop cities and urbanize
to the extent that western Europe did. Power remained dispersed throughout the countryside and in the hands of the nobles. The cities that did exist were not dynamic or organized. Furthermore, cities did not have a politically or economically powerful middle class. The weak cities did not provide a refuge the same way the strong cities in western Europe did. Serfdom also became more firmly established as large-scale farming developed in eastern Europe. For these large agricultural operations, landlords needed more land and more work from the peasants. Nobles then took their produce and instead of selling it to the local residents, they exported it to foreign markets. This practice further undermined the middle class and towns, ensuring their continued weak position by preventing them from accumulating wealth or goods.

**Absolutism in Central and Eastern Europe**

Absolutism was not limited to western Europe. Absolutist regimes developed in central and eastern Europe, too, particularly in Austria, Prussia, and Russia. These three emerging nation-states became the dominant political forces in eastern Europe. They replaced the weak and ineffective empires that controlled eastern Europe until the Peace of Westphalia (1648): the Holy Roman Empire, Poland, and the Ottoman Empire. In these areas, constant warfare (or the threat of warfare) allowed rulers to consolidate their power at the expense of the aristocracy.

By 1650, absolute monarchs in eastern Europe had developed professional, standing armies and created large, trained bureaucracies. Kings imposed taxes to finance the armies, and the growing administrative arm of the state made sure these taxes were collected. Like in western Europe, the majority of these taxes fell on the peasants and created a financial strain on the lower classes. Unlike most of western Europe—with the exception of Spain—the eastern European economic and political system led to a society with virtually no middle class. Various German states vied for power within the crumbling and ineffective Holy Roman Empire, and by 1700, two emerged as eastern European powers: Austria and Prussia.

**Challenges for the Austrian Hapsburgs**

The traditional power of the Hapsburg family came from their rule in wealthy Spain and their role as Holy Roman Emperors. However, both of these sources of power and prestige disappeared in the seventeenth century. The Holy Roman Empire failed to consolidate the various and numerous German states during the Thirty Years’ War. Spain suffered setbacks throughout the seventeenth century. The once-powerful nation declined economically and politically throughout the 1600s and into the 1700s, especially as a result of the Thirty Years’ War and the War of the Spanish Succession. This decline isolated the Austrian Hapsburgs and forced them to fight for increased power and territory in their own right.

Following Spain’s century of decline, the Hapsburgs’ power rested in the domains of Austria, Bohemia, and Hungary, and they worked to consolidate these diverse lands and even more diverse people. The task presented many challenges. People within the Hapsburg Austrian domains came from different ethnic groups, practiced different religions, and spoke numerous languages. Austrians considered
themselves ethnic Germans, Bohemians were Protestant Czechs, and many Hungarians came from the Calvinist Magyar ethnic group. Other Hapsburg domains were inhabited by Poles, Italians, Croats, Slovaks, Romanians, and Slovenes. In addition to the religious and ethnic differences the monarchy faced, the nobles within various kingdoms fought to maintain their power and resist domination by the Hapsburg rulers. One of the first areas where the Hapsburgs managed to increase their control in these diverse lands was Bohemia, where King Ferdinand II (r. 1619–1637) conquered the Protestant Czechs in 1620 and installed a loyal Roman Catholic nobility. After the Thirty Years’ War, Ferdinand III (r. 1637–1657) further consolidated Hapsburg power in the German-speaking region of the Holy Roman Empire and established the groundwork for a strong, absolutist regime. With this firm power base, the Hapsburgs turned to the east to expand their power even more.

The Austrian Hapsburgs won a major victory in their quest for legitimacy and power at the end of the seventeenth century. After a 20-year truce between the Ottoman Turks and Hungary, conflict reigned in 1683. The Turks besieged the Austrian city of Vienna for two months. Imperial troops under the command of Holy Roman Emperor Leopold I (r. 1658–1705) and Polish troops under King John Sobieski (r. 1674–1696) came to Vienna’s defense and forced a Turkish retreat. In 1697, Prince Eugene of Savoy led the Hapsburg forces in the Battle of Zenta and engineered an important victory. Eugene then drove the Turks out of Hungary and took Budapest. The accession was formalized in the 1699 Treaty of Karlowitz, which granted the Hapsburgs most of Hungary. With the accession of Hungary, Leopold became the ruler of the Magyar ethnic group. He also gained an important avenue for establishing trade in the Mediterranean.

After the conflict with the Turks, Prince Eugene of Savoy (1663–1736) emerged as the new military leader of the Hapsburg domains. In 1704, in the early years of the War of the Spanish Succession, Savoy joined forces with England’s Duke of Marlborough in the Battle of Blenheim. The battle turned into an overwhelming victory for the duo and delivered France a decisive defeat in Bavaria. After the battle, Austria was regarded as one of Europe’s great powers. Austria gained additional territory as a result of the Spanish losses in the War of the Spanish Succession. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, Austria had successfully established itself as a European power.

**Hohenzollern Leadership in Prussia**

The Hohenzollern family gradually increased their power from 1415—when they were electors of Brandenburg who helped choose the Holy Roman Emperor—to the late 1600s, when their landholdings were surpassed only by the Hapsburgs. In 1618, the Hohenzollerns acquired the Duchy of Prussia, which sat on the Baltic Sea, north of Poland and east of the family’s existing territory of Brandenburg. They were able to increase their power and holdings as a result of the power vacuum created in the Germanic states in the aftermath of the Peace of Westphalia (1648).
The treaty gave German states the authority to rule independently and limited the power of the Hapsburgs. As the Hohenzollerns gained control of more land—much of which had been devastated by the Thirty Years’ War—they struggled to consolidate their domains just as the Hapsburgs had in Austria. Prussia had a small population and few natural resources in its war-ravaged lands. Much of this land didn’t share borders with other Hohenzollern land and was occupied by diverse ethnic and religious groups. Prussia’s rise to power was due to strong leadership from the Hohenzollerns, skillful military tactics, and wise use of the limited resources that were available.

Frederick William (r. 1640–1688), also known as the Great Elector, did much to turn Prussia into a modern and powerful state. During his 48-year rule, he modernized and increased the nation’s army and bureaucracy. He also decreased the influence of the nobility, called the Junkers, while maintaining a strategic alliance with the nobles. He also reduced the power of the assemblies, called estates, but did not interfere with the Junkers’ complete control over their serfs. Unlike France, where Louis XIV worked to alienate the nobility from the government process, Frederick William managed to skillfully incorporate the nobility into the government and military structure. He appointed nobles to key positions within the army and bureaucracy, and all officials pledged an oath of loyalty to the king. Frederick William also levied taxes to pay for his modernizing reforms. Finally, at a time when much of western Europe was embroiled in religious conflict, Frederick William practiced religious toleration and welcomed Jews and Huguenots into Prussia.

Frederick William’s son succeeded him in 1688. Unlike his father, Frederick I (r. 1688–1713) wasn’t interested in building up the military or bureaucracy. In fact, he wasn’t interested much in power or government at all. Instead, Frederick was a patron of the arts and enjoyed living a life of luxury in his palace. Frederick’s reign, however, was notable for one particularly significant event. In 1701, he became King of Prussia, the first of the German princes to gain such a title. The Holy Roman Emperor bestowed Frederick I with this title in appreciation for Prussia’s support of the Holy Roman Empire during the War of the Spanish Succession. Frederick I passed this title on to his son when he died in 1713.

**Extension**
- Read the chapter “The Great Elector Welcomes Protestant Refugees from France” in *The Habsburg and Hohenzollern Dynasties in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*. Were religious or economic concerns the real motivator for the Great Elector to welcome French Protestants to Prussia? What special privileges were extended to them? What kind of economic activities does the elector expect the French refugees to engage in?
Summary

Although serfdom existed in both eastern and western Europe, it took very different courses in each region following the famine and plague of the fourteenth century. In western Europe, serfs generally enjoyed more freedoms and rights. They rose up to demand better conditions when landlords tried to embark on more repressive policies. By 1500, serfdom had virtually disappeared from western Europe. In contrast, eastern European serfs saw their rights decrease and labor obligations increase during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Nobles were able to repress their serfs because of weak monarchs in eastern Europe and the absence of strong towns or a middle class. Nobles also dominated the court systems and were unlikely to make rulings that reduced their power.

Because of the power of nobles in eastern Europe, strong monarchs didn’t immediately develop after the Middle Ages the way they did in western Europe. However, in the power vacuum that existed after the Thirty Years’ War, two eastern European states gradually came to dominate the political landscape. Austria and Prussia both developed strong absolute monarchs who embarked on modernizing reforms. These absolutist regimes also undertook the difficult task of uniting their various territories, which were occupied by people of various ethnic and religious backgrounds. Both Austria and Prussia emerged as European powers in the eighteenth century.

Looking Ahead

In Russia, monarchs strengthened their power at the expense of peasants. As the first Romanov tsar in Russia, Peter the Great solidified his power through reforms that affected the army and government. Russia became a great European power in the seventeenth century, and St. Petersburg became a magnificent Baroque city. The comparison of absolutism in western and eastern Europe reveals sharp contrasts in the way that monarchs in both areas secured their authority.

SELF-CHECK ANSWERS

1. Hereditary subjugation was a system in which a serf’s child was born into automatic serfdom and belonged to the lord and the land.

2. Leopold I was the Holy Roman Emperor who oversaw the campaigns of Prince Eugene of Savoy and expanded the power and territory of Hapsburg Austria.

3. Many of the lands controlled by the Hohenzollerns didn’t border one another. Also, the lands had been devastated by the Thirty Years’ War and contained people with different languages, cultures, and religions.
Essential Questions

- What was absolutism like in Russia in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries?
- What were some of the many reforms of Peter the Great, and how did they impact Russia?
- What are the similarities and differences between absolutism in eastern and western Europe from 1400 to 1650?
**Set the Stage**

Absolutism existed in Austria and Prussia, but these two states weren’t the only eastern European countries to develop absolutist monarchs. Russia also developed a powerful centralized government centered on a tsar (a Slavic contraction of the Latin “caesar”). However, Russia remained unique, largely because it was influenced by both European and Asian traditions. Serfdom remained entrenched in Russian life at a time when it was almost nonexistent in much of the rest of Europe. Peter the Great admired Western technology and industry and set about modernizing what he saw as a very backward Russian state. He increased Russia’s military power, decreased the power of the nobility, strengthened Russia’s economy, reorganized the administration, and brought the Russian Orthodox Church under state control. Peter also fought wars against the Ottoman Empire and Sweden as he looked to strengthen Russia’s power and influence in western Europe.

**Eastern and Western Absolutism (1400–1650)**

Absolutism reached its peak under the French king Louis XIV (r. 1643–1715), who provided the example for absolute leaders throughout Europe. Austria, Prussia, and Russia developed absolutism that emulated the rule of Louis XIV, but with important differences. These eastern European nations also took longer to develop absolute rule, and they faced very different political, economic, and social situations from western European nation-states in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

In France, Louis limited the power of the nobility by excluding them from government proceedings and keeping them preoccupied at Versailles. By limiting the power of the nobility, Louis strengthened his own authority. In eastern Europe, rulers initially failed to increase their own power because the nobles retained such strong control throughout the 1400s and 1500s. Once eastern European monarchs established absolute control, they usually depended on the cooperation and loyalty of the nobility to maintain that authority. France had a strong middle class and large, organized cities. Eastern European states had essentially no middle class, and cities did not develop to the extent they did in the west. The absence of strong cities kept power concentrated in the hands of the nobles. Well before the time of Louis XIV’s seventeenth-century reign, most western European peasants were free, while repressive serfdom not only still existed in the east, but was actually becoming more entrenched and brutal.

Eastern Europe development, which was so different from western Europe’s, affected the styles of leadership and social structure in the various states. While the west eventually developed more extensive industrial and manufacturing sectors of the economy, the east remained tied primarily to agriculture. Large farms formed the core of the economy, which meant manors, rather than cities, were centers of power. Eastern nobles sold most of their crops to western cities, which served to keep eastern cities weak and poorly organized. Nobles retained most of the power and weak kings depended on the support of the nobility for their limited power.
Despite these differences, Austria, Prussia, and Russia were still able to form absolute governments by the seventeenth century. Austria consolidated its power after the Peace of Westphalia (1648) by looking to its lands outside of Germany. Prussia developed strong leadership through the Hohenzollern dynasty and carved out power in the northern Germanic states. Russia, whose people were united by their Slavic language, strengthened its power by developing a large and powerful army. These eastern European absolute regimes shared three fundamental similarities: a powerful monarch, a weak or nearly nonexistent middle class, and a repressed and often servile peasantry. These last two characteristics set eastern European absolutism apart from its western European counterpart.

Russia Moves Toward Absolutism

Russia emerged as an absolute power in the 1600s. Although it adapted many Western ideas to create a powerful nation with an absolute ruler, Russia also developed many of its own characteristics that made it unique. Russia incorporated customs and ideas from the Ottoman Empire, particularly with regard to religion and the Eastern Orthodox Church. Russia also had a strong Asian influence that other European nations did not. The Mongols ruled Russia for nearly 250 years, which gave Russia strong ties to Asia and caused the nation’s development to take a different course than other European states took. After the Mongols brutally conquered the eastern Slavs in the thirteenth century, they used the traditional great princes to collect taxes and subdue the peasants. Eventually, the princes of Moscow gained particular favor with the Mongol rulers and developed their own power. These Muscovite princes were finally able to topple the Mongol rulers in the fifteenth century, starting with Ivan III.

Under the leadership of Ivan III (r. 1462–1505), also known as Ivan the Great, Russia broke free from the Mongols in 1480. When Ivan IV (r. 1533–1584) came to power, he pursued an ambitious reform program. Ivan IV had watched Poland decline from a great power and did not want Russia to follow suit. He strengthened the Russian military by demanding mandatory military service by the nobility. Ivan III and Ivan IV helped create the beginnings of Russia’s military class called the streltsi. Ivan embarked on extensive wars, which rid Russia of remaining Mongol rule and added significant territory to the empire. To celebrate one of his military victories, Ivan had St. Basil’s Cathedral built in 1560. According to legend, Ivan had the architect blinded to ensure that he could not reproduce the grand, Ottoman-influenced cathedral that stands in Red Square.

Ivan’s reforms were short lived as he became a repressive, violent, and ruthless ruler about halfway through this reign, earning himself the name Ivan the Terrible. He was cruel, autocratic, and highly suspicious of the hereditary boyars—Russia’s old nobility. He executed many of that class in Moscow using his band of henchmen dressed in black. He later confiscated the land of hereditary boyars and gave it to the service boyars (nobility who earned their land through service to the tsar) using secret police. He controlled every aspect of Russian life he could possibly manage. He abolished the distinction between hereditary boyars and service boyars and required them all to serve the tsar. As the nobility demanded more and more from the peasants, many peasants fled to less populated territory in the east and south. In these remote lands they formed small groups of independent armies called Cossacks, which managed to evade the repressive controls of Ivan and the
nobility. Artisans and traders also faced repression under Ivan’s policies. He bound them to their towns to effectively collect taxes. Ivan also took over businesses that proved to be profitable and turned them into royal monopolies. These actions helped halt the rise of a powerful middle class in Russia.

Ivan the Terrible had complete control of Russian life. When he died, Russia was thrown into a period of chaos called the Time of Troubles (1584–1613). Ivan’s son Theodore ruled after his father’s death but died in 1598 without an heir. Various boyar factions tried to gain control of the government. They wanted to elect a tsar who would help them regain some of the freedoms they had lost under Ivan IV. After nearly 30 years of chaos and civil war, a council elected boyar Michael Romanov (r. 1613–1654) as tsar in 1613, ending the Time of Troubles. The Romanov dynasty would rule Russia until 1917, when Tsar Nicholas II abdicated during the Russian Revolution. Michael Romanov was only 17 when he was elected tsar—too young, many thought, to be swayed by any particular political group. The new tsar developed Russian absolutism, using violence when necessary, and brought some stability back to Russian society. His increasing power allowed him to hold off attempts by the boyars and streltsi to gain power. He relaxed Ivan’s heavy obligations on the nobility, and peasants were completely enserfed by 1649.

By the 1600s, Russia had developed strong ties with the West in terms of technological and scientific knowledge. The arts and literature of Russia also became part of the larger European culture. Some upper class Russians married western Europeans, and limited trade occurred when the Russian port city of Archangel wasn’t blocked by ice. However, the Russian people remained distinct from Westerners. Men wore full beards and traditional clothing that easily set them apart from western Europeans. Women lived secluded, private lives and often wore veils when they did leave their homes. Russia had little if any formal education system and superstition plagued both the state and the Russian Orthodox Church.

The center of Russian life was Moscow, located in the heart of the vast Russian territory. Although Russians were united by their Slavic language, they were still a diverse group of people. Seventeenth-century Russia was led by the Muscovites—the Great Russians. They rose to power in the previous centuries owing to their support of the Mongol khans. The Muscovites expanded Russian influence by pushing east. They conquered lands east of the Volga River, then kept pushing all the way to the Pacific Ocean—crossing and conquering some 5,000 miles of territory by the 1630s. Because of Russian expansion and settlement, Russia was a vast land by the start of the seventeenth century. By midcentury, Russian expansion had nearly reached the Baltic Sea in the north and the Black Sea in the south. Russian territory spanned from west of Moscow to the Pacific Ocean. West of Russian territory, the Poles controlled the Byelorussians (White Russians), the Ukrainians (Little Russians), and the cities of Kiev and Smolensk. By the end of the seventeenth century, Russia would look to the west for valuable ports connecting it to western Europe.

**SELF-CHECK**

Why was Ivan the IV called Ivan the Terrible?
**Russia’s Seventeenth-Century Troubles**

Throughout the seventeenth century, the Russian people dealt with increasingly harsh conditions of serfdom and uncertainties and reform within the Russian Orthodox Church. Both of these challenges highlighted the internal tensions between Russia’s aristocracy and peasants. They are also indicative of the competing ideas of traditionalism and modernization, which fought for supremacy as Russia grew into a European power.

As serfdom disappeared from western Europe, the institution became even more entrenched—and more repressive—in seventeenth-century Russia. Free peasants became fewer and fewer as more were bound to the land and to their service obligations. Farmers weren’t the only people who lost freedom and became restricted in their movements and activities. Even artists and tradesmen became obliged to stay within a particular town. These restrictions made it easier for the government to control taxation. The monarchy further increased its control on Russian economic life by creating state monopolies on certain industries and taking over profitable businesses.

Much as it did throughout eastern Europe, legislation helped strengthen serfdom in Russia and keep serfs in a position of servitude. Nobles implored Michael Romanov to strengthen the laws to protect the labor they did have. In a territory as vast as Russia, land was abundant and labor was in short supply. Michael complied and passed laws strengthening landlords’ control over their serfs. If a serf managed to run away, he could be returned to his landlord for the rest of his life if he was found. Landlords could rule with complete authority on their land and could sentence serfs to death for any reason. Hereditary serfdom developed during the mid-seventeenth century, meaning that serfs’ children were born into serfdom. Serfdom essentially turned into slavery in 1675, when it became legal to sell a serf independent from the land. Prior to that time, serfs were bought and sold with the land but were not property themselves.

Many peasants tried to resist their increasing subjugation, especially those who followed the leadership of Stephen Razin (1630–1671) and rebelled in 1667. Razin had many followers, including a group of Cossacks, and together they rose up against the landlords, nobles, and priests. Razin launched the attack from a ship in the Caspian Sea, where he destroyed Russian vessels, then sailed up the Volga River. When an army was sent to quell the rebellion, Razin successfully convinced them to join his ranks. The government eventually caught Razin and executed him. The revolt produced the opposite effect of what Razin had intended. Outraged by the revolt, nobles actually tightened their control over the serfs after the rebellion was over.

As the tsars increased control by building absolutist regimes, they also exercised considerable control over the church. Russians came to view the Russian Orthodox Church as a tool of the tsar. The head of the Russian Orthodox Church, the patriarch, launched church reforms in the 1650s to correct errors in Russian translations of the Bible. However, people did not respond to these reforms, and the tsar had to impose the reforms upon the people. Those who didn’t accept the reforms were called Old Believers. They were often more fanatical than the
traditional church member and many participated in Razin’s rebellion and later revolts.

**Russia’s Peter the Great**

Peter I (r. 1682–1725), better known as Peter the Great, began his rule in 1682 at the age of 10 and shared power with his half brother Ivan V (r. 1682–1696). Ivan was in poor health, and Peter began his personal reign when his brother died in 1696. Peter grew up with an interest in all things modern and Western. He studied Western engineering and manufacturing, learning from the Germans living in Moscow, and he learned how to sail from English and Dutch sailors.

**Peter the Great’s Modernizing Reforms**

Shortly after Peter began his personal rule, he embarked on an 18-month journey through Europe called the Grand Embassy. Peter studied the factories and shipyards of Europe as he tried to travel incognito. However, Peter was a giant of a man—he likely stood at least six and a half feet tall—and had a facial twitch that made him easily recognizable. He also travelled with a large entourage that made his disguise as a commoner utterly unbelievable. Despite these obvious giveaways, Peter did manage to mingle and learn from the common people during his tour of Europe. He returned home with an even stronger passion to modernize Russia. He brought with him Westerners who were experts in their field, and Peter continued to encourage western Europeans to settle in Russia throughout his reign.

Before he could embark on any reforms, however, Peter first had to deal with the coup that broke out in his absence. In 1698, the *streltsi* tried to topple Peter’s rule. The tsar rushed home and brutally smashed the rebellion. He executed over 1,000 rebels and kept their corpses on public display as a caution to anyone else who might think of wresting power from the tsar.

With his power secure, Peter set about modernizing Russia. He wanted to turn his country into a European power. He modernized the army, created a navy, decreased the power of the boyars, increased taxes, reorganized the bureaucracy, and increased state control over the church. He expanded the army by introducing a draft, and over the course of his reign, more than 300,000 men were drafted into the Russian army. Peter developed Russia’s first navy, largely to protect Russia’s interests in the Black Sea.

Peter modernized the boyars by forcing men to shave their long beards and banning them from wearing their traditional dress. He forbade the women from wearing their traditional veils. He also demanded that women play a more prominent and public role in society by going out in public and socializing with men as they did in western Europe. He required that all noblemen serve in either the military or the civil service. He introduced a merit-based system to evaluate their performance called the Table of Ranks. People who were loyal and worked hard...
could move up the social ranks based on their service alone, regardless of their heredity. Peter also required that boyars send their sons for technical training in western Europe.

Peter tried to reform the Russian economy in a number of ways. First, he placed more emphasis on education. In addition to sending nobles to schools in the West, Peter developed compulsory education within Russia. Along with indoctrinating students about loyalty to the state, the schools taught basic reading, writing, and arithmetic. Peter hoped the education reforms would help Russia catch up to the more educated West. Second, Peter increased the state's role in the economy. He created more government monopolies, charged taxes on state-produced goods, subsidized private industry, and employed serfs in factories and mines. His mercantilist policies promoted commercialism by establishing joint-stock companies and developing a merchant fleet. Finally, Peter raised taxes. He established a soul tax, which was a tax on every Russian male.

The modernizing states in western Europe had established efficient, trained bureaucracies, and Peter set out to do the same in Russia. He reorganized the administration and modeled it after the successful central administration in Sweden. Peter created colleges, or bureaus, to administer nine basic areas of society: the army, the navy, foreign affairs, commerce, income, expenditures, mines and manufacturing, justice, and control. As part of his restructuring, Peter proclaimed Russia an empire and took the title of Emperor of All Russia in 1711.

Peter's reforms also included taking more control of the Russian Orthodox Church, which was generally hostile to Peter's agenda. Peter abolished the office of patriarch, who had been the head of the Russian Orthodox Church. In its place, he established the Holy Synod. A layman called the procurator general headed the Holy Synod. Peter appointed bishops to this council, which ensured the tsar's complete control over the church.

**Peter the Great's Wars**

One reason Peter had to increase taxes and the government's role in industry was to finance and supply his extensive wars. Peter was at war for all but two years of his reign, primarily fighting two different foes.

Peter's first target was the Ottoman Empire. Gaining land in the Ottoman Empire along the Black Sea would give the Russians their long desired warm-water port. Peter declared war on the Ottoman Empire in 1695, and Russian troops took the port city of Azov the next year. The Turks would later recapture the port in 1711, right in the midst of Peter's other great war.

Russia's major rival was Sweden, whose presence stood in the way of Russian dominance in the Baltic Sea. Charles XII (r. 1697–1718) ruled Sweden, and his severely outnumbered troops defeated the Russians in 1700 at the Battle of Narva, which marked the beginning of the Great Northern War (1700–1721). Peter and his troops recovered from the defeat and regrouped. Peter changed his tactics and faced off against Swedish troops again in 1709 at the Battle of Poltava. Peter used the brutal Russian winter in his favor by drawing the Swedish troops deep into Russia before attacking. Peter won the battle and eventually won the war. The Treaty
of Nystadt (1721) granted Russia significant territory in the Baltic region. Upon this new land, Peter built St. Petersburg—a modern city modeled after those in the West and used as Peter’s “window to the West.” Located on the Gulf of Finland, St. Petersburg was a baroque city that included an imperial court modeled on Louis XIV’s palace at Versailles. Built by Western architects, the city had a distinctly different look and feel than the old Russian cities.

**Peter the Great’s Impact**

Peter the Great accomplished much for Russia. He turned his nation into one that western Europe could no longer ignore, if only because of the sheer size and military strength of the empire. Peter added territory to Russia, increased its army, and established its first navy. However, his domestic reforms were less successful and served to create a further gap between the nation’s two classes: the aristocracy and the peasants. Much of the aristocracy embraced Peter’s reforms, which gave them opportunities for power and prestige. Peasants, Old Believers, and the lower classes resented his changes, which often came at their expense. Peter’s autocratic rule and inability to deal with the growing gap in Russian society laid the foundation for Russian unrest that continued well into the twentieth century.

**Extension**

- Read *Peter the Great* by Robert K. Massie and describe how Peter the Great expanded Russia’s territory and modernized its army and navy.

**Summary**

Absolutism developed in Russia as well as Austria and Prussia. All three states’ absolutism was loosely modeled on western Europe’s—particularly the absolutism
of Louis XIV. However, eastern absolutism differed from that in the west because it revolved around an oppressed peasantry and a weak or nonexistent middle class. After gaining independence from the Mongols, Russia started its growth in Moscow and pushed east, conquering and settling territory all the way to the Pacific Ocean. When Peter the Great became tsar, he tried to westernize Russia, which was often seen as backward and odd. Peter traveled for 18 months in Europe and brought back a wealth of information and advisers that helped Russia catch up to the West. Peter reformed the military, the administration, and the Russian economy. He also decreased the influence of the old nobility and introduced a merit-based social structure. Peter brought the Russian Orthodox Church under state control and increased Russia's influence in the west through conflicts with the Ottoman Empire and Sweden.

**Looking Ahead**

John Locke promoted Constitutionalism in his political treatises. His ideas were influential in England as the country experienced war between the crown and Parliament during the Stuart dynasty that followed Elizabeth I's reign.

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**SELF-CHECK ANSWERS**

1. Ivan the Terrible ruled with an iron fist and was often erratic and violent. He brutally suppressed uprisings.

2. The Time of Troubles was the period after the death of Ivan the Terrible lasting from 1584 to 1613. It ended when the nobles picked young Michael Romanov to be tsar because they believed him to be free of entanglements with the many factions in Russia.

3. Stephen Razin was the leader of popular and violent serf uprising. He was eventually caught and executed by the Russians.

4. The Old Believers were mostly serfs who disagreed with reforms in the Russian Orthodox Church. They broke from the state-controlled church, and many of them participated in the serf rebellions.

5. Peter the Great went to learn about everything from shipbuilding to engineering and brought experts back with him to help Russia modernize and also to make sure Russia couldn't be overrun by the West at some point.

6. It was a Russian head tax on every male used to pay for Russia's rapid modernization and foreign wars.

7. Sweden

8. It was based on a different social structure: a powerful monarchy, a small and powerless middle class, and oppressed serfs. In the east, the kings worked with the nobles because they needed the aristocracy's support owing to the inherent weaknesses of their kingdoms.
Constitutionalism and Seventeenth-Century England

**Essential Questions**
- What were the essential components of constitutionalism?
- Why did absolutism decline in England?
- What were the key elements of the rule of James I?
- What were the key elements of the rule of Charles I?
- How would you describe the English Commonwealth and the Protectorate under Oliver Cromwell?
- What were the key elements of the rule of Charles II?
- What were the key elements of the rule of James II?
Set the Stage
As Russia, Prussia, and Austria became absolutist regimes, England adopted an entirely different form of government: constitutionalism. Founded on the limitation of government by law, constitutionalism first emerged in England and Holland. England arrived at a constitutional monarchy only after years of religious and political turmoil. England started the seventeenth century with the powerful monarchy of Elizabeth I. After her death in 1603, the monarchy was beset with political troubles as James I and Charles I became immersed in a power struggle with Parliament. This struggle culminated in a civil war that resulted in the dissolution of the monarchy. After a failed attempt at a republic led by Oliver Cromwell, the Restoration brought Charles II to the throne. However, religious conflict continued to plague England and Scotland and eventually resulted in the overthrow of James II and the Glorious Revolution, which brought the Protestant monarchs William and Mary to the throne.

Constitutionalism
As Louis XIV turned France into an absolutist regime in the seventeenth century and as absolutist governments developed in eastern Europe, England and Holland moved toward constitutionalism. Constitutionalism is based on the idea that a nation’s government must be limited by laws that protect the rights of its people. A constitution, whether written, unwritten, or some combination of the two, sets out these rights.

A constitutional government can be a republic or a monarchy. In either case, the ruling body or person is bound to uphold certain rights of the people. People can count on these rights regardless of the leader in power. Constitutionalism does not require democracy—that is, constitutional governments don’t necessarily include direct participation and representation by all of the nation’s citizens. English constitutionalism did not develop fully until the last part of the seventeenth century. It came about after nearly a century of political and religious turmoil, during which certain monarchs tried to move England’s government toward absolutism. Indeed, in many ways, constitutionalism can be understood as a reaction against and a rejection of absolutism.

England’s Seventeenth-Century Rulers
Throughout the seventeenth century, England’s leaders struggled to define the proper roles and powers of the crown and Parliament. Parliament fought to keep its power over financial matters and monarchs struggled to work within a system that depended on parliamentary cooperation. Religious tensions and foreign conflicts made these trying times even more difficult.

Elizabeth I (r. 1558–1603)
Respected by the English people and victorious in foreign conflict, Elizabeth I had a very successful reign. After defeating the mighty Spanish Armada in 1588, England
established a policy of isolationism that persisted well into the seventeenth century. Elizabeth was politically savvy and avoided conflict with Parliament.

Elizabeth’s major challenge during her reign involved religious tensions. She managed to avoid much conflict with the Calvinist Puritans, who wanted to reform the Church of England. Specifically, they wanted to purify the Church of England by ridding any lingering characteristics of the Roman Catholic Church. Elizabeth secured Protestantism as the dominant religion in England, but she faced perpetual threats to her power from Catholics, who opposed her religious agenda. The primary threats came from within Elizabeth’s own family, particularly through her cousin Mary, Queen of Scots. Elizabeth had Mary imprisoned for 20 years before she was finally executed in 1587. Elizabeth never married nor had any children. When Elizabeth died in 1603, the Tudor dynasty, which began with Henry VII in 1485 after the War of the Roses, came to an end. Mary’s Protestant son took the throne.

**James I (r. 1603–1625)**

James VI had technically been king of Scotland since 1567, when he was an infant, but he became the de facto ruler of Scotland in 1581. When he inherited the English throne in 1603, he became James I, the first ruler of the Stuart dynasty. From the beginning, James was an outsider, and he lacked the personal appeal and connection with the English people that Elizabeth had enjoyed. Elizabeth had been able to avoid conflict between the Parliament and the crown and had also avoided outright religious conflict among the English people, but James faced both of these problems during his reign.

James’s ardent belief in the divine right of the monarchy set him up for almost immediate conflict with Parliament. James had publicized his thoughts on divine right even before he took the English throne. In 1598, he published *The True Law of Free Monarchies*, which laid out his beliefs. According to James and the idea of divine right, citizens—including Parliament—did not have the right to question or protest the king’s decisions or actions. As such, James rejected Parliament’s role in the English government, a role established in 1265. The House of Commons—made up of wealthy merchants, lawyers, and gentry—vehemently opposed James’s reign from the start. The more conservative House of Lords—mostly nobility and clergy—supported him initially, but eventually came to the same conclusions as the House of Commons.

Since Parliament refused to work with James, the king faced economic troubles throughout his reign. He overspent and inflation gripped the country. He needed to raise money, but couldn’t legally do so without the approval of Parliament. James tried to circumvent Parliament to raise funds, charging custom duties and selling titles, which angered the lawmakers even more. In 1621, Parliament passed the Great Protestation, which reaffirmed parliamentary rights when it came to political or economic issues facing English citizens.

James’s other fierce opposition came from the Puritans, Presbyterians, and Catholics. James was a staunch Anglican with a deep distrust for the Presbyterians, who accounted for the religious majority in
Scotland. Both Puritans and Presbyterians were Calvinists who stressed local control and representative governance in church affairs. To James, these beliefs constituted a threat to his authority. During his reign, the Puritans became more visible and vocal in their calls to purify the Anglican Church from any remaining vestiges of Catholicism. James tried to control the clergy by imposing an “Episcopal” structure—meaning bishops controlled the church—on the Anglican Church. When the Puritans called for the dissolution of the position of bishop in the Church of England, James famously proclaimed, “No bishop, no king.” James believed bishops and church structure were important components of royal support. Many Puritans in Parliament wanted more local control and regional boards to govern the church. This more Presbyterian structure—where ministers rather than bishops controlled the church—contrasted with James’s efforts.

James had initially been quite accepting of the Catholics, but as the religion started to thrive in England, he responded with more repressive policies. Anti-Catholic sentiment spread throughout the country when officials discovered a plot by Guy Fawkes (1570–1606), a radical Catholic, to blow up Parliament. Fawkes and his supporters placed kegs of gunpowder underneath the House of Lords and wanted to blow up the entire building, along with King James. The Gunpowder Plot never came to fruition, but it did generate anger toward the nation’s minority Catholic population. James’s great accomplishment in matters of religion was the 1611 King James version of the Bible, which became the dominant version of the text for the next 250 years.

**Charles I (r. 1625–1649)**

Charles I proved to be even less capable than his father as he faced many of the same problems that plagued his predecessors. Charles’s problems with religious tensions deepened when he married French princess Henrietta Maria, a Catholic. The public didn’t trust Charles because of these Catholic ties. However, Charles practiced even less religious tolerance than his father and supported the policies of William Lund (1573–1645), Archbishop of Canterbury. Lund believed that Anglican ideas and values were the only acceptable beliefs for English citizens, and he wanted to expel the Puritans from the church. He also mandated that all churches in England, Ireland, and Scotland use the *Book of Common Prayer*. Lund’s policies outraged the Presbyterian Scots, who rebelled in 1639 and signed the Solemn League and Covenant, vowing to protect their Calvinist religion. Many Puritans and Catholics left for the New World as a result of Charles’s religious intolerance and Lund’s policies.

Charles faced the most serious conflict yet with Parliament. Parliament continued its refusal to raise funds for the crown, and Charles continued to try to raise money without Parliament’s approval. He imposed new taxes (called Tonnage and Poundage) on English citizens and then enforced their collection with the military. He also forced the nobility to give the crown “loans,” which he assured would be repaid. Citizens who did not comply might have troops quartered in their homes or be sent to prison. Charles became even more repressive when he relied on
the Star Chamber, a court used by his father and earlier English monarchs that suspended the right to a trial by jury.

Outraged by Charles’s blatant disregard for the rights of Parliament and rights of English citizens, Parliament passed the Petition of Rights in 1628. This petition demanded that the king gain parliamentary approval for any taxes, stop quartering troops in citizen homes, and allow every person a trial by jury. Charles needed to raise money, so he complied. Almost immediately afterward, however, Charles dissolved Parliament. He ruled without Parliament from 1628 to 1640, using questionable and largely illegal means to raise money for the crown. Charles expanded the practice of collecting ship money. Coastal towns traditionally provided ships or paid ship money to the crown to support the navy, but Charles required all English towns to pay the fee to generate revenue.

Facing rebellion in Scotland because of his religious policies, Charles called Parliament into session in 1640. He needed money to fight the uprising. Parliament refused to grant Charles anything until the king met their demands, one of which was that Charles recognize that taxation required parliamentary approval. The body also implored the king to make the Church of England more Protestant in character. Charles refused to bend and dissolved the Parliament after only three weeks. This session of Parliament came to be known as the Short Parliament.

England suffered humiliation at the hands of the Scots. The Treaty of Ripon (1640) forced England to pay a heavy indemnity to Scotland, which only exacerbated Charles’s financial woes. When he called Parliament into session again in November 1640, the session lasted nearly 13 years and was called the Long Parliament. During this time, Parliament set about curbing the power of the king. Members had two of the king’s prominent advisers, including Lund, executed and reiterated that the king could not levy taxes without Parliament’s approval. Parliament passed the Triennial Act in 1641, which required the king to call Parliament into session at least once every three years. The same year, Parliament passed the Grand Remonstrance, which enumerated the body’s grievances with the king. An infuriated Charles tried to have five parliamentary leaders arrested, but when that attempt failed, he fled to northern England. His supporters went with him, while his opposition remained entrenched in London. The stage was set for conflict, and the English Civil War broke out in 1642.

The civil war was the violent manifestation of a conflict that had long been lingering in England, a conflict between the crown and the Parliament. Supporters of the crown were called Cavaliers or Royalists. They were mainly in northern and western England and consisted of peasants, wealthy noble families, and Anglicans. This group faced opposition from the Roundheads, so named because of their haircuts. The Roundheads supported the Parliament and consisted of merchants, lawyers, Puritans, and by 1643 Scots. The Roundheads developed a superior army under the leadership of Oliver Cromwell (1599–1658). Called the New Model Army, or Ironsides, Cromwell’s troops defeated the Cavaliers at key battles in 1644 at Marston Moor and 1645 at Naseby.

In 1646, the Scots captured Charles and handed him over to the Parliament. He escaped, only to be caught again. Parliament could not decide what to do with
Charles; radicals wanted him tried, while moderates did not. No English king had ever been put on trial. This debate created a rift in Parliament. When Parliament failed to act, Cromwell called in the army to break up the legislative body. Cromwell forced nearly 100 members of Parliament—almost two-thirds of the existing members, most of them moderates—out of Parliament in an action called Pride’s Purge. Cromwell’s purge of these more moderate members of Parliament was named after Colonel Thomas Pride, who led Cromwell’s army. With these members gone, the remaining Parliament was called the Rump Parliament. They dissolved the monarchy, the House of Lords, and the Anglican Church. They also called for the king’s execution. Only 26 members of Parliament voted for his execution, which was enough for a majority in the Rump Parliament, and Charles I was beheaded on January 30, 1649.

**Oliver Cromwell and the Commonwealth**

With the monarchy dissolved, civil war hero and leader of Parliament’s New Model Army Oliver Cromwell led England’s new republican government, which was called the Commonwealth. Cromwell dissolved the Rump Parliament and named himself “Lord Protector” under the Instrument of Government—England’s only written constitution. Cromwell experienced success with his foreign policies during these years. He brought Scotland under English control in 1649 and defeated supporters of Charles’s son, Charles II, in 1650 and 1651, thus securing his power and ending the English Civil War. English trading ambitions brought the nation in conflict with Holland and Spain, which Cromwell defeated in 1654 and 1658, respectively. England’s victory over Spain gave them the West Indies island of Jamaica.

Cromwell faced significant domestic challenges during his time as the head of the Commonwealth. He was a devout Puritan who imposed strict moral codes on society. He closed theaters and prohibited dancing, gambling, and the celebration of Christmas. He demanded that people observe the Sabbath and he condemned Catholics and Anglicans alike. Cromwell repressed an Irish Catholic uprising by burning churches, murdering priests, and killing Irish citizens. The brutality of his action created fierce backlash from the Catholic population. English peasants gradually became dissatisfied with their nation’s social and economic position under Cromwell.

Cromwell also faced opposition from Parliament. Many radicals in Parliament supported the grievances of the peasants, but Cromwell quickly crushed those who disapproved of his leadership. He dissolved the Rump Parliament and the Council of State in 1653. In their place, Cromwell created a new council and a 140-member Parliament called the Barebone’s Parliament. He became
dissatisfied with this Parliament, too, however, and dissolved it, as well. He then established what amounted to a military dictatorship called the Protectorate. The English citizens no longer hailed Cromwell as a hero, but instead hated him for his repressive policies and military-backed autocratic state.

When Cromwell died in 1658, his son Richard took power for a short time, but soon resigned under the pressures of leadership. The military took control. Admitting the failure of England’s experiment in republican government, General George Monk (1608–1670) summoned the exiled Charles II to take the throne.

**Charles II (r. 1660–1685) and the Restoration**

Charles II had been in exile since Cromwell defeated him and the Scots in 1651 to end the civil war. Charles II became king in 1660 during the Restoration of the English monarchy. The restored monarch pursued religious and political tolerance. He reestablished the English government much as it had looked before the civil war. Parliament retained the right to levy taxes and agreed to meet regularly. In 1679, Parliament passed the Habeas Corpus Act, which guaranteed that individuals held illegally could not be prosecuted. Charles II also reestablished the Church of England. Charles II worked hard to avoid conflict with Parliament, but Parliament quickly took issue with the king’s tolerant religious policies.

King Charles's parliamentary opposition was led by the ultra-royalists in the House of Commons. Alarmed by the king’s religious tolerance, the Parliament passed the Clarendon Code (1661–1665). This series of laws, named after the king’s chief adviser the Earl of Clarendon (1609–1674), limited the toleration for Catholics and non-Anglican Protestants (called Nonconformists).

Religious tensions weren’t the only problems during Charles II’s reign. In 1665, a plague hit England, followed by devastating fires in London the following year. While rebuilding at home, Charles faced a rebellion in Scotland in 1666 and war with the Dutch from 1665 to 1667. After a significant defeat at the hands of the Dutch, Charles needed Parliament to raise taxes to support the war. When Parliament refused to do so, Charles entered into secret negotiations with France’s Louis XIV. In exchange for loans, Charles would support the French war effort against the Dutch. This agreement was formalized with the Treaty of Dover (1670). England and France fought the Dutch from 1672 to 1674. As money rolled in from France, Charles became less dependent on cooperation from Parliament.

The English people were concerned about their king’s alliance with the French and his leanings toward Catholicism. Charles’s brother, the Duke of York, and his wife, Catherine of Braganza (1638–1705), were both Catholic. As many people feared, Charles increased religious tolerance in 1672 when he issued the Declaration of Indulgence, which lifted Parliament’s previous restrictions on Catholics and Nonconformists. Parliament responded with the Test Act of 1673. The act required all public officials to declare an oath of allegiance to the Church of England. This move marked a serious effort by Parliament to restrict Catholics and Nonconformists from having any influence in matters of the state. Charles could do little to combat the move, but he did successfully thwart Parliament’s attempt to ban his Catholic brother from taking the crown upon his death. Anti-Catholic sentiment increased again in 1678 in response to the Popish Plot, a sham conspiracy invented by a man
who falsely testified that the king’s wife was trying to assassinate Charles so that Charles’s Catholic brother could gain the throne. The fabricated plot resonated because there were people who genuinely feared the crown being passed to the Duke of York. Those who tried to prevent Charles from passing the crown to his brother James were the Whigs, while the Tories supported Charles.

**James II (r. 1685–1688)**

When Charles II died in 1685 without any legitimate heirs, his Catholic brother, the Duke of York, took the crown with the support of the Tories and to the dismay of the Whigs. James II worked to establish royal absolutism and promised to restore Catholicism to England. He appointed Catholics to key government and academic positions. He issued the Declaration of Liberty of Conscience in 1687, which granted religious tolerance to all denominations. The declaration outraged Parliament and was issued in blatant disregard for the Test Act.

When James’s wife gave birth to a son in 1688, it was the last straw for Parliament. Members couldn’t handle the thought of another Catholic on the throne. Parliament dissolved the hereditary monarchy and deposed King James II. To take his place, Whigs invited James’s Protestant daughter Mary Stuart and her husband William of Orange, stadholder of the Netherlands, to take the throne. They accepted and prepared to invade. William of Orange was an ideal pick for opponents of James II and his father. William was strongly anti-Catholic and a fierce opponent of Louis XIV. When William and his army landed in England and marched toward London in November 1688, James promptly fled to France. William and Mary’s bloodless takeover of the throne in defense of Protestantism is called the Glorious Revolution.

**Extensions**

- Watch the film *Cromwell*. Make a time line of important events in the English Civil War and in Cromwell’s rise to power.

**Summary**

While absolutism flourished in France, Prussia, Austria, and Russia, a different type of government system—constitutionalism—developed in England and Holland. Constitutionalism is the limitation of a government by law, usually embodied in the creation of a constitution. England began its move toward constitutionalism when Elizabeth I died. Her cousin, James I, took the throne and moved the government toward absolutism. Both he and his son, Charles I, clashed with Parliament over monetary and religious concerns. These tensions erupted in a civil war that pitted the Parliament against the king. Parliamentary supporters called Roundheads won, and Oliver Cromwell headed the new English Commonwealth. Eventually, Cromwell’s republic turned into a military-supported autocracy. After Cromwell’s death, the military restored the monarchy, which continued to clash with Parliament over money and religion. Parliament, fearing a hereditary Catholic Stuart dynasty, eventually invited William of Orange and his wife, Mary, to invade England and capture the throne. This “Glorious Revolution” reestablished Protestant control of the country.
Looking Ahead

The Glorious Revolution of 1688 ended the crisis that beset James II and Parliament when he had a male heir to the throne. Fearing a Catholic dynasty in England, key leaders from the Whigs and Tories in Parliament joined forces to invite the Protestant and Dutch William of Orange and his wife Mary to take the throne in England. The Glorious Revolution removed any vestiges of absolute monarchy in England and resolved the dispute between the crown and Parliament. The Bill of Rights that followed limited the monarch's power and firmly established a constitutional monarchy in England.

**SELF-CHECK ANSWERS**

1. Puritans wanted to purify the Church of England of what they saw as too many vestiges of Roman Catholicism.

2. Charles II tried to arrest some antiroyalists in Parliament after they issued the Grand Remonstrance in 1641. Both sides then recruited armies and the war started.

3. Oliver Cromwell was a Puritan who distinguished himself during the English Civil War and eventually became the leader of the British Commonwealth after the monarchy was abolished.

4. It took place in 1660 and saw the English king, Charles II, restored to the throne.
The English Civil War and the Glorious Revolution

Essential Questions
• What happened during the English Civil War?
• What events took place during the Glorious Revolution?
• What accomplishments resulted from the Glorious Revolution?
• What were the theories of John Locke?
• How did parliamentary government develop in England?

Keywords
- cabinet
- Great Britain
- inalienable rights
- prime minister
- tabula rasa
**Set the Stage**

Throughout the seventeenth century, England faced numerous domestic political and religious crises. After a tumultuous hundred years that saw the abolition of the monarchy, first in favor of a Commonwealth and then a type of military dictatorship, England faced yet another crisis: the possibility of a Catholic dynasty. In primarily Protestant England, this scenario was unacceptable to both the Whigs and the Tories in Parliament. Putting aside their differences, the two groups invited the Protestant William of Orange and his wife Mary to invade England and retake the throne in the name of Protestantism. James II, the Catholic king, fled England when William and his forces landed in 1688. William and Mary were now poised to become the new king and queen of England.

**The English Civil War**

When the English Civil War broke out in 1642, Royalists and Roundheads fought over an issue that had plagued the English government since the beginning of the century. Royalists, or Cavaliers, supported the king and believed he should have more power independent from Parliament. Roundheads believed that the king needed to respect the power of the Parliament, especially in financial matters. Throughout the century, Parliament repeatedly refused to raise taxes for the monarchy, and the monarchy—first with James I (r. 1603–1625) then Charles I (r. 1625–1649)—refused to concede any power to Parliament.

Charles I needed money more than ever after facing a humiliating defeat at the hands of the Scots in 1640. He called Parliament to session, but the session only lasted three weeks because neither side would give in to the demands of the other. This Short Parliament was followed closely by the Long Parliament, which stayed in session for 13 years but still failed to produce any real cooperation between Parliament and the monarchy. Outraged by Parliament’s grievances against him as outlined in the Grand Remonstrance, Charles tried to arrest five of its leaders. When this attempt failed, Charles fled north and raised an army. Parliamentary supporters in London also built up troops, and the violence began soon after.

The parliamentary supporters—called the Roundheads—found victory under the leadership of Oliver Cromwell. After the war, Cromwell dissolved the monarchy and led the nation on an 11-year experiment in republican government. Cromwell’s government dissolved into a military dictatorship, which his son tried to keep up after Cromwell died in 1658. However, he soon stepped down. The military restored the monarchy by calling for Charles II (r. 1660–1685) to return to England after being in exile since the end of the civil war. The Restoration occurred in 1660.
Although Charles was careful to avoid conflict with Parliament, religious tensions continued to cause a rift between Parliament and the throne. Charles was able to decrease his dependence on the revenue-raising authority of Parliament by entering into a secret treaty with French king (and Catholic) Louis XIV and supporting the French in their war against the Dutch. Charles’s penchant for supporting Catholicism sparked the ire of Parliament and English citizens alike. When Charles died, his Catholic brother James II (r. 1685–1688) took the throne. After James and his wife produced a male heir, Parliament could not abide the thought of a possible Catholic dynasty. Parliament prepared to oust James from the throne.

**The Glorious Revolution**
Parliament wanted to get rid of the Catholic monarch and restore Protestantism to England. Both Whigs and Tories set aside their differences and embarked on a plan to remove James from the throne. They invited James II’s Protestant daughter Mary and her husband William of Orange, *stadholder* of the Netherlands, to take the throne.

William assembled an army and landed in England in November 1688. As William’s troops marched toward London, James made no attempt to fight. He instead fled to France without formally abdicating the throne. Parliament declared the throne vacant, which allowed the body to name the next king, an action that negated the idea of divine right. William and Mary became king and queen and established power-sharing policies with Parliament.

William of Orange became William III (r. 1689–1702), and Mary (r. 1689–1694) ruled with him until her death in 1694. By taking the crown, William and Mary agreed to an English Bill of Rights, which resolved many of the tensions that plagued English government over the past century. Parliament would meet at least every three years, would operate free of any royal interference in legal matters, and had to consent to any taxation. The monarchy could not interfere with any parliamentary debates or punish any member of Parliament for views expressed during debate. The Bill of Rights also granted rights to English citizens. It established independent judges and guaranteed trials by jury. The Mutiny Act of 1689 also granted Parliament control over the English army.

After the Glorious Revolution, Parliament continued to struggle with religious tensions in England. The Toleration Act (1689) granted limited religious tolerance to Nonconformists, but the Test Act officially remained in place. However, some of the effect of the Test Act was subverted when Parliament adopted legislation that legalized the actions of Nonconformists who had not fulfilled the requirements of the
Test Act. The same tolerance was not extended to the throne. The Act of Settlement (1701) barred any Catholic from succeeding to the throne. It also established the succession after William’s death. Upon his death in 1702, the throne passed to Anne (r. 1702–1714), who was another one of James II’s daughters. Anne had no living heirs, so upon her death the throne passed to Sophia, the electress of Hanover, and her heirs. Her son George I became England’s first Hanoverian monarch in 1714.

The Glorious Revolution restored Protestantism to England in a nearly bloodless revolution, but it was not a democratic revolution. The majority of England’s citizens still had no right to participate in the government. The revolution did, however, firmly establish a constitutional monarchy and the working system of government that England would function under into the twentieth century.

John Locke

John Locke (1632–1704) was one of the most influential philosophers of his time and was a strong defender of the Glorious Revolution. Locke opposed absolutism, and thus opposed James II’s short rule. Rather than absolutism, Locke support constitutionalism and was influential in its development in England and later in the United States. Locke did not oppose all monarchies, but he did oppose absolute monarchies.

Locke’s political philosophy set him apart from the earlier writer Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679). Hobbes believed that a strong ruler was necessary because people in a state of nature were self-interested, brutal, and in constant conflict. Locke, on the other hand, believed men were more civilized and good natured in a state of nature. He set forth his ideas in his First and Second Treatise of Government. Leaders should arbitrate over disputes, Locke argued, not impose their will on the people. Where Hobbes believed effective government occurred only through an absolute leader whose authority remained unquestioned, Locke believed that good government stemmed from a social contract between the governing and the governed. This contract ensured that a limited government helped protect what Locke called humans’ inalienable rights: life, liberty, and property. Locke believed that if a government failed to protect these rights, the governed have the right and responsibility to rebel to secure their rights.

Locke wasn’t only interested in political theory and human nature. He also wrote about human understanding, education, economics, and politics. In 1689, Locke explained his views on education in Some Thoughts Concerning Education. Locke argued that children learn best through experience, rather than by memorization and strict book learning. Locke developed this idea more fully in his highly influential Essay Concerning Human Understanding (1690), in which he set forth the concept of tabula rasa. Locke believed, unlike many earlier philosophers, that every human was born as a blank slate (tabula rasa). Their personality and knowledge then developed through their particular experiences. This idea informed his philosophy concerning education.

inalienable rights: rights that John Locke believed no government could take away from a person: life, liberty, and their property ownership

tabula rasa: Latin term meaning blank slate; refers to the philosophical idea of John Locke that personality and knowledge grow out of an individual’s particular experiences

3

SELF-CHECK

Why was the revolution that brought William and Mary to the English throne referred to as “glorious”?
England’s Parliamentary Government

Locke’s ideas helped form the basis for England’s parliamentary government, which became well established during the eighteenth century. The monarch shared powers with Parliament, which included representatives from Scotland after the Act of Union of 1707. The act created a political union between Scotland and England, which already ruled Wales. The union created the nation of Great Britain. Although Scotland had to disband its own parliament, the act guaranteed certain religious freedoms for the predominantly Presbyterian Scots.

As the century progressed, the crown gradually lost much of its power. English monarchs began relying on the cabinet, a group of chief ministers who advised the ruler. By utilizing the cabinet, monarchs had better success gaining parliamentary support. Anne and her two successors—George I (r. 1714–1727) and George II (r. 1727–1760)—relied heavily on their cabinets. Eventually, one minister took the lead in these cabinets and was called the prime minister.

Whig Robert Walpole (1676–1745) was the first prime minister and wielded considerable power. He served under George I and George II. Walpole came to power in the aftermath of an economic crisis known as the South Sea Bubble. The seed of the crisis was planted when the South Sea Company took over much of the government’s debt by exchanging government bonds for shares of stock. Speculation and unrestrained optimism caused stock values to soar as new industries sprang up to support colonial enterprises in the New World. Eventually, however, investors doubted the reality of such quick and lucrative profits. They sold their stocks en masse, which hurt the English economy. As a result, the government brought new ministers to power, and Walpole emerged as the prime minister. Walpole largely avoided involving the nation in costly wars, which allowed him to keep taxes low and made him a popular figure with both the citizens and the House of Commons. Walpole was also the first to live in the home at 10 Downing Street, which remains the prime minister’s residence today.

When George III (r. 1760–1820) appointed cabinet members that did not have the support of Parliament, his government faced problems. This failed attempt by George III to increase the crown’s power showed just how important cooperation had become between Parliament and the cabinet.

Extensions

• Read John Locke’s Second Treatise on Government. How does Locke describe life in a state of nature? How does this compare with Thomas Hobbes’s view on the same subject? For what reasons do governments and societies exist, according to Locke? In what ways might Locke’s ideas have inspired William and Mary’s ascension to the throne in 1689?
Summary
Tensions between the crown and Parliament erupted in 1642 during the English Civil War. Oliver Cromwell emerged as the English leader in the aftermath of the war. After his failed attempt at republican government, the army restored the monarchy in 1660. Although the restored monarchy tried to avoid conflict with Parliament, religious tensions still besieged the English government. Finally, when James II had a male heir, the possibility of a Catholic dynasty on the English throne was too much for the British Parliament to bear. In 1688, Parliament invited William of Orange and his wife Mary (both Protestants) to invade England and depose the Catholic James II. The Glorious Revolution resulted. The nearly bloodless revolution restored Protestantism to England under the rule of William and Mary. James fled to France and the protection of Louis XIV.

Under William and Mary, Parliament passed the English Bill of Rights and acts extending some religious freedoms to Nonconformists. However, the Act of Settlement of 1701 guaranteed that a Catholic would never sit on the English throne. Because William and Mary accepted their crowns from Parliament, it was thereafter assumed that the monarch was subservient to the Parliament. Needing approval of royal actions by the Parliament, monarchs began to depend on a group of advisers called cabinet ministers (who were also members of Parliament). The leading minister is called the prime minister. Robert Walpole served as England’s first prime minister. During the eighteenth century, Great Britain—formed by the Act of Union of 1707—fully developed parliamentary government and a constitutional monarchy as advocated by political philosopher John Locke. Locke’s ideas about politics, human nature, and education were extremely influential and contrasted sharply with the earlier ideas of Thomas Hobbes.

Looking Ahead
The Dutch Republic, also known as the United Provinces of the Netherlands, experienced a “Golden Age” of commerce, art, science, and literature in the seventeenth century. The Dutch Republic worked as a confederation: a weak union of provinces. The fishing industry served as the cornerstone of Dutch industry and economic vitality. The Dutch Republic also housed banking centers and provided respite for those who faced religious persecution in other countries.

Self-Check Answers

1. James II was a Catholic.
2. The Bill of Rights outlined the power of the Parliament in relation to the king, with the king being subservient to Parliament.
3. It was relatively bloodless and restored England to a Protestant country.
4. Life, liberty, property
The Dutch Golden Age

Essential Questions
• What were the political characteristics of the Dutch Republic in the seventeenth century?
• What were the economic characteristics of the Dutch Republic in the seventeenth century?
• Why was the Dutch Republic said to have “urban prosperity”?
• What contributed to the decline of the Dutch Republic?
• What were the characteristics of Dutch art during the seventeenth century?
• Who were some famous Dutch painters of the seventeenth century?

Keywords
Bank of Amsterdam
entrepot
fluyts or flyboats
stadholder
stock exchange
Set the Stage

As England established a constitutional monarchy during the seventeenth century, a very different type of government developed in the Netherlands. A product of war and strong leadership, the Dutch Republic was a confederation—a group of loosely allied provinces established for protection and trade advantages. Of these provinces, populous and wealthy Holland dominated the other six regions. The provinces’ cooperative approach made the Netherlands the most successful and wealthy nation in seventeenth-century Europe. This affluence allowed many Dutch citizens to become patrons of the arts, and Dutch art flourished and developed its own style during the seventeenth century. These economic, political, and artistic successes created a Dutch Golden Age.

Dutch Political Success

During the seventeenth century, the Dutch experienced a golden age that included success in politics, economics, and art. Located along important trade routes and involved in European politics, the Netherlands quickly became one of Europe’s major economic, political, and cultural forces after the nation’s founding in the late sixteenth century.

Spain controlled the Netherlands during the sixteenth century until the Dutch rebelled in 1572. Dutch forces defeated Spain and the Netherlands established itself as a loosely connected group of seven provinces called the United Provinces of the Netherlands. Unlike the rest of Europe, the provinces did not trust a monarchy or even bestow significant power upon a parliament. The republic had a central governmental body called the States General, which met at in the capital of Holland, The Hague. However, the individual provinces retained considerable autonomy, carefully guarded their independence, and looked to the House of Orange for leadership during times of war. Holland became the most wealthy and powerful of the seven provinces.

The Dutch did not call on the leadership of their ancestral House of Orange until they were confronted by military challenges in the seventeenth century. The Dutch fought the English at sea in the early 1600s and relied on the leadership of William II. The strongest threat to the Dutch came from Louis XIV in 1672, and the Dutch prevailed under William of Orange (William III). William was the stadholder—a hereditary ruler and military commander—of the Netherlands and came from the nation’s most prosperous and powerful province, Holland. William III rallied much of Europe to defeat the ambitious French forces under Louis XIV. The two men developed a heated rivalry that only intensified when William and his wife Mary took the English throne during the Glorious Revolution. William and Mary’s political move created strong ties between the Netherlands and England. During the seventeenth century, the Netherlands emerged as a European power.

stadholder the chief executive of the Netherlands
Economic and Urban Prosperity

In addition to the Netherlands’ political successes, many other factors contributed to the Dutch Golden Age. Located along the North Sea and between England and central Europe, the Dutch developed an important role in trade and commerce. They built effective merchant fleets and served as middleman in European trade. The Dutch East India Company developed strong trading relationships in the East, and the Bank of Amsterdam provided the financial stability for the Netherlands’ economy to thrive. The Netherlands also prospered as a result of its tolerant religious policies. At a time when much of Europe ousted religious minorities such as Jews, Roman Catholics, and Noncomformists, the Netherlands welcomed these believers and benefitted from the influx of money, innovation, and skill that they brought with them. The Netherlands also welcomed Spaniards who fled the Inquisition. Philosopher Baruch Spinoza’s family sought refuge in the Netherlands as Portuguese Jews, and Spinoza was born in Amsterdam in 1632. René Descartes also sought refuge in the Netherlands, moving to Amsterdam in 1630.

As people flocked to the Netherlands, Dutch cities became the most densely populated and wealthy urban areas in Europe. Businesses and banks prospered in the growing cities, but fertile soil brought the Dutch agricultural successes, as well. The Netherlands became famous for growing tulips and raising cattle for beef and dairy products. Textile manufacturing was also a vital part of the Dutch economy. The Dutch people enjoyed a higher standard of living than anyone else in Europe.

The Dutch played a central role in European trade during the seventeenth century by acting as middlemen. Unlike much of the rest of Europe, which pursued mercantilist policies, the Dutch traded with nearly every nation it could. Dutch ships docked at ports throughout Europe, bought various goods, and then resold the goods to other nations for a profit.

The Netherlands is located along the North Sea and on important trade routes, so shipbuilding became extremely important to the country’s financial success. The Dutch developed outstanding ships called flyboats. These maneuverable ships traveled throughout Europe as part of the Dutch merchant marine fleet. They also allowed the Dutch to develop a thriving fishing industry. Dutch-caught herring accounted for the majority of Europe’s dried fish.

Dutch supremacy at sea allowed the Netherlands to develop extensive trade networks, especially in Indonesia. The Dutch East India Company, established in 1602, bought spices from Sri Lanka, Java, and the Moluccas and used its trading power to establish Dutch dominance in the area. The Dutch initially prevented the English from establishing ports in the area and eventually displaced the Portuguese as the dominant power in the region. They remained a colonial power in Indonesia until after World War II. Amsterdam served as the hub for the Netherlands’ trading empire. It was an entrepot city, where ships were loaded and unloaded.

Dutch commerce and trade thrived because it was backed by the Netherlands’ strong financial system centered in Amsterdam. The Bank of Amsterdam and the
**stock exchange** helped make the Netherlands’ financial system the most advanced in Europe. As ships unloaded their cargo in Amsterdam, the city became extremely wealthy and was able to loan money to develop more business.

**Dutch Art**

Dutch art also experienced a golden age and became known throughout Europe for its unique style and subject matter. Dutch artists often depicted the middle class, rather than the aristocracy, or images of science and medicine. Portraits were very popular, as were biblical, domestic, and nature scenes. Dutch painters often depicted still lifes, as well. Frans Hals, Jan Vermeer, and Rembrandt van Rijn were three of the most popular Dutch painters during the seventeenth century.

Frans Hals (c. 1580–1666) is most famous for his portraits of the civic guards and well-known members of the community. Hals valued vivid, animated works rather than overly polished pieces, and his portraits brought the subjects to life through his loose brushwork. Dutch wealth during the century made portrait painting a profitable endeavor since commissioning a portrait of oneself conveyed a certain level of social status.

Jan Vermeer (1632–1675) also painted portraits, but he was better known for his landscapes and allegorical scenes depicting middle class life. During his lifetime, his paintings were not well known outside his hometown of Delft. His works only number about 35, and he died bankrupt due to a struggling art-dealing business. Among the baroque painter’s most famous works are *Girl with a Pearl Earring* and *The Geographer*. Painted in 1669, *The Geographer* captures the world of science and mathematics during Vermeer’s age, which coincided with the Scientific Revolution in Europe. Vermeer’s geographer, working less than 30 years after the death of Galileo, whose monumental discoveries about motion in the heavens and on earth reshaped science forever, is immersed in thought in his tidy study. Scientific instruments, a globe, and maps all represent the seemingly limitless opportunities for knowledge and exploration during this golden age for the Dutch and for science. Vermeer’s would have been a contemporary of Isaac Newton—a scientist during the very pinnacle of the Scientific Revolution.

Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–1669) was a prolific painter and sketcher who worked for most of his life in Amsterdam. His influence was long lasting as he became an important teacher for other painters of the period. Rembrandt was known for his close observation of objects and people in their natural settings. He painted many famous portraits, including *The
Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp (1632) and the group portrait The Nightwatch (1642). The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp depicts the doctor dissecting a cadaver in front of the Amsterdam guild of surgeons. Dissections were controversial and rare, allowed only once a year in Amsterdam. The Nightwatch shows a militia group of the civic guard in the midst of action. The picture seems to capture a moment in time—a snapshot of life—rather than a posed and polished image more common in a portrait. Rembrandt’s paintings reflected Dutch life during this golden age. His Syndics of the Cloth Hall (1662) depicts the Holland businessmen that characterized this era of economic prosperity. The merchants appear hardworking and honest, driven but willing to work collectively to achieve success.

**Economic Decline**

The Dutch Golden Age gradually came to an end with the dawn of the eighteenth century. When William III died in 1702, another strong Dutch stadholder failed to emerge and the separate provinces of the Netherlands began to reassert their autonomy and individual interests. Dutch supremacy on the seas also began to wane as English naval power eclipsed that of the Netherlands. As other nations expanded their trading efforts, they had less of a need for the Dutch middleman—a role that had been extremely profitable for the Netherlands. The British launched a deliberate attack on Dutch trade by passing the Navigation Acts, which stipulated that only English ships and crews could supply goods to the colonies. The Anglo-Dutch wars that occurred between 1652 and 1674 also damaged Dutch commerce and shipping. Economic stagnation set in as the provinces failed to work together. The Dutch fishing industry declined, as well. Despite these setbacks, the Dutch banks and stock market remained strong and an important part of the European economy.
Extensions

• Go online to view more work from Rembrandt van Rijn. Compare his works with those of Jan Vermeer. What similarities and differences can the viewer identify?

Summary

During the seventeenth century, the Netherlands flourished in what is referred to as the “Dutch Golden Age.” The Dutch had the highest standard of living in all of Europe. Economically, the Dutch were the envy of the continent. They dominated in trade, commerce, manufacturing, and art. Amsterdam was the financial capital of the region. Politically, the Netherlands was a republic—a collection of seven provinces bound together for protection and trade advantages. Distrustful of monarchies, a strong leader emerged only in times of military turmoil. Dutch art also experienced a golden age in the seventeenth century. Painters like Jan Vermeer and Rembrandt van Rijn excelled at painting portraits and domestic scenes of middle class life. In the eighteenth century, the fortunes of the Netherlands reversed. The refusal to allow strong leadership after the death of William III fractured the republic back into what were essentially seven separate states. Economic stagnation followed as the Dutch lost their edge to the other nations of Europe, especially England.

Looking Ahead

The Scientific Revolution was a period of time when many new ideas in astronomy, physics, human anatomy, and chemistry were advanced. These ideas laid the foundation for modern science. The Age of Enlightenment had at its core the questioning of traditional institutions, morals, and customs. It developed simultaneously in many areas of Europe, as reason came to be valued above all else.

SELF-CHECK ANSWERS

1. A war with Spain caused the seven provinces to band together for defense, and they remained organized that way when the war (which the Dutch won) was over.

2. The chief executive of the Netherlands; usually a military designation

3. The Dutch welcomed it, and many Catholics, Jews, and Nonconformists settled in the Netherlands, which benefitted economically from their skills.

4. Rembrandt van Rijn was the most famous painter of the seventeenth century and was noted for his group and individual portraits and biblical scenes.