Political Developments in Europe
1450-1750
Objectives

* Understand how Spain, Portugal, The Netherlands, France, England, and the nations of Central Europe changed politically during the time period 1450-1750

*Understand the rise of **absolutism (absolute monarchs)** in Europe
Rise of ABSOLUTISM (Absolute Monarchs) in Europe

*ABSOLUTISM*- political theory that maintains leaders should have all political power without limits

*Absolute leaders* attempt to control all aspects of their empires and demand complete allegiance from subjects- no dissent is tolerated

*Often claimed* divine right
Rise of ABSOLUTISM (Absolute Monarchs) in Europe

What factors led to absolutism in Europe?

- Late Middle Ages increased the power of kings, decreased the power of popes
- Renaissance, humanism, Reformation led to increased scrutiny of the Church
- Decline of feudalism, rise of national kingdoms, urbanization led to increased centralized power
- Growing middle class supported kings- stable government was good for business
- Monarchs supported merchants’ endeavors
- Constant warfare in Europe- need for protection and support strengthened the influence of kings
Spain

Spain’s territory in Europe in 1550

Charles V (king of Spain) divided this territory between:

-His brother Ferdinand (Austria and the Holy Roman Empire)

-His son Philip II (Spain, the Spanish Netherlands, and Spain’s American colonies)

The combined territories of the Spanish and Austrian Habsburgs during the reign of Philip II. Charles V had divided his estates to make it easier for them to be governed.
Spain under Philip II (1556-1598)

- 1580: Seized Portugal after the Portuguese king died without an heir (Philip II was his nephew)- took control of Portugal’s global empire too
- Great wealth mainly from the American colonies was used to bulk up Spain’s army and navy:
  - Wanted to defend Catholicism from Muslims and Protestants
  - 1571: Defeated the Ottoman Empire in a naval battle
  - 1588: **Spanish Armada** (huge fleet of ships) sent to punish Protestant England (England’s queen, **Elizabeth I**, had supported Protestants who had rebelled against Philip)
    - Superior English warships, armed with long-range cannons, defeated the Armada- led to Spain’s decline
Spain
Spain under Philip II (1556-1598)
Spanish Armada
Spain

Even though Spain’s Armada was defeated by England, it still appeared to be wealthy...at least for a little while longer…

*Philip’s grand palace, the Escorial, demonstrated his power and wealth

*Monarchs and nobles also used wealth to patronize the arts- led to Spain’s Golden Age

- Painters: *El Greco, Diego Velazquez*

- Literature: *Don Quixote* (1605)- often called modern Europe’s first novel
Spain

El Greco painting
Spain

Diego Velazquez painting
Spain
The Escorial
Spain
Weakening of the Spanish Empire

● ECONOMIC:
  ○ Huge influx of silver led to **inflation** - the value of Spain’s currency fell, prices rose = economic decline
  ○ Also, Spain’s population grew, which resulted in more people needing products. More demand= merchants could charge higher prices
  ○ Expelling of Jews and Muslims in the **Inquisition** resulted in many talented artisans leaving Spain
  ○ Spain’s nobles didn’t have to pay taxes, so the tax burden fell on lower classes (couldn’t gain wealth due to this burden)
  ○ Many Spanish products still produced by **guilds** using old-fashioned methods, which resulted in high prices. Spanish consumers bought lower-priced goods from Spain’s enemies (France, England)
Spain
Weakening of the Spanish Empire

- **POLITICAL**
  - Defeat of the Spanish Armada
  - Dutch revolt - break away from Spain in 1579
    - Religious differences: Spain was Catholic, Netherlands was mostly Protestant
    - Philip raised taxes in Netherlands, tried to end Protestantism
    - Result: Protestant rebellion against Philip
    - Northern provinces became the **United Provinces of the Netherlands**
    - Southern provinces, mainly Catholic, remained with Spain - would later become **Belgium**
The Netherlands

- As opposed to Spain, the Netherlands, a Protestant country, had a prosperous middle class
- Practiced *religious toleration*
- Not a kingdom, but a *republic* (each province had an elected governor, whose power depended on support from merchants and landowners)
- In the 1600s, basically replaced Italy as the banking and trading powerhouse of Europe
- Like Italy in the 1400s, merchants sponsored artists such as *Rembrandt*
The Netherlands

Rembrandt painting
The Netherlands

Rembrandt painting
The Netherlands

- Stability of the government in the Netherlands enabled the Dutch economy and middle class to thrive
- Dutch had the largest fleet of merchant ships in the world by 1636- enabled the Dutch East India Company to successfully monopolize the spice trade in Indonesia
FRANCE

- From 1562-1598, Catholics and French Protestants (Huguenots) fought each other in religious conflicts
- Chaotic environment
- 1572: St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre - sparked a 6 week slaughter of Huguenots
FRANCE

- 1589: **Henry IV**, a Huguenot, became King of France
- Strengthened the monarchy
- Converted to Catholicism to keep peace in France
- 1598: **Edict of Nantes** - granted religious toleration to Huguenots
- Henry was killed by a religious fanatic in 1610
Experience with religious wars and growth in France’s political power led to the development of skepticism in France— a movement that believed nothing can ever be known for certain

- Religious doubt
- Questioned old ideas
- Michel de Montaigne—expressed his ideas in a new form, the essay
FRANCE

- Henry IV’s grandson, Louis XIV, assumed the throne in 1643 at just 4 years old
- While growing up, Cardinal Mazarin ruled France
- Nobles frequently rioted, threatened young king’s life
- When Louis XIV took control at 22 (in 1661), he vowed to become so powerful that the nobles would not be able to challenge him
FRANCE

- **Louis XIV - “The Sun King”**
- Said “*L’etat c’est moi*” - “I am the state”
- Most powerful ruler in French history
- Townspeople were weary of fighting in France (both religious and political)- accepted an absolute ruler as preferable to disorder
FRANCE

LOUIS XIV- “THE SUN KING”

- Louis XIV weakened the power of nobles by excluding them from his councils
- Increased the power of government agents called intendants, who collected taxes and administered justice- communicated regularly with them
- Goal was to help France achieve political, economic, and cultural brilliance
FRANCE

LOUIS XIV - “THE SUN KING”

- Economically, tried to make France self-sufficient by encouraging mercantilism
- Encouraged people to move to Canada - fur trade added to French wealth
- Canceled the Edict of Nantes - Huguenots left France in large numbers
FRANCE

LOUIS XIV- “THE SUN KING”

● Lived an extremely extravagant lifestyle
● Had a grand palace constructed at Versailles- demonstrated his wealth
● Had nobles live with him at Versailles- made them completely reliant on him
● Patronized the arts, made opera and ballet more popular
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LOUIS XIV- “THE SUN KING”

- Under Louis, France was the most powerful country in Europe
- 1667: France invaded Spanish Netherlands (Belgium), gained new cities
- 1672: Invaded Dutch Netherlands, failed when the Dutch released the dikes, flooding the countryside
FRANCE

LOUIS XIV- “THE SUN KING”

- 1680s: Other European countries (England, Spain, Sweden, Austria) banded together to form the **League of Augsburg** to oppose France
- By this time, France was weakened by poor harvests and heavy taxation put on the people to finance wars
FRANCE

LOUIS XIV- “THE SUN KING”

- 1701-1714: War of Spanish Succession
- 1700: Childless king of Spain had died; promised throne to Louis XIV’s grandson
- Other European nations fought France to prevent it from becoming too powerful
FRANCE

LOUIS XIV- “THE SUN KING”

- 1701-1714: War of Spanish Succession
- 1714: Treaty of Utrecht was signed- Louis’s grandson could stay king of Spain as long as the thrones of Spain and France were not united
- Britain won big: got Gibraltar and an asiento (permission from Spain to send African slaves to the Americas); Britain also got some French territories in North America like Nova Scotia and the Hudson Bay region
- Louis XIV died in 1715 to cheers from his own people after he had brought suffering to France
In England, rulers had more barriers to becoming absolute monarchs. They had to deal with Parliament, since Parliament controlled England’s treasury, leading to frequent conflict between the monarch and Parliament over money. After Elizabeth I’s reign (1558-1603), England was firmly Protestant, with the Anglican Church. Many in England wanted the Anglican Church to abandon Catholic-inspired rituals; these people were called Puritans, who sought to “purify” the Anglican Church. Like the rest of Europe, warfare was a constant theme in England during the 16th-18th centuries.
ENGLAND

- 1625- Charles I took the throne
- Wanted money to fight Spain and France
- 1628: Parliament refused to grant him money until he signed a document called the **Petition of Right** which acknowledged:
  - He would not imprison subjects without due cause
  - He would not levy taxes without Parliament’s consent
  - He would not house soldiers in private homes
  - He would not impose martial law in peacetime
- Charles I agreed to the Petition of Right, then ignored it
- Still, the idea was important: the law was higher than the king
- 1629: Charles I dissolved Parliament, raised money by imposing more fines on the people
ENGLAND

- Charles I became very unpopular
- Angered Puritans by keeping rituals in the Anglican Church, tried to force Presbyterian Scots to accept the Anglican prayer book- Scots rebelled, threatened to invade England
- 1641: Parliament passed more laws to limit royal power; Charles I tried to have Parliament leaders arrested
- England was now split between Royalists (loyal to Charles) and Puritan supporters of Parliament
ENGLAND

- 1642-1649 English Civil War
- Puritans fought Royalists
- Oliver Cromwell, a Puritan general, proved to make the difference- Puritans won
- 1649: Charles found guilty for treason against Parliament, executed (first public execution of a monarch)
OLIVER CROMWELL’S RULE (1649-1658)

- Disbanded Parliament and the monarchy - established a commonwealth (a republican form of government) with a written constitution (the first written constitution of any European state) - later ignored it
- Cromwell became a military dictator
- Ireland, which had been colonized by England since the 1100s, held an uprising - Cromwell crushed it
- Sought Puritan reforms of society; extended toleration to all except Catholics
ENGLAND

- 1658- Cromwell died
- A new Parliament was selected
- 1659-Charles I’s son, **Charles II**, was selected to be the next ruler
- Since Charles II restored the monarchy, his rule was called the **Restoration**
- **Habeas corpus** was established- the right of prisoners to know what charges are being brought against them; no one could be thrown in jail just for opposing the ruler, and could not be held indefinitely without trial
ENGLAND

- 1685: Charles II died
- His son, James II, a Catholic, became king
- James outraged Puritans by appointing Catholics to high office and disbanding Parliament
- Parliament leaders invited James’ daughter, Mary, wife of William of Orange, ruler of the Netherlands, to overthrow James II for the sake of Protestantism
- 1688: William of Orange invaded England, James II fled- called the Glorious Revolution
ENGLAND

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE GLORIOUS REVOLUTION

• William and Mary vowed to recognize Parliament as their partner in power
• England had officially become a constitutional monarchy (laws limited rulers’ power)
• After 1688, no British ruler could rule without consent of Parliament, and Parliament could not rule without consent of the monarch
ENGLAND

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE GLORIOUS REVOLUTION

● 1689- Parliament drafted the **English Bill of Rights**, which specified that rulers could not:
  ○ Suspend Parliament’s laws
  ○ Levy taxes without permission from Parliament
  ○ Interfere with freedom of speech in Parliament
  ○ Impose penalties for citizens who express grievances in petitions to the king

● William and Mary consented to these changes
HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE (GERMANY)

- Protestant Reformation had destabilized Germany
- 1555: **Peace of Augsburg** - each prince in the Holy Roman Empire (HRE) could determine his subjects’ religion
- However, Protestants and Catholics were still wary of one another
- 1618-1648- **Thirty Years War**
  - Began in 1618 when **Ferdinand II**, a Catholic Hapsburg ruler, closed Protestant churches in Bohemia- Protestants there revolted, crushed by Ferdinand’s Catholic forces
  - For 30 years, Catholics and Protestants battled
  - Ended when France, wanting to weaken the Catholic Hapsburgs, came to the aid of the Protestants
HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE (GERMANY)

● Important effects of the **Thirty Years War** (1618-1648)
  ○ Hapsburg states of Spain and Austria were weakened
  ○ France was strengthened, received some German territory
  ○ German princes became independent of the Holy Roman emperor
  ○ Ended religious wars in Europe
  ○ Introduced a new method of peace negotiation where participants meet to settle the problems of war and decide on terms of peace (still used today)
  ○ Abandoned the idea of a Catholic empire ruling Europe
  ○ Recognized Europe as a group of equal, independent states (marking the beginning of the modern state system)
CENTRAL/EASTERN EUROPE

- States formed more slowly in Central/Eastern Europe than in Western Europe:
  - Landowning aristocracy prevented serfs from gaining freedom
  - Aristocrats also put serious limits on kings
  - Central/Eastern Europe did not participate in the Commercial Revolution and Age of Exploration as Western Europe had, thus had slower economies
Two German-speaking families attempted to become more powerful in the 17th-18th centuries:

- **AUSTRIA** - Hapsburg rulers ruled over a diverse population of Czechs, Hungarians, Italians, Croatians, and Germans; Hapsburgs ruled over Austria, Hungary, and Bohemia, keeping the empire together

- **PRUSSIA** - Hohenzollern family created a strong, disciplined army and a highly militarized society