



The Rise of Absolute Monarchs in Europe

1500-1789 AD

What is an Absolute Monarch?

- Monarch = ruler who inherits power through family (King, Tsar, etc)
- Europe's Kings & Queens gained more & more power with new wealth from colonies
- Developed "Absolute" Monarchies
 - King/ruler has unlimited power
 - Seeks total control of all aspects of society & economy

Spain: Superpower of the 1500's

- Phillip II becomes king of Spain in 1556
- Vastly wealthy due to American gold & silver imports
- Took control of Portugal & all its colonies
- Failed in attempt to invade England
- Inflation hurt economy in long run
- Netherlands (Holland) split from Spain in 1579

France: The Sun King

- France torn by protestant vs. Catholic fighting during 1500's
- Louis XIV becomes King in 1643
- Determined to reduce power of nobles & church
- Used middle class to staff government
- Built massive palace at Versailles
- Encouraged industry & settlement in New world
- Made France Europe's most powerful country
 - Largest population
 - Most productive economy

Russia: Rise of the Czars

- Romanov family comes to power in 1600's
- Peter the Great
 - Determined to modernize Russia
 - Wanted to be more connected to Western European culture
 - Built St. Petersburg as new capital
- Increased power of government
 - Took control of Eastern Orthodox Church
 - Developed modern, large army

Central Europe: Conflict & Compromise

- Thirty-Years' War
 - No central leader of the German princes
 - Fighting between protestant & catholic leaders
 - Other monarchs supported warring sides
 - Huge armies devastated villages & farming
 - Local populations down as much as 30%
 - Ends with Peace of Westphalia in 1648
 - Takes centuries for German economy & society to really recover

Eastern Europe:

- Did not develop powerful absolute monarchies
- Great ethnic divisions
- Less advanced economy—town based
- Local nobles & warlords retained much power
- Hapsburgs become dominant ruling family

Limited Monarchy in England

- Ongoing struggle for power between English Kings & Parliament
- Eventually leads to civil war, 1642-1649
 - Most pro-parliament forces are strict 'puritans'
- Oliver Cromwell leads Parliament forces to victory
 - Cromwell rules as dictator until 1658
 - King Charles I executed in public

Limited Monarchy in England, con't.

- After Cromwell, English Kings accepted limited power
 - Agreed to Bill of Rights
 - Parliament recognized as the only legitimate source of laws & taxes
 - Parliament recognized as the ultimate authority & leading force in English government
 - First "constitutional" monarchy
 - Beginning of modern democracy

The Big Picture

- By about 1700 a group of increasingly powerful governments was in firm control of Europe's most powerful nations
- France was seen as a leading power, influencing all of European culture
- Through their overseas colonies, the powers of Europe had increasing impact throughout the world