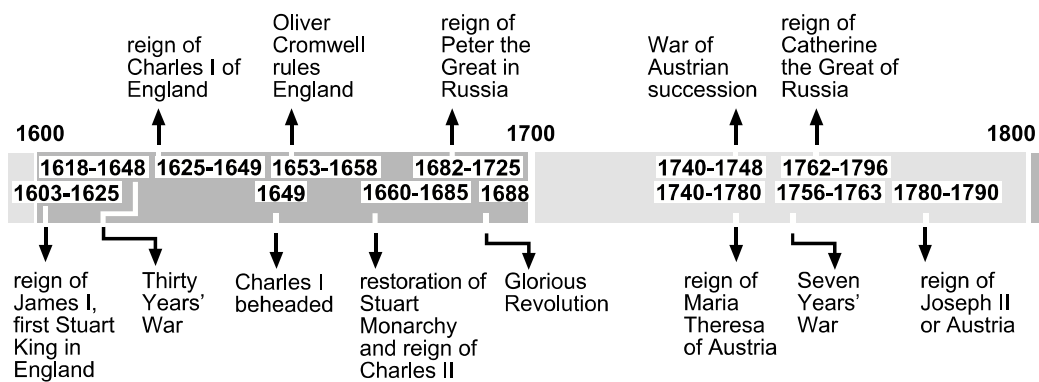


## The Age of Absolutism in Europe (1600s and 1700s)

### Reshaping Governments

During the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, Europe was growing strong and wealthy as a result of the overseas exploration and development of new empires. While the European empires grew economically, social, political, and religious unrest caused much change in government structures. The religious and political war—Thirty Years' War—involved battles between France, Germany, Spain, and Sweden. However, these battles had much affect on the governments of the lesser countries of Prussia, Russia, and Poland. The social structure and religious beliefs of the people became the driving force for the reshaping of governments of the individual nations.

#### Timeline of the Age of Absolutism in Europe



### England



*Mary, Queen of Scots*

Elizabeth I died in 1603. She was the last Tudor monarch. During her reign, England became the strongest naval power in the world. With a strong navy, England was able to build a very large empire around the world.

Mary, Queen of Scots, was the first cousin of Elizabeth I. Mary and Elizabeth did not like each other because Mary was a Roman Catholic who had been raised in France; thus she had different ideas from those of Elizabeth. Mary wanted her son to become king of England and Scotland, but she never lived to see it happen because Elizabeth I had her **beheaded**.



James I

When Elizabeth I died, the English invited her cousin, James IV of Scotland, to become the king of England. This began the Stuart monarchy. He became James I of England. Elizabeth I, like her father Henry VIII, had been a Protestant and so was James I.

James I ruled England and Scotland for 22 years. His reign can be described as poor. Protestants were afraid that Catholics were gaining too much power in England. James I did not really understand the English way of life. He believed that the king had a *divine right* to rule. In other words, the king's power came from God, and the people must obey the king. When James I died in 1625, many Englishmen were relieved.

Charles I, the son of James I, ruled England until he was beheaded in 1649. Charles I, like his father, did not believe that the English **Parliament** had rights. He ignored its members. In 1628 the members of Parliament passed a law called the *Petition of Right*, which said that the king could not tax the people unless Parliament gave its consent. Charles I was so angry that for the next 11 years, he ruled England without the help of Parliament. This made the members of Parliament extremely angry.



Charles I

## Changes in Government

Civil War broke out in England around 1640. Men loyal to the king, mostly Catholics, were called *Cavaliers*. Against the king were the *Roundheads*, led by Oliver Cromwell. The Roundheads were mostly Puritans—people of the Protestant religion. They were fighting for the rights of Parliament. In 1649 Charles I was captured, tried, sentenced, and beheaded.



Cavaliers

England now became a **commonwealth**. From 1649 to 1658, England was ruled by Oliver Cromwell. England then had no king. The Commonwealth government of Oliver Cromwell became a **military dictatorship**. The people had few rights. Four years after Cromwell took over the government, he dismissed Parliament. Under the military dictatorship of Oliver Cromwell, the Puritans ruled England with a certain amount of cruelty. They seemed to have forgotten why they came to power in the first place. When Oliver Cromwell died in 1658, the majority of the English people were happy to see him go.

Oliver Cromwell's son, Richard Cromwell, took over his father's position. However, in 1659, the military forced Richard Cromwell out, so he went into exile for the next 20 years.

The Parliament met once again. Members of Parliament voted to ask the son of Charles I to become king. After accepting this offer, Charles II ruled from 1660 to 1685. These 25 years in England are known as the *Restoration* because the monarchy was restored or put back into place. In England, Charles II was not very popular, even though he tried very hard to be fair.



Charles II

When Charles II died in 1685, his brother James II became king. James II became Catholic in 1669. He tried very hard to give Catholics and Protestants equal rights, but the English Protestants were against giving equal rights to Catholics. They did not want England to become a Catholic nation.

### The Glorious Revolution



William III of Orange

In 1688 members of Parliament voted to force James II to give up the throne. Parliament invited James' Protestant daughter, Mary, and her husband, William III of Orange, king of Holland, to become king and queen. James escaped to France, and William and Mary became the rulers of England and Scotland. This change in power was called the *Glorious Revolution* because it was bloodless. In other words, there was no fighting.

Before William and his wife Mary could be crowned, they had to agree that Parliament was the lawmaking body in England—not the king. They also had to agree to ask permission from Parliament to gather an army. William and Mary had to accept this and several other acts passed by Parliament that became known as the *English Bill of Rights*. In this way, some traditional powers of the monarchy were **revoked**. The Glorious Revolution was a great victory for parliamentary powers.

### The Revolution Settlement



*William and Mary*

King William and Queen Mary ruled until 1702. Under their reign, England had a *constitutional monarchy*. A constitutional monarchy means that the king and queen could no longer rule without **consent** from the Parliament. Since some members of Parliament were elected by the people, this gave the people a say in their government.

Finally, Parliament did two more things. First, it passed a law called the *Toleration Act*. The Toleration Act gave religious freedom and limited toleration to Puritans, Quakers, and other Protestants, but not to Catholics and Jews. It was an attempt to create an atmosphere of **tolerance**. Second, Parliament passed the *Act of Settlement*. This law said that Catholics could never become kings or queens of England. The English remembered their troubles from the Catholic Stuart kings and did not want to repeat them.

So, during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, England passed from a government with an all-powerful king, also known as an *absolute monarchy*, to a government with a king who shared his powers with Parliament, known as a *limited monarchy*. Yet England continued to expand its empire and kept its position as a very strong world power.



## Monarchs of England

### House of Tudor:

|             |             |   |
|-------------|-------------|---|
| Henry VII   | (1485-1509) | established the king's authority over nobles  |
| Henry VIII  | (1509-1547) | named himself head of the Church of England   |
| Edward VI   | (1547-1553) | succeeded to the throne at age nine when father Henry VIII died; never knew his mother, Jane Seymour  |
| Mary Tudor  | (1553-1558) | known as Bloody Mary because of her religious persecution; daughter of Henry VIII, half sister of Elizabeth I; desired to make England Catholic again |
| Elizabeth I | (1558-1603) | last Tudor monarch, daughter of Henry VIII, half sister of Mary Tudor, established England as a major European power                                  |



Henry VII



Henry VIII



Mary Tudor



Elizabeth I

### House of Stuart:

|                  |                            |  |
|------------------|----------------------------|--|
| James I          | (1603-1625)                | already king of Scotland when he became king of England; son of Mary Queen of Scots; never really understood the English way of life   |
| Charles I        | (1625-1649)                | son of James I; did not believe Parliament had rights; beheaded in 1649  |
| Commonwealth     | (1649-1660)                | ruled by Oliver Cromwell until his death in 1658, then ruled by his son Richard until 1659 when military forced him into exile; in 1660, newly elected Parliament invited Charles II to return to England from exile                                   |
| Charles II       | (1660-1685)                | known as the Restoration because the monarchy was restored   |
| James II         | (1685-1688)                | brother of Charles II; tried to give Catholics and Protestants equal rights  |
| William and Mary | (1689-1702)<br>(1689-1694) | Parliament voted to force James II out; Mary was the intended Queen of England but married William of Orange, the ruler of Holland; they were eventually made joint sovereigns—called the Glorious Revolution because no blood was shed changing power |
| Anne             | (1702-1714)                | daughter of James II; loyal to the Church of England   |



James I



Charles I



Charles II



William and Mary



Anne

## France

During the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, France, like England, became a very powerful country. The difference was that while England was changing from an absolute monarchy to a limited monarchy, French kings became more and more powerful. This led to very sad results for France.

### Louis XIV—France’s “Sun King”

The most powerful absolute monarch of all French kings was Louis XIV, who ruled France from 1661-1715. He believed that all power to make and change laws was his and that he answered to no one but God. Governments with absolute monarchies believe in what historians call the *divine right of kings*, which means that the king is believed to have been given the right to rule by God. Louis took the sun as the symbol of his power. The sun is the center of the solar system, and Louis believed that he was the center of the French nation. Louis was known to say, “L’etat c’est moi”... “I am the state.”

Louis XIV became king in France when he was four years old. Since he was not old enough to make decisions, a Roman Catholic cardinal and French statesman named Jules Mazarin was asked to help rule France. He served as principle minister and advisor to the young king’s mother. Mazarin was the most important person in France until his death in 1661. By this time, Louis XIV was old enough to take full command of the French government.

The way in which Louis XIV ran the government was begun by his father Louis XIII and his father’s chief minister Cardinal Armand Richelieu. Cardinal Mazarin continued the policies of Richelieu, who had two goals for France. The first goal was to make the French king as strong a ruler as possible. The second goal was to make France the most powerful country in Europe. Both of these goals were accomplished.

Therefore, Louis XIV had a very solid base from which to run his government. He did not allow nobles, aristocrats, or the wealthy to take part in running France because he was afraid that they would take power



Louis XIV

away from him. Louis XIV wanted the people of France to know that he, and he alone, was their leader.

Louis XIV spent large amounts of money. Most of the income of the French people was paid to the government in taxes. Louis XIV built a gigantic palace, the Palace of Versailles, near Paris.

Louis XIV chose rich businessmen to help him run the government. One of these men was Jean Baptiste Colbert. Colbert started a government policy called *mercantilism*. Mercantilism means that the government controls the economy by acquiring foreign trade, setting up colonies, and acquiring lots of gold and silver. Anything the people did was taxed by the government. The middle class and the peasants paid heavy taxes to support Louis XIV's expensive lifestyle and many wars.

### Life in France

The three classes of people in French society were the First Estate (Roman Catholic clergy), the Second Estate (nobles), and the Third Estate (commoners, middle class, and peasants). The First and Second Estates or about two percent of the people owned about 70 percent of the land of France. In other words, about 98 percent of the French people—those of the Third Estate—were mainly peasant and very poor. They were poor because of fees, land taxes, and payments they had to pay to the other estates. Although members of the Third Estate worked hard to pay the government, they had no voice in government. They could be arrested, put in jail, or sent away from France for any reason.



*well dressed man  
in 1780*

Under Louis XIV, the official religion of France became Roman Catholicism. Louis XIV no longer allowed Protestants to worship in France. He revoked the Edict of Nantes, an order which protected French Huguenots, who were Protestants. Many French Protestants were put in prison, tortured, and even killed. Many more Protestants left France forever. Facing persecution, more than 100,000 Huguenots fled France. The Huguenots had been both hard-working and wealthy, so the loss was a serious blow to France's economy, just as the expulsion of Jews and Muslims had been to Spain.

Louis outlived both his sons and grandsons. When he died in 1715, his great-grandson inherited the throne as Louis XV.

## Russia

Russia is one of the largest nations in the world. To understand the Russian way of looking at the world today, it is very important to learn about the history of Russia.

The early part of Russian history was affected by the Byzantine Empire. Russia, like its Western European neighbors, was invaded by barbarians during the Middle Ages. For hundreds of years, Russia was under the control of Mongol invaders who came from Mongolia, north of China.

In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, a strong Russian leader named Ivan III—sometimes called Ivan the Great—was able to force the Mongols east across the Ural Mountains. At the time, Ivan was the Grand Prince of Moscow. He built a large and powerful Russian empire. When Ivan married the daughter of a Byzantine emperor, he took the title of czar (pronounced ZAR), which means Caesar. Ivan claimed, “The czar is in nature like all men, but in authority, he is like the highest God.”

The czars who followed Ivan the Great throughout the 16<sup>th</sup> century continued to take more land. The czars told their people that Moscow was the third center of the Roman Empire. The first two centers were Rome and Constantinople.

### Ivan the Terrible

Ivan IV, grandson of Ivan the Great, came to power and ruled Russia during the 16<sup>th</sup> century. He was called Ivan the Terrible by the nobles and had earned the title through his awesome power and the ways he used it. Ivan had many nobles murdered because they were not happy that he was czar. One important thing to remember about Ivan the Terrible is that he was the first Russian czar to gain a warm-water port for Russia. Unfortunately, as has happened many times in Russian history, Ivan lost the port soon after he took it. Another thing to remember about Ivan the Terrible is that he became friendly with English and German merchants.

After Ivan the Terrible died in 1584, Russians began fighting each other. They were swept by great unrest and for a short time were even ruled by Poland. For 30 years, many Russian nobles killed each other while trying to gain power. In Russia, this 30-year period is known as the *Time of Troubles*.



Russia did not experience the Renaissance because the country was isolated by language and geography. First, the Russians, even the churchmen, spoke no Latin or Greek, which were the main languages of the Renaissance period. Second, the Russian people had almost no contact with the people of Western Europe.

### **Peter I, called Peter the Great (1682-1725)**

Under czar Peter I, called Peter the Great, many changes were made in Russian life. The Russian Empire grew, and the capital was moved from Moscow to St. Petersburg. Peter ruled Russia for about 43 years.

### **Peter the Great Westernizes Russia**

The most important contribution of Peter the Great was introducing Western European ideas to Russia. He visited Western Europe to learn about European customs. Peter felt that in order for Russia to be competitive with the rest of Europe, Russians would have to learn to think like Europeans. He traveled throughout Europe, keeping his identity secret, and when he returned to Russia, he forced his people to adopt European customs. Peter the Great introduced into Russia many western ideas on science, education, military training, and industry. Russians knew little of life outside their country. To combat this, Peter the Great started Russia's first newspaper. He even edited the first issue himself.



*Peter the Great*

Peter adopted a new westernized dress code, so all Russian nobles had to shave off their beards. Russia also adopted the European calendar which started the year on the first day of January instead of the first day of September. In addition, Russians would date each year from the birth of Jesus, not from the supposed time of the creation of the world.

Peter adopted mercantilist ideas to strengthen the economy. He encouraged exports and discouraged imports. Russian farmers were encouraged to grow new crops. He also expanded Russian factories and mining operations. Russian armies were modernized to model western armies. Soldiers were trained using European war tactics and weapons.

## **Russia Gains a Seaport**

Peter the Great wanted a window on the sea, or a warm-water seaport to allow his landlocked country access to water routes for trade with Europe. After a long war with Sweden, he annexed territories on the Baltic Sea. There he built his new capital and seaport, St. Petersburg.

By the time Peter died, the Russian form of government was, like that of France, an absolute monarchy. The czar had complete control over his countrymen. Nobles lost much authority just as they did in France. Also, just as in France, most of the people were peasants who had no civil rights.

## **Catherine II, Called Catherine the Great (1762-1796)**

About 50 years after the death of Peter the Great, another important Russian leader came to power—Catherine the Great. She ruled from 1762 to 1796. Catherine used her brains and her strong will to make changes in Russia.

Catherine was a German princess who married Russian czar, Peter III. Her husband was mentally unstable. When he was murdered by a group of Russian army officers, she took over. Catherine was able to keep control by giving Russian nobles more power over the lands on which they lived. She also took control of the Russian church.

Overall, Catherine was a resourceful but ruthless leader. She had no tolerance for anyone who questioned her power. Peasants, who made up most of the Russian people, still had no civil rights. They were treated horribly. Whenever Russian soldiers wanted to have fun, they would ride into a village, rape, torture, and murder the peasants, then burn the village.

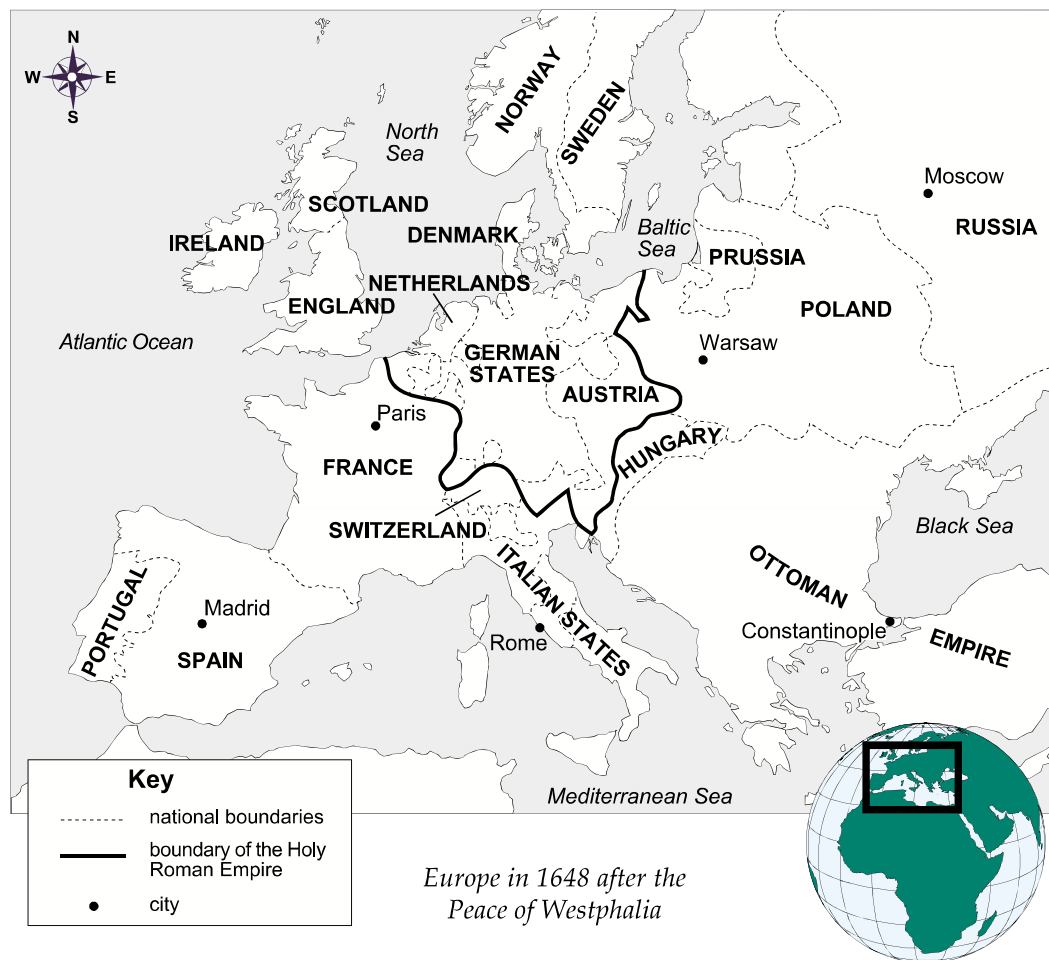


*The Growth of Russia, 1505-1796*

Catherine the Great continued Peter's policies of westernization and military expansion. During the reign of Catherine the Great, Russia added territory across Siberia into Alaska. The Russian border moved south and west into Europe as well. Together with the rulers of Prussia and Austria, Catherine the Great participated in the **partitioning** of Poland. She achieved the Russian desire of a warm-water port on the Black Sea. Like Peter the Great, Catherine the Great supported western ideas. She also encouraged the arts and sponsored education for boys and girls.

## The Thirty Years' War

The Thirty Years' War was a struggle between the Catholic Holy Roman Emperor Ferdinand II and the German Protestant states. From 1618 to 1648, the European countries were fighting with each other. The Thirty Years' War involved France, Sweden, German states, and Spain. It was fought for religious and political reasons. The German princes opposed Ferdinand II because he was a foreigner and a Catholic. As a Hapsburg ruler, he was a threat to the Bourbon kings of France. The war itself was really a series of small battles, involving great loss of life. Much property was destroyed. In 1648 the Peace of Westphalia ended the war. The political map of Europe was changed. Some countries were weakened while others were strengthened.





The results of the war were very important. First, the Hapsburg family had failed in their attempt to unite the German states under the Holy Roman Emperor. The Hapsburg family lost much power and territory. Second, Protestant religions gained more followers, while the influence of the Catholic Church declined. Third, German states became independent. The Holy Roman Empire now existed in name only. This prevented unification of Germany for another 125 years. The fourth and most lasting result was the beginning of a new kind of *diplomacy*, which is the art of building friendship with other nations.

After 1648 European leaders made alliances based upon the balance of power. A balance of power means that no one state dominates another. Remember that the Italian city-states tried to maintain the balance of power as they went from one alliance to another. European leaders began to keep an eye on one another. As one nation grew too strong, others would check its power by signing treaties. One of the key reasons for the Thirty Years' War was the rising power of the Hapsburgs in Germany and around Europe. This type of diplomacy among European countries continued until 1914 when World War I began.

Rather than help their own people grow economically, European leaders played a dangerous game of power politics. The purpose of the game was for each leader to make his country the most powerful. The result of the game was the formation of strong alliances. The sad effect of the game was to take a great deal of money away from helping the people live better lives and spending it instead on more guns and maintaining large armies. In other words, the European people were heavily taxed but did not receive any benefits in return. European leaders were to learn the hard way that they were playing a very dangerous game.

## Poland

The history of Poland has to be one of the saddest on record. Poland was a leading power in Europe from the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century it was divided up by other nations in Europe and disappeared from the European map until 1918. It has been ruled by outsiders who have abused the Polish people.

To understand how and why the Polish people have suffered so much, consider its geography. Poland is located in the north center of Europe. On the western border is Germany. On the eastern border is Russia. To the south is Czechoslovakia. The Baltic Sea lies to the north.

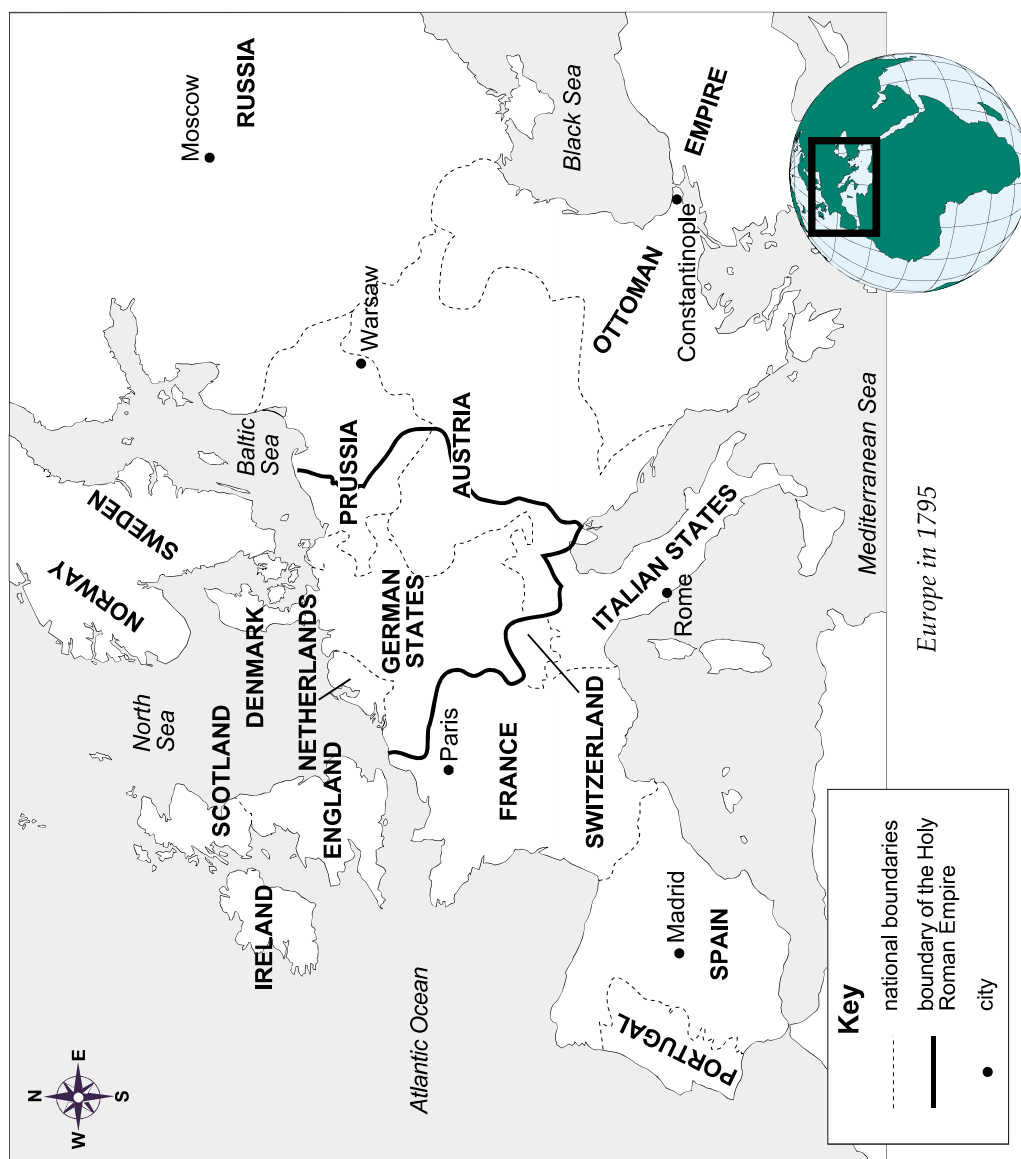
As the Russian empire spread west and the Holy Roman Empire spread east, Poland found itself in the middle. To make matters worse, Poland is mostly flat, with mountains in the south and southeast only. Flat land makes it very easy for invading armies to march through and very difficult to defend against such armies.

Between the years 1772 and 1795, Poland slowly disappeared from the map of Europe. This was because of a number of factors, some originating within Poland and some from countries outside Poland. The disappearance of Poland shows how European countries played the game of power politics. Without its consent, Poland was carved up to satisfy the wishes of other European nations.

The disappearance of Poland happened in three stages:

1. The first partition in 1772—about one quarter of Poland was taken by Austria, Russia, and Prussia.
2. The second partition in 1793—Prussia and Russia took more Polish land.
3. The third partition in 1795—Russia, Austria, and Prussia took the rest of Poland.

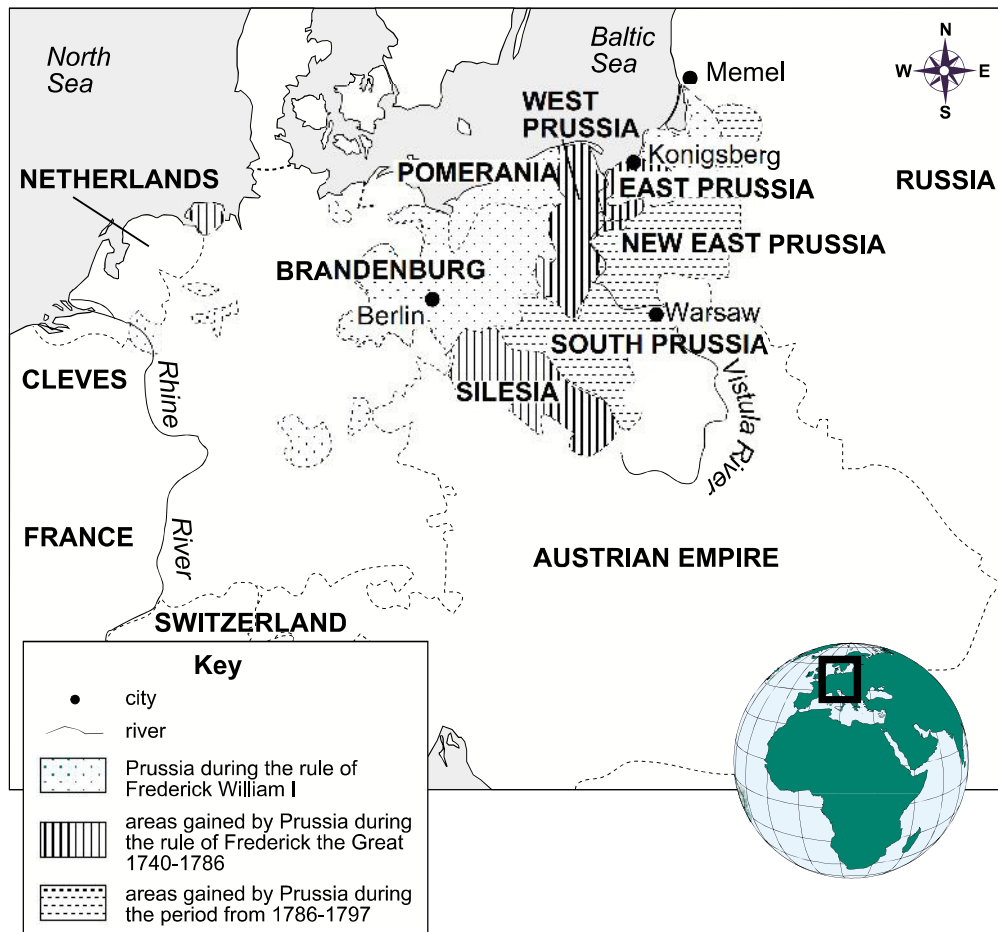
Poland appeared again as a result of foreign alliances and wars, and the Polish state was restored in 1918.



## Prussia in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century

Geographically, Prussia was located west of Poland in the northeast section of the Holy Roman Empire. Prussia was a German state.

The end of the Thirty Years' War saw the Hohenzollern family grow from important Protestant Rulers in the German states to the kings of Prussia. Under the rule of Frederick William I and Frederick the Great (Frederick II), Prussia became a major European power. These two kings took a small, weak country and, over a period of about 60 years, made it a major European power.



*The Growth of Prussia, 1740-1797*



Frederick the Great worked hard to serve and strengthen his country. He seized the Austrian province of Silesia and plunged most of Europe into war. He later annexed West Prussia. His successes in war won him the title “the Great.” He transformed Prussia from a small country into a major power and almost doubled his country’s size. He also began great public works projects and encouraged industry and education in his country. When Frederick the Great died, Prussia was militarily, politically, and economically very strong.



*Frederick the Great*

## **Maria Theresa of Austria and the War of Austrian Succession**

In the 18th century, the Hapsburg family ruled the Austrian Empire, located in the central part of Europe, just north of Italy. For hundreds of years, until 1914, the Hapsburg family ruled the Austrian Empire. Perhaps of all the Hapsburg rulers, the greatest was Maria Theresa, the eldest daughter of Austrian emperor Charles VI.

### **Maria Theresa (1717-1780)**

Maria Theresa was the empress, archduchess of Austria, queen of Hungary and of Bohemia and wife of the Holy Roman Emperor Francis I. She was a very capable ruler, introducing reforms in the government, and maintaining a strong army. She married Francis of Lorraine in 1736 and arranged his election as emperor. Maria Theresa had 16 children. She arranged the marriage of her youngest daughter Marie Antoinette to Louis XVI, heir to the French throne.

Charles VI had no sons, and Hapsburg law forbade women to inherit Hapsburg land. Without a male heir to the throne, Maria Theresa’s father worried that the leaders of Europe would not recognize his daughter as the Empress of Austria. In order to guarantee his oldest daughter’s succession to the throne, he persuaded all the rulers in Europe to sign an agreement known as the *Pragmatic Sanction*. This agreement guaranteed that Maria Theresa would succeed to the throne as the Hapsburg Empress of the Austrian Empire.

Maria Theresa was on the throne for only two months when war broke out. In the typical European fashion of the period, France, Spain, and Prussia opposed Maria Theresa because she was a woman. Frederick the Great of Prussia marched Prussian armies into Austria and conquered Silesia in 1740. This began the War of Austrian Succession. He encouraged other European countries to ignore the Pragmatic Sanction.

This war was fought in different parts of Europe and in North America. It was actually a group of small battles. The war ended in 1748. There were two results: Frederick the Great was allowed to keep Silesia, a region of Austria in Central Europe, and Maria Theresa kept her throne.

Maria Theresa proved to be an excellent and beloved ruler of her people. She made nobles and clergy pay taxes. She took power away from the nobles and the clergy and set up a system of government which was more responsive to the people.

When Maria Theresa's husband Francis I died in 1765, her son, Joseph II became emperor because of the law of male succession. However, Maria Theresa, his mother, continued to hold all the power. She died in 1780. The Hapsburg emperors who followed Maria Theresa were poor rulers.

## Review

The 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries saw the nations of Europe gaining in strength. One reason was the wealth generated by the colonies in the Americas, Africa, and Asia. As they became more powerful, the European nations also changed politically. England moved toward a constitutional monarchy, in which the monarch shared power with the Parliament. France moved toward an absolute monarchy, in which the king held all the power.

In spite of its isolation from the rest of Europe, Russia absorbed Western European ideas under leaders like Peter the Great and Catherine the Great. The German state of Prussia rose to power under Frederick William I and Frederick the Great, leading to conflict with Hapsburg-ruled Austrian Empire. Meanwhile, Poland was caught in the crossfire of European conflicts. Poland lost its lands to Russia, Austria, and Prussia.

The European nations established a balance of power by forming alliances. Whenever a country, such as Austria, seemed to be growing too powerful, other nations would form alliances to counter it. In Prussia, scheming was heavy taxation of the people for military purposes. This state of affairs led to a revolution in France late in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.