

France 1500-1789

Introduction: Like English monarchs, France's monarchs in the centuries before our course begins, consolidated royal power by expanding the king's domain: war, aid of the Church, and through matrimonial strategies. The French are dealing with population loss from the plague (1348), as well as the aftermath from the 100 Years' War with England (1337-1453).

16th Century: Between 1521 and 1559, Spain and France went to war four times—or more accurately, the Hapburgs and the Valois monarchs waged war against one another. They were fighting at sea (Mediterranean) and on the continent, esp. in Italy.

Francis I (r. 1515-1547) had attempted to compete with Charles V for the crown of the Holy Roman Empire—Charles was able to outbribe him. Francis found a ready ally in Sulayman the Magnificent of the Ottoman Empire (r. 1520-1566) to confront Charles with a 2-front war. The Turks reach the outermost limit of European expansion with their unsuccessful siege of Vienna in 1529 (they will try again unsuccessfully in 1683).

Early in his reign—on the eve of the Reformation--Francis came to an understanding with the papacy in the Concordat of Bologna. This agreement gave French monarchs certain significant rights on choosing French bishops, as well as economic aid. Thus, French monarchs will control Church policy within France. Thus, French monarchs will have a vested interest in Catholicism.

Francis and his son Henry II (r. 1547-1559) spend huge sums of money on palaces and on importing the Italian Renaissance to France. Between the two of them, they rebuild the Louvre, acquire the *Mona Lisa*, build the Dreux and Tuileries palaces.

Calvinism spreads among reform-minded clergy, the bourgeoisie, and some artisans early on, and among the nobility in the latter part of the century. South has the largest Calvinist population.

Henry II dies young—succeeded by 3 young weak sons, the first of which, Francis II, rules for only 17 months (r. 1559-60). The second son, Charles IX (r. 1560-1574), was dominated by his Florentine mother Catherine de Medici. Henry II's third son Henry III (r. 1574-89) was more intelligent than his predecessors, but he alternated his time between his male lovers and in repenting for his sins—he too was dominated by his mother Catherine. France is faced with weak leadership during a time of religious upheaval—eight wars of religion between 1562 and 1598.

Catherine, who had initially opted for a more tolerant approach, panicked and carried out the Bartholomew's Day Massacre in 1572.

Henry III died without an heir. This is no surprise since he was young and more concerned with his gay lovers. He was assassinated by a radical friar in 1589.

The closest heir is Henry of Navarre (IV) (r. 1589-1610), who is Calvinist and decides to convert to Catholicism to preserve his kingship—he felt that tolerant Catholicism was the best road for France, saying “Paris is worth a Mass.” He enacts the Edict of Nantes in 1598 encouraging toleration—devotion to monarch rather than religion.

Henry IV spreads his royal power via sale of offices (as discussed in class).

17th Century: Henry IV is assassinated by a fanatical monk, and once again France is left with a young king, Louis XIII (r. 1610-1643)—Queen mother Marie de Medici—yes yet another regent from the famous Florentine family. She seeks an alliance with Spain and appoints Cardinal Richelieu to the Council of Ministers—he is the architect of French absolutism. Marie still has to rely on the *Estates General*—she is the one who calls them

- into session in 1614, the last time before 1789. She surrenders power to her son in 1617, who still had Richelieu as an advisor.
- Between 1618 and 1648 much of continental Europe was involved in the 30 Years' War. What started out as a revolt of Protestant nobility against an unflinching Catholic HRE ends up as an international conflict. Interestingly enough, France enters on the side of the Protestants—it was more important to confront Habsburgs than it was to confront Protestantism. France's placement of political objectives above religious ones garnered it the leading position in continental affairs. This conflict closes a century of wars of religion.
- Between 1642/43, both Richelieu and Louis die, and young Louis XIV (r. 1643-1715) takes the throne. His mother Anne of Austria (a Habsburg who is more culturally Spanish) appoints Mazarin as regent.
- Louis rules in his own right in 1661—refer to notes from class—I will discuss here only what was not already mentioned in class. One way in which Louis XIV carried out centralization was from his policy of “one law, one faith, one king” [it sounds better in French since it rhymes]. He revokes the Edict of Nantes in 1685.
- Louis XIV was quite the ladies' man, despite his diminutive stature (only 5'4"). He married a Spanish princess (for political reasons in 1660), but he had numerous other mistresses. Apparently after his wife's death in 1683, he secretly married one of his mistresses and became less of a philanderer.
- With respect to foreign policy, France had come out a winner in the 30 Years' War, and thus it was able to confront the Spanish and the Dutch between 1660s and 80s—Louis uses his marriage to Marie Therese to make territorial claims in NE Europe. War was a means of Louis keeping his population unified—by the late 1680s he had stepped on too many toes and a coalition formed against him headed by William of Orange (now William III of England), the HRE, Spain, the United Provinces, and a few assorted German princes. Louis's finances are stretched—makes an uneasy peace in 1697—continues to fight England in NW.
- A further crisis arises when the mentally defective (and terribly in-bred), impotent (therefore childless) Spanish King Charles II died in 1700. His mental and physical conditions were well-known secrets, to the point where his two brother in laws, Louis XIV and the HRE had already agreed to divide his holdings in 1698. Nevertheless, the King willed the crown to Louis XIV's grandson Philip of Anjou, and Louis reneged on the treaty, sent his grandson to Spain with a slew of French ministers; but he had to agree to the fact that the crown of France and Spain were not united.
- Fighting between the French, English, Dutch, Austrians, and Prussians continued until 1713, with the Peace of Utrecht. France was allowed to keep Philip on the throne—without united crowns, but it had to give up Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, and territories around the Hudson Bay—all go to England. From Spain, England acquired Gibraltar, Minorca, and Spain's interests in the slave trade. The Dutch didn't get much of anything since the Spanish Netherlands went to Austria. England emerges in control of Mediterranean and the Atlantic.

18th Century & the Aristocracy in W Europe

Some historians have referred to the 18th century as the aristocratic century because of the prevalence of that class in the army, diplomacy, politics, and society. War had become a means of politics—there was no ideal of peace to uphold, but rather the “balance of power”. All states want more territory, power, dynastic ties, and secure borders. War becomes more rational with rules of siege and engagement. Officers are almost always from the aristocracy. It is also aristocrats who form the diplomatic corps—use French as the medium of expression.

In France, the old aristocracy begins to mix with the robe aristocracy (office buyers) to protect mutual interests. Louis XV is not a hands-on king—his hands are usually on one of his mistresses.

In E Europe, the aristocracy was the wealthiest—one Hungarian prince had 700,000 peasants! Where feudalism is fading in NW Europe, in E Europe it has become entrenched—remember they are the grain suppliers.

In England, 400 families own about $\frac{1}{4}$ of the land, i.e. 2% own 75%. In England the aristocracy is more likely to mingle with the bourgeoisie since only the eldest son can inherit the title and the land—therefore mixing becomes common among younger sons of the nobility.

The French aristocracy was somewhat poorer, since the peasants own more; but they had greater privileges.

Over the course of the century, the aristocracy became a European aristocracy with similar tastes in art and culture—and French was the language of communication. They followed ornate social rituals: one spent the “season” (late fall to early spring) in one’s capital where political maneuvering was the order of the day. Once Spring broke, one then made the “Grand Tour” of other European countries to visit aristocrats there. Rococo was the style of art—extremely ornate, non-religious and sensual. Aristocrats decorate their sumptuous homes in this style—want to preserve their status. It is also during this period that there is a rise of game laws. In England, e.g., only persons owning a certain amount of landed property could hunt game animals: hares, partridges, pheasants, moorfowl, and deer—obviously this will not endear the aristocracy to the poor, who view game as common property.

By the mid-18th century France realized it needed a powerful ally to fight England, and it finally made friends with its long-standing arch enemy, the Austrian Habsburgs. Nonetheless, France still lost the 7 Years’ War to Britain over North American possessions.

Enlightenment: As we discussed in a previous lecture, over the course of about 200 years Christendom—increasingly becoming Europe—began to change their view of the world over the course of the scientific revolution—by the 18th century people begin to apply these laws to society to make it a better place. The thinkers of the enlightenment were not necessarily revolutionary—they encourage change from within and from above, rather than a complete overhaul. We have already seen work of Locke (and Hobbes) who are early Enlightenment figures with their views on political philosophy. In the 18th century philosophes (philosophers seeking a new science of man) came largely from the urban bourgeoisie (and sometimes from aristocracy). They view Christianity, especially Roman Catholicism as an impediment to the improvement of mankind—they seek a more rational religion: Deism. In Deism God is like a divine watchmaker who sets the mechanism of nature to work, and then allows his clock to work on its own.

Ideas of the enlightenment spread through writing—French is the medium of communication—more accessible given rising literacy in cities. The ideas also circulate in salons, coffee houses, pubs, and taverns.

Three Estates & Patterns of Landholding on the eve of the Revolution

- The **monarch** owned **10%** of the land.
- The **1st estate** was comprised of about 100,000 clergy (priests, monks, nuns), who owned **10%** of the land.
- The **2nd estate** was comprised of about 400,000 nobles, who owned about **20%** of the land.
- The remaining 22,500,000 people were commoners belonging to the **third estate**, some of whom were **bourgeois**—town dwellers making their living from trade, commerce and related professions—who own **30%** of the land, and about 80% of the total French

population were **peasants**, who owned about **30%**. There were also urban working and unemployed poor who owned no land.