IN MAY 1664, KING LOUIS XIV OF FRANCE ORGANIZED THE FIRST OF many spectacular entertainments for his court at Versailles, where he had recently begun construction of a magnificent new palace. More than six hundred members of his court attended the weeklong series of parades, races, ballets, plays, and fireworks. In the opening spectacle, Louis was accompanied by an eighteen-foot-high float in the form of a chariot dedicated to Apollo, Greek god of the sun and Louis’s personally chosen emblem. The king’s favorite writers and musicians presented works specially prepared for the occasion, and each evening ended with a candlelit banquet served by masked and costumed servants.

Louis XIV designed his pageants to awe those most dangerous to him, the leading nobles of his kingdom. To make his authority and glory concrete, the king relentlessly increased the power of his bureaucracy, expanded his army, and insisted on Catholic orthodoxy. This model of state building was known as absolutism, a system of government in which the ruler claims sole and uncontestable power. Other mid-seventeenth-century rulers followed Louis XIV’s example or explicitly rejected it, but they could not afford to ignore it.

Although absolutism exerted great influence beginning in the mid-1600s, it faced competition from constitutionalism, a system in which the ruler shares power with an assembly of elected representatives. Constitutionalism provided a strong foundation for state power in England, the Dutch Republic, and the British North American colonies, while absolutism dominated in central and eastern Europe. Constitutionalism triumphed in England, however, only after one king had been executed as a traitor and another had been deposed. The English conflicts over the nature of authority found their most enduring expression in the writings of Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, which laid the foundations of modern political science.
The search for order took place not only in government and politics but also in intellectual, cultural, and social life. Artists sought means of glorifying power and expressing order and symmetry in new ways. As states consolidated their power, elites endeavored to distinguish themselves more clearly from the lower orders. Officials, clergy, and laypeople worked to reform the poor, now seen as a major source of disorder. Whether absolutist or constitutionalist, seventeenth-century states all aimed to extend control over their subjects’ lives.

Louis XIV: Absolutism and Its Limits

French king Louis XIV (r. 1643–1715) personified the absolutist ruler, who in theory shared his power with no one. In 1655, he reputedly told the Paris high court of justice, “L’état, c’est moi” (“I am the state”), emphasizing that state authority rested in him personally. Louis cleverly manipulated the affections and ambitions of his courtiers, chose as his ministers middle-class men who owed everything to him, built up Europe’s largest army, and snuffed out every hint of religious or political opposition. Yet the absoluteness of his power should not be exaggerated. Like all other rulers of his time, Louis depended on the cooperation of many people: local officials who enforced his decrees, peasants and artisans who joined his armies and paid his taxes, clergy who preached his notion of Catholicism, and nobles who joined court festivities rather than causing trouble.

The Fronde, 1648–1653

Louis XIV’s absolutism built on a long French tradition of increasing centralization of state authority, but before he could establish his preeminence he had to weather a series of revolts known as the Fronde. Louis was only five when he came to the throne in 1643 upon the death of his father, Louis XIII, who with his chief minister, Cardinal Richelieu, had steered France through increasing involvement in the Thirty Years’ War, rapidly climbing taxes, and innumerable tax revolts. Louis XIV’s mother, Anne of Austria, and her Italian-born adviser and rumored lover, Cardinal Mazarin (1602–1661), ruled in the young monarch’s name.

To meet the financial pressure of fighting the Thirty Years’ War, Mazarin sold new offices, raised taxes, and forced creditors to extend loans to the government. In 1648, a coalition of his opponents presented him with a charter of demands that, if granted, would have given the parlements (high courts) a form of constitutional power with the right to approve new taxes. Mazarin responded by arresting the leaders of the parlements. He soon faced a series of revolts.

Fearing for the young king’s safety, his mother took Louis and fled Paris. With civil war threatening, Mazarin and Anne agreed to compromise with the parlements. The nobles saw an opportunity to reassert their claims to power against the weakened monarchy and demanded greater local control. Leading noblemen often played key roles in the opposition to Mazarin, carrying messages and forging alliances, especially
when male family members were in prison. While the nobles sought to regain power and local influence, the middle and lower classes chafed at the repeated tax increases. Conflicts erupted throughout the kingdom as nobles, parlements, and city councils all raised their own armies to fight either the crown or one another. The urban poor, such as those in the southwestern city of Bordeaux, sometimes revolted as well.

Mazarin and Anne eventually got the upper hand because their opponents failed to maintain unity in fighting the king’s forces. But Louis XIV never forgot the humiliation and uncertainty that marred his childhood. His own policies as ruler would be designed to prevent the recurrence of any such revolts. Yet, for all his success, peasants would revolt against the introduction of new taxes on at least five more occasions in the 1660s and 1670s, requiring tens of thousands of soldiers to reestablish order.

**Court Culture as an Element of Absolutism**

When Cardinal Mazarin died in 1661, Louis XIV, then twenty-two years old, decided to rule without a first minister. He described the dangers of his situation in memoirs he wrote later for his son’s instruction: “Everywhere was disorder. My Court as a whole was still very far removed from the sentiments in which I trust you will find it.” Louis listed many other problems in the kingdom, but none occupied him more than his attempts to control France’s leading nobles, some of whom came from families that had opposed him militarily during the Fronde.

The French nobles had long exercised local authority by maintaining their own fighting forces, meting out justice on their estates, arranging jobs for underlings, and resolving their own conflicts through dueling. Louis set out to domesticate the warrior nobles by replacing violence with court ritual, such as the festivities at Versailles described at the beginning of this chapter. Using a systematic policy of bestowing pensions, offices, honors, gifts, and the threat of disfavor or punishment, Louis induced the nobles to cooperate with him. The aristocracy increasingly vied for his favor and in the process became his clients, dependent on him for advancement. Great nobles competed for the honor of holding his shirt when he dressed, foreign ambassadors squabbled for places near him, and royal mistresses basked in the glow of his personal favor. Far from the court, however, nobles could still make considerable trouble for the king, and royal officials learned to compromise with them.

Those who did come to the king’s court were kept on their toes. The preferred styles of behavior changed without notice, and the tiniest lapse in attention to etiquette could lead to ruin. Marie-Madeleine Pioche de La Vergne, known as Madame de Lafayette, described the court in her novel *The Princess of Clèves* (1678): “The Court gravitated around ambition. . . . Everybody was busily trying to better his or her position by pleasing, by helping, or by hindering somebody else.”

Louis XIV appreciated the political uses of every form of art. Calling himself the Sun King, after Apollo, Louis stopped at nothing to burnish this radiant image. He played Apollo in ballets performed at court; posed for portraits with the emblems of Apollo (laurel, lyre, and tripod); and adorned his palaces with statues of the god. He also emulated the style and methods of ancient Roman emperors. At a celebration for the birth of his first son in 1662, Louis dressed in Roman attire, and many engravings and paintings showed him as a Roman emperor.
The king gave pensions to artists who worked for him and sometimes protected writers from clerical critics. The most famous of these writers was the playwright Molière (the pen name of Jean-Baptiste Poquelin, 1622–1673), whose comedy Tartuffe (1664) made fun of religious hypocrites and was loudly condemned by church leaders. Louis forced Molière to delay public performances of the play after its premiere at the festivities of May 1664 but resisted calls for his dismissal. Louis’s ministers set up royal academies of dance, painting, architecture, music, and science. The government regulated the number and locations of theaters and closely censored all forms of publication.

Louis commissioned operas to celebrate royal marriages and military victories. His favorite composer, Jean-Baptiste Lully, wrote sixteen operas for court performances as well as many ballets. Playwrights often presented their new plays first to the court. Pierre Corneille and Jean Racine wrote tragedies set in Greece or Rome that celebrated the new aristocratic virtues that Louis aimed to inculcate: a reverence for order and self-control. All the characters were regal or noble, all the language lofty, all the behavior aristocratic.

Louis glorified his image as well through massive public works projects. Veterans’ hospitals and new fortified towns on the frontiers represented his military might. Urban improvements, such as the reconstruction of the Louvre palace in Paris, proved his wealth. But his most ambitious project was the construction of a new palace at Versailles, twelve miles from the turbulent capital.

Building began in the 1660s. By 1685, the frenzied effort had engaged thirty-six thousand workers, not including the thousands of troops who diverted a local river to supply water for pools and fountains. The gardens designed by landscape architect André Le Nôtre reflected the spirit of Louis XIV’s rule: their geometrical arrangements and clear lines showed that art and design could tame nature and that order and control defined the exercise of power. Versailles symbolized Louis’s success at reigning in the nobility and dominating Europe, and other monarchs eagerly mimicked French fashion and often conducted their business in French.

Yet for all its apparent luxury and frivolity, life at Versailles was often cramped and cold. Fifteen thousand people crowded into the palace’s apartments, including all the highest military officers, the ministers of state, and the separate households of each member of the royal family. Refuse collected in the corridors during the incessant building, and thieves and prostitutes overran the grounds. By the time Louis actually moved from the Louvre to Versailles in 1682, he had reigned as monarch for thirty-nine years. After his wife’s death in 1683, he secretly married his mistress, Françoise d’Aubigné, marquise de Maintenon, and conducted most state affairs from her apartments at the palace. She inspired Louis XIV to increase his devotion to Catholicism.

Enforcing Religious Orthodoxy

Louis believed that he reigned by divine right. As Bishop Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet (1627–1704) explained: “We have seen that kings take the place of God, who is the true father of the human species. We have also seen that the first idea of power which exists among men is that of the paternal power; and that kings are modeled on
The king, like a father, should instruct his subjects in the true religion, or at least make sure that others did so.

Louis’s campaign for religious conformity first focused on the Jansenists, Catholics whose doctrines and practices resembled some aspects of Protestantism. Following the posthumous publication of the book *Augustinus* (1640) by the Flemish theologian Cornelius Jansen (1585–1638), the Jansenists stressed the need for God’s grace in achieving salvation. They emphasized the importance of original sin and resembled the English Puritans in their austere religious practice. Prominent among the Jansenists was Blaise Pascal (1623–1662), a mathematician of genius, who wrote his *Provincial Letters* (1656–1657) to defend Jansenism against charges of heresy. Many judges in the parlements likewise endorsed Jansenist doctrine. Louis rejected any doctrine that gave priority to considerations of individual conscience over the demands of the official church hierarchy. Therefore, in 1660, he began enforcing various papal bulls (decrees) against Jansenism and closed down Jansenist theological centers.

Protestants posed an even greater obstacle to religious conformity. After many years of escalating pressure on the Calvinist Huguenots, Louis decided to eliminate
all of the Calvinists’ rights. Louis considered the Edict of Nantes (1598), by which his grandfather Henry IV granted the Protestants religious freedom and a degree of political independence, a temporary measure, and he fervently hoped to reconvert the Huguenots to Catholicism. In 1685, his revocation of the Edict of Nantes closed Calvinist churches and schools, forced all pastors to leave the country, and ordered the conversion of all Calvinists. Children of Calvinists could be taken away from their parents and raised Catholic. Tens of thousands of Huguenots responded by illegally fleeing to England, Brandenburg-Prussia, the Dutch Republic, or North America. Protestant European countries were shocked by this crackdown on religious dissent and would cite it in justification of their wars against Louis.

Extending State Authority at Home and Abroad
Louis XIV could not have enforced his religious policies without the services of a nationwide bureaucracy. Bureaucracy — a network of state officials carrying out orders according to a regular and routine line of authority — comes from the French word bureau, for “desk,” which came to mean “office,” both in the sense of a physical space and a position of authority. Louis personally supervised the activities of his bureaucrats and worked to ensure his supremacy in all matters. But he always had to negotiate with nobles and local officials who sometimes thwarted his will.

Louis extended the bureaucratic forms his predecessors had developed, especially the use of intendants. He handpicked an intendant for each region to represent his rule against entrenched local interests such as the parlements, provincial estates, and noble governors. The intendants supervised the collection of taxes, the financing of public works, and the provisioning of the army. In 1673, Louis decreed that the parlements could no longer vote against his proposed laws or even speak against them.

To keep tabs on all the issues before him, Louis relied on a series of talented ministers, usually of modest origins, who gained fame, fortune, and even noble status from serving the king. Most important among them was Jean-Baptiste Colbert (1619–1683), a wool merchant’s son turned royal official. Colbert had managed Mazarin’s personal finances and worked his way up under Louis XIV to become head of royal finances, public works, and the navy. He provided the king with pocket account books bound in red leather so that Louis could study the kingdom’s finances for himself.

Colbert used the bureaucracy to establish a new economic doctrine, mercantilism. According to mercantilist policy, governments must intervene to increase national wealth by whatever means possible. Such government intervention inevitably increased the number of bureaucrats needed. Under Colbert, the French government established overseas trading companies and granted manufacturing monopolies. A government inspection system regulated the quality of finished goods and compelled all craftsmen to organize into guilds, in which masters could supervise the work of the journeymen and apprentices. To protect French production, Colbert rescinded many internal customs fees but enacted high foreign tariffs, which cut imports of competing goods. To compete more effectively with England and the Dutch Republic, Colbert also subsidized shipbuilding, a policy that dramatically expanded the number of seaworthy French vessels. Such mercantilist measures
aimed to ensure France's prominence in world markets and to provide the resources needed to fight wars against the nation's increasingly long list of enemies. Although later economists questioned the value of mercantilism, virtually every government in Europe embraced it.

Colbert's mercantilist projects shaped life in the French colonies, too. He forbade colonial businesses from manufacturing anything already produced in mainland France. In 1663, he took control of the trading company that had founded New France (Canada). With the goal of establishing permanent settlements like those in the British North American colonies, he transplanted several thousand peasants from western France to the present-day province of Quebec, which France had claimed since 1608. He also tried to limit expansion westward, without success.

Despite the Iroquois' initial interruption of French fur-trading convoys, fur trader Louis Jolliet and Jesuit missionary Jacques Marquette reached the upper Mississippi River in 1672 and traveled downstream as far as Arkansas. In 1684, French explorer Sieur de La Salle went all the way down to the Gulf of Mexico, claiming a vast territory for Louis XIV and calling it Louisiana after him. Colbert's successors embraced the expansion he had resisted, thinking it crucial to competing successfully with the English and the Dutch in the New World.

Colonial settlement occupied only a portion of Louis XIV's attention, however, for his main foreign policy goal was to extend French power in Europe. To expand the army, Louis's minister of war centralized the organization of French troops. Barracks built in major towns received supplies—among which were uniforms to reinforce discipline—from a central distribution system. Louis's wartime army could field a force as large as that of all his enemies combined.

Absolutist governments always tried to increase their territorial holdings, and as Louis extended his reach, he gained new enemies. In 1667–1668, in the War of Devolution (so called because Louis claimed that lands in the Spanish Netherlands should devolve to him since the Spanish king had failed to pay the dowry of Louis's Spanish bride), Louis defeated the Spanish armies but had to make peace when England, Sweden, and the Dutch Republic joined the war. In the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle in 1668, he gained control of a few towns on the border of the Spanish Netherlands.

In 1672, Louis XIV opened hostilities against the Dutch because they stood in the way of his acquisition of more territory in the Spanish Netherlands. He declared war again on Spain in 1673. By now the Dutch had allied themselves with their former Spanish masters to hold off the French. Louis also marched his troops into territories of the Holy Roman Empire, provoking many of the German princes to join with the emperor, the Spanish, and the Dutch in an alliance against Louis, whom they now denounced as a “Christian Turk” for his imperialist ambitions. Faced with bloody but inconclusive results on the battlefield, the parties agreed to the Treaty of Nijmegen of 1678–1679, which ceded several Flemish towns and the Franche-Comté region to Louis, linking Alsace to the rest of France. French government deficits soared, and in 1675 increases in taxes touched off the most serious antitax revolt of Louis's reign.

Louis had no intention of standing still. Heartened by the Habsburgs' seeming weakness, he pushed eastward, seizing the city of Strasbourg in 1681 and invading
the province of Lorraine in 1684. In 1688, he attacked some of the small German cities of the Holy Roman Empire. So obsessed was Louis with his military standing that he had miniature battle scenes painted on his high heels and commissioned tapestries showing his military processions into conquered cities, even those he did not take by force. It took a large coalition known as the League of Augsburg — made up of England, Spain, Sweden, the Dutch Republic, the Austrian emperor, and various German princes — to hold back the French king. When hostilities between Louis and the League of Augsburg ended in the Treaty of Rijswijk in 1697, Louis returned many of his conquests made since 1678, with the exception of Strasbourg (Map 16.1).

Four years later, Louis embarked on his last and most damaging war, the War of the Spanish Succession (1701–1713). It was caused by disagreement over who would inherit the throne of Spain. Before he died, Spanish king Charles II (r. 1665–1700)
named Louis XIV’s second grandson—Philip, duke of Anjou—as his heir, but the Austrian emperor Leopold I refused to agree and the British and the Dutch supported his refusal. In the ensuing war, the French lost several major battles and had to accept disadvantageous terms in the Peace of Utrecht of 1713–1714. France ceded possessions in North America (Newfoundland, the Hudson Bay area, and most of Nova Scotia) to Britain. Although Philip was recognized as king of Spain, he had to renounce any future claim to the French crown, thus barring unification of the two kingdoms. Spain surrendered its territories in Italy and the Netherlands to the Austrians, and Gibraltar to the British. Lying on his deathbed in 1715, the seventy-six-year-old Louis XIV watched helplessly as his accomplishments began to unravel.

Louis XIV’s policy of absolutism fomented bitter hostility among his own subjects. Critics complained about the secrecy of Louis’s government, and nobles resented his promotions of commoners to high office. Louis de Rouvroy, Duke of Saint-Simon, complained that “falseness, servility, admiring glances, combined with a dependent and cringing attitude, above all, an appearance of being nothing without him, were the only ways of pleasing him.” Ordinary people suffered the most for Louis’s ambitions. By the end of the Sun King’s reign, one in six Frenchmen had served in the military. In addition to the higher taxes paid by everyone, those who lived on the routes leading to the battlefields had to house and feed soldiers; only nobles were exempt from this requirement.

**Review Question**

How “absolute” was the power of Louis XIV?

**Constitutionalism in England**

Of the two models of state building—absolutism and constitutionalism—the first seemed unquestionably more powerful because Louis XIV could raise such large armies and tax his subjects without much consultation. In the end, however, Louis could not defeat the coalition led by England’s constitutional monarch. Constitutionalism had its own distinctive strengths, which came from the ruler sharing power through a representative assembly such as the English houses of Parliament. But the English rulers themselves hoped to follow Louis XIV’s lead and install their own absolutist policies. Two revolutions, in 1642–1660 and 1688–1689, overturned two kings and confirmed the constitutional powers of an elected parliament, laying the foundation for the idea that government must guarantee certain rights to the people under the law.

**England Turned Upside Down, 1642–1660**

Disputes about the right to levy taxes and the nature of authority in the Church of England had long troubled the relationship between the English crown and Parliament. For more than a hundred years, wealthy English landowners had been
accustomed to participating in government through Parliament and expected to be consulted on royal policy. Although England had no single constitutional document, it did have a variety of laws, judicial decisions, customary procedures, and charters and petitions granted by the king that all regulated relations between king and Parliament. When Charles I tried to assert his authority over Parliament, a civil war broke out. Some historians view the English civil war of 1642–1646 as the last great war of religion because it pitted Puritans against those trying to push the Church of England toward Catholicism; others see in it the first modern revolution because it gave birth to democratic political and religious movements.

When Charles I (r. 1625–1649) succeeded his father, James I, he faced an increasingly aggressive Parliament that resisted efforts to extend his personal control. In 1628, Parliament forced Charles to agree to the Petition of Right, by which he promised not to levy taxes without Parliament’s consent. Charles hoped to avoid further interference with his plans by simply refusing to call Parliament into session between 1629 and 1640. Without it, the king’s ministers had to find every loophole possible to raise revenues. They tried to turn “ship money,” a levy on seaports in times of emergency, into an annual tax collected everywhere in the country. The crown won the ensuing court case, but many subjects still refused to pay what they considered to be an illegal tax.

Religious tensions brought conflicts over the king’s authority to a head. With Charles’s encouragement, the archbishop of Canterbury, William Laud (1573–1645), imposed increasingly elaborate ceremonies on the Church of England. Angered by these moves toward “popery,” the Puritans responded with pamphlets and sermons filled with fiery denunciations. Laud then hauled them before the feared Court of Star Chamber, which the king personally controlled. The court ordered harsh sentences for Laud’s Puritan critics; they were whipped, pilloried, branded, and even had their ears cut off and their noses split. When Laud tried to apply his policies to Scotland, however, they backfired completely: the stubborn Presbyterian Scots invaded the north of England in 1640. To raise money to fight the war, Charles called Parliament into session and unwittingly opened the door to a constitutional and religious crisis.

The Parliament of 1640 did not intend revolution, but reformers in the House of Commons (the lower house of Parliament) wanted to undo what they saw as the royal tyranny of the 1630s. Parliament removed Laud from office, ordered the execution of an unpopular royal commander, abolished the Court of Star Chamber, repealed recently levied taxes, and provided for a parliamentary assembly at least once every three years, thus establishing a constitutional check on royal authority. Moderate reformers expected to stop there and resisted Puritan pressure to abolish bishops and eliminate the Church of England prayer book. The reformers also faced a rebellion in Ireland by native Catholics against the English and Scottish settlers who had taken over their lands. The reformers in Parliament feared that the Irish Catholics would make common cause with Charles to reestablish Catholicism as the religion of England and Scotland. Their hand was forced in January 1642, when Charles and his soldiers invaded Parliament and tried unsuccessfully to arrest those leaders who had moved to curb his power. Faced with mounting opposition within London, Charles quickly withdrew from the city and organized an army.
The ensuing civil war between king and Parliament lasted four years (1642–1646) and divided the country. The king's army of royalists, known as Cavaliers, enjoyed the most support in northern and western England. The parliamentary forces, called Roundheads because they cut their hair short, had their stronghold in the southeast, including London. Although Puritans dominated on the parliamentary side, they were divided among themselves about the proper form of church government: the Presbyterians wanted a Calvinist church with some central authority, whereas the Independents favored entirely autonomous congregations free from other church government (hence the term congregationalism, often associated with the Independents). The Puritans put aside their differences for the sake of military unity and united under an obscure member of the House of Commons, the country gentleman Oliver Cromwell (1599–1658), who sympathized with the Independents. After Cromwell skillfully reorganized the parliamentary troops, his New Model Army defeated the Cavaliers at the battle of Naseby in 1645. Charles surrendered in 1646.

Although the civil war between king and Parliament had ended in victory for Parliament, divisions within the Puritan ranks now came to the fore: the Presbyterians dominated Parliament, but the Independents controlled the army. The disputes between the leaders drew lower-class groups into the debate. When Parliament tried to disband the New Model Army in 1647, disgruntled soldiers protested. Called Levellers because of their insistence on leveling social differences, the soldiers took on their officers in a series of debates about the nature of political authority. The Levellers demanded that Parliament meet annually, that members be paid so as to allow common people to participate, and that all male heads of households be allowed to vote. Their ideal of political participation excluded servants, the propertyless, and women but offered access to artisans, shopkeepers, and modest farmers. Cromwell and other army leaders rejected the Levellers' demands as threatening to property owners. Speaking to his advisers, Cromwell insisted, “You have no other way to deal with these men but to break them in pieces.”

While political differences between Presbyterians and Independents helped spark new political movements, their conflicts over church organization fostered the emergence of new religious sects that emphasized the “inner light” of individual religious inspiration and a disdain for hierarchical authority. The Baptists, for example, insisted on adult baptism because they believed that Christians should choose their own church and that children should not automatically become members of the Church of England. The Religious Society of Friends, who came to be called Quakers, demonstrated their beliefs in equality and the inner light by refusing to doff their hats to men in authority. Manifesting their religious experience by trembling, or “quaking,” the Quakers believed that anyone—man or woman—inspired by a direct experience of God could preach. In keeping with their notions of equality and individual inspiration, many of the new sects provided opportunities for women to become preachers and prophets.

Parliamentary leaders feared that the new sects would overturn the whole social hierarchy. Some sects did advocate sweeping change. The Diggers promoted rural communism—collective ownership of all property. Seekers and Ranters questioned just about everything. One notorious Rantter, John Robins, even claimed to be God.
A few men advocated free love. The political elite decided that tolerating the new sects would lead to skepticism, anarchism, and debauchery, and they therefore took measures to suppress the most radical ones.

The king tried to negotiate with the Presbyterians in Parliament, but Independents in the army purged the Presbyterians from Parliament in late 1648, leaving a “rump” of about seventy members. This Rump Parliament then created a high court to try Charles I. The court found him guilty of attempting to establish “an unlimited and tyrannical power” and pronounced a death sentence. On January 30, 1649, Charles was beheaded before an enormous crowd, which reportedly groaned as one when the ax fell. Although many had objected to Charles’s autocratic rule, few had wanted him killed. For royalists, Charles immediately became a martyr, and reports of miracles, such as the curing of blindness by the touch of a handkerchief soaked in his blood, soon circulated.

The Rump Parliament abolished the monarchy and the House of Lords (the upper house of Parliament) and set up a Puritan republic with Oliver Cromwell as chairman of the Council of State. Cromwell did not tolerate dissent from his policies. When his agents discovered plans for mutiny within the army, they executed the perpetrators; new decrees silenced the Levellers. Although under Cromwell the various Puritan sects could worship rather freely and Jews with needed skills were permitted to return to England for the first time since the thirteenth century, Catholics could not worship publicly, nor could adherents of the Church of England use the Book of Common Prayer, thought to be too Catholic. The elites were troubled by Cromwell’s religious policies but pleased to see some social order reestablished.

The new regime aimed to extend state power just as Charles I had before. Cromwell laid the foundation for a Great Britain—made up of England, Ireland, and Scotland—by reconquering Scotland and brutally subduing Ireland. When his position was secured in 1649, Cromwell went to Ireland with a large force and easily defeated the rebels, massacring whole garrisons and their priests. He encouraged expropriating more lands of the Irish “barbarous wretches,” and Scottish immigrants resettled the northern county of Ulster. This seventeenth-century English conquest left a legacy of bitterness that the Irish even today call “the curse of Cromwell.”

In 1651, Parliament turned its attention overseas, putting mercantilist ideas into practice in the first Navigation Act, which allowed imports only if they were carried on English ships or came directly from the producers of goods. The Navigation Act was aimed at the Dutch, who dominated world trade; Cromwell tried to carry the policy further by waging naval war on the Dutch from 1652 to 1654.

At home, however, Cromwell faced growing resistance. His wars required a budget twice the size of that of Charles I, and his increases in property taxes and customs duties alienated landowners and merchants. The conflict reached a crisis in 1653: Parliament considered disbanding the army, whereupon Cromwell abolished the Rump Parliament in a military coup and made himself Lord Protector. He now silenced his critics by banning newspapers and using networks of spies to read mail and keep tabs on his enemies. Cromwell intended that his son should succeed him, but his death in 1658 only revived the prospect of civil war and
political chaos. In 1660, a newly elected Parliament invited Charles II, the son of the executed king, to return from exile.

Restoration and Revolution Again

England’s traditional monarchical form of government was restored in 1660 under Charles II (r. 1660–1685). More than a thousand Puritan ministers lost their positions, and attending a service other than one conforming with the Book of Common Prayer was illegal after 1664. Two natural disasters in quick succession posed new challenges. The plague struck in 1665, claiming more than thirty thousand victims in just a few months and forcing Charles and Parliament to flee from London. Then in 1666, the Great Fire swept the city. Some saw these disasters as punishment for the sins of the Cromwell era, others as an ill omen for Charles’s reign.

Many in Parliament feared that Charles II wanted to emulate Louis XIV. In 1670, Charles made a secret agreement, soon leaked, with Louis in which he promised to announce his conversion to Catholicism in exchange for money for a war against the Dutch. Charles never proclaimed himself a Catholic, but in his Declaration of Indulgence (1673), he did suspend all laws against Catholics and Protestant dissenters. Parliament refused to continue funding the Dutch war unless Charles rescinded his Declaration of Indulgence. Asserting its authority further, Parliament passed the Test Act in 1673, requiring all government officials to profess allegiance to the Church of England and in effect disavow Catholic doctrine. Then in 1678, Parliament precipitated the so-called Exclusion Crisis by explicitly denying the throne to a Roman Catholic. This action was aimed at the king’s brother and heir, James, an open convert to Catholicism. Charles refused to allow it to become law.

The dynastic crisis over the succession of a Catholic gave rise to two distinct factions in Parliament: the Tories, who supported a strong, hereditary monarchy and the restored ceremony of the Church of England, and the Whigs, who advocated parliamentary supremacy and toleration of Protestant dissenters such as Presbyterians. Both labels were originally derogatory: Tory meant an Irish Catholic bandit; Whig was the Irish Catholic designation for a Presbyterian Scot. The Tories favored James’s succession despite his Catholicism, whereas the Whigs opposed a Catholic monarch.

When James II (r. 1685–1688) succeeded his brother, he seemed determined to force Catholicism on his subjects. Tories and Whigs joined together when a male heir—who would take precedence over James’s two adult Protestant daughters—was born to James’s second wife, an Italian Catholic, in 1688. They invited the Dutch ruler William, prince of Orange, and his wife, James’s older daughter, Mary, to invade England. Mary was brought up as a Protestant and was willing to act with her husband against her father’s pro-Catholic policies. James fled to France, and Parliament offered the throne jointly to William (r. 1689–1702) and Mary (r. 1689–1694) on the condition that they accept a bill of rights guaranteeing Parliament’s full partnership in a constitutional government.

In the Bill of Rights (1689), William and Mary agreed not to raise a standing army or to levy taxes without Parliament’s consent. They also agreed to call meetings
of Parliament at least every three years, to guarantee free elections to parliamentary seats, and to abide by Parliament’s decisions. The agreement gave England’s constitutional government a written, legal basis by formally recognizing Parliament as a self-contained, independent body that shared power with the rulers. Victorious supporters of the coup declared it the Glorious Revolution because it was achieved with so little bloodshed (at least in England).

The propertied classes who controlled Parliament prevented any resurgence of the popular turmoil of the 1640s. The Toleration Act of 1689 granted all Protestants freedom of worship, though non-Anglicans (those not in the Church of England) were still excluded from the universities; Catholics got no rights but were more often left alone to worship privately. When the Catholics in Ireland rose to defend James II, William and Mary’s troops savagely suppressed them.

Social Contract Theory: Hobbes and Locke

Out of the turmoil of the English revolutions came a major rethinking of the foundations of all political authority. Although Thomas Hobbes and John Locke wrote
in response to the upheavals of their times, they offered opposing arguments that were applicable to any place and any time, not just England of the seventeenth century. Hobbes justified absolute authority; Locke provided the rationale for constitutionalism. Yet both argued that all authority came not from divine right but from a social contract among citizens.

Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) was a royalist who sat out the English civil war of the 1640s in France, where he tutored the future king Charles II. Returning to England in 1651, Hobbes published his masterpiece, *Leviathan*, in which he argued for unlimited authority in a ruler. Absolute authority could be vested in either a king or a parliament; it had to be absolute, Hobbes insisted, in order to overcome the defects of human nature. Believing that people are essentially self-centered and driven by the “right to self-preservation,” Hobbes made his case by referring to science, not religion. To Hobbes, human life in a state of nature—that is, any situation without firm authority—was “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.” Only the assurance of social order could make people secure enough to act according to law; consequently, giving up personal liberty, he maintained, was the price of collective security. Rulers derived their power, he concluded, from a contract in which absolute authority protects people’s rights.

Hobbes’s notion of rule by an absolute authority left no room for political dissent or nonconformity, and it infuriated both royalists and supporters of Parliament. He enraged his fellow royalists by arguing that authority came not from divine right but from the social contract. Parliamentary supporters resisted Hobbes’s claim that rulers must possess absolute authority to prevent the greater evil of anarchy. Like Machiavelli before him, Hobbes became associated with a cynical, pessimistic view of human nature, and future political theorists often began their arguments by refuting Hobbes.

Rejecting both Hobbes and the more traditional royalist defenses of absolute authority, John Locke (1632–1704) used the notion of a social contract to provide a foundation for constitutionalism. Locke experienced political life firsthand as physician, secretary, and intellectual companion to the earl of Shaftesbury, a leading English Whig. In 1683, during the Exclusion Crisis, Locke fled with Shaftesbury to the Dutch Republic. There he continued work on his *Two Treatises of Government*, which, when published in 1690, served to justify the revolution of 1688. Locke’s position was thoroughly anti-absolutist. He denied the divine right of kings and ridiculed the common royalist idea that political power in the state mirrored the father’s authority in the family. Like Hobbes, he posited a state of nature that applied to all people. Unlike Hobbes, however, he thought people were reasonable and the state of nature peaceful.

Locke insisted that government’s only purpose was to protect life, liberty, and property, a notion that linked economic and political freedom. Ultimate authority rested in the will of a majority of men who owned property, and government should be limited to its basic purpose of protection. A ruler who failed to uphold his part of the social contract between the ruler and the populace could be justifiably resisted, an idea that would become crucial for the leaders of the American Revolution a century later. For England’s seventeenth-century landowners, however, Locke helped validate a revolution that consolidated their interests and ensured their privileges in the social hierarchy.
Locke defended his optimistic view of human nature in the immensely influential *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690). He denied the existence of any innate ideas and asserted instead that each human is born with a mind that is a tabula rasa (blank slate). Not surprisingly, Locke devoted considerable energy to rethinking educational practices; he believed that education shaped the human personality by channeling all sensory experience. Everything humans know, he claimed, comes from sensory experience, not from anything inherent in human nature. Although Locke himself owned shares in the Royal African Company and justified slavery, his writings were later used by abolitionists in their campaign against slavery.

**REVIEW QUESTION** What differences over religion and politics caused the conflict between king and Parliament in England?

**Outposts of Constitutionalism**

When William and Mary came to the throne in England in 1689, the Dutch and the English put aside the rivalries that had brought them to war against each other in 1652–1654, 1665–1667, and 1672–1674. The English and Dutch had much in common: oriented toward commerce, especially overseas, they both had developed representative forms of government. Also among the few outposts of constitutionalism in the seventeenth century were the British North American colonies, which developed representative government while the English were preoccupied with their revolutions at home. Constitutionalism was not the only factor shaping this Atlantic world; as constitutionalism developed in the colonies, so, too, did the enslavement of black Africans as a new labor force.

**The Dutch Republic**

When the Dutch Republic gained formal independence from Spain in 1648, it had already established a decentralized, constitutional state. Rich merchants called regents effectively controlled the internal affairs of each province and (through the States General) chose the stadholder, the executive officer responsible for defense and for representing the state at all ceremonial occasions. They almost always picked one of the princes of the house of Orange, but the stadholder resembled a president more than a king.

The Dutch Republic soon became Europe’s financial capital. Praised for their industriousness, thrift, and cleanliness—and maligned as greedy, dull, and fat—the Dutch dominated overseas commerce with their shipping (Map 16.2). They imported products from all over the world: spices, tea, and silk from Asia; sugar and tobacco from the Americas; wool from England and Spain; timber and furs from Scandinavia; grain from eastern Europe. A widely reprinted history of Amsterdam that appeared in 1662 described the city as “risen through the hand of God to the peak of prosperity and greatness. . . . The whole world stands amazed at its riches and from east and west, north and south they come to behold it.”
CHAPTER 16 • ABSOLUTISM, CONSTITUTIONALISM, AND THE SEARCH FOR ORDER 1640–1700

The Dutch rapidly became the most prosperous and best-educated people in Europe. Whereas in other countries kings, nobles, and churches bought art, in the Dutch Republic art buyers were merchants, artisans, and shopkeepers. One foreigner commented that “pictures are very common here, there being scarce an ordinary tradesman whose house is not decorated with them.” Relative prosperity decreased the need for married women to work, so Dutch society developed the clear contrast between middle-class male and female roles that would become prevalent elsewhere in Europe and in America more than a century later.

Extraordinarily high levels of urbanization and literacy created a large reading public. Dutch presses printed books censored elsewhere, and the University of Leiden attracted students and professors from all over Europe. Dutch tolerance extended to the works of Benedict Spinoza (1633–1677), a Jewish philosopher and biblical scholar who was expelled by his synagogue for alleged atheism but left alone by the Dutch authorities. Spinoza strove to reconcile religion with science and mathematics, but his work scandalized many Christians and Jews because he seemed to equate God
and nature. Like nature, Spinoza’s God followed unchangeable laws and could not be influenced by human actions, prayers, or faith.

The Dutch lived, however, in a world of international rivalries in which strong central authority gave their enemies an advantage. The naval wars with England between 1652 and 1674 and the land wars with France, which lasted until 1713, drained the state’s revenues. The Dutch survived these direct military challenges but began to lose their position in international trade as both the British and French limited commerce with their own colonies to merchants from their own nations. At the end of the seventeenth century, as the Dutch elites became more preoccupied with ostentation, the Dutch “golden age” came to an end.

**Freedom and Slavery in the New World**

The Dutch Republic competed with England, France, and other European nations for its share of the burgeoning slave trade, but it lost its only settler colony in North America, New Netherland (present-day New York, New Jersey, Delaware, and Connecticut), to England in 1674. After the Spanish and Portuguese had shown that African slaves could be transported and forced to labor in South America and Central America, the English and French endeavored to set up similar labor systems in their new Caribbean island colonies. White planters with large tracts of land bought African slaves to work fields of sugarcane; and as they gradually built up their holdings, the planters displaced most of the original white settlers.

By the end of the seventeenth century, slavery had become codified as an inherited status that applied only to blacks. In 1661, Barbados instituted a slave code that stripped all Africans of rights under English law. Louis XIV promulgated a “black code” in 1685 to regulate the legal status of slaves in the French colonies and to prevent non-Catholics from owning slaves. The code supposedly set limits on the violence planters could exercise and required them to house, feed, and clothe their slaves. But white planters simply ignored provisions of the code that did not suit them, and in any case, because the code defined slaves as property, slaves could not themselves bring suit in court to demand better treatment.

The highest church and government authorities in Catholic and Protestant countries alike condoned the gradually expanding slave trade. In 1600, seventy-six hundred Africans were exported annually from Africa to the New World; by 1700, this number had increased more than fourfold, to thirty-three thousand. Historians advance several different ideas about which factors increased the slave trade: some claim that improvements in muskets made European slavers more effective; others cite the rising price for slaves, which made their sale more attractive for the Africans who sold them; still others focus on factors internal to Africa such as the increasing size of African armies and their use of muskets in fighting and capturing other Africans for sale as slaves. What is clear is that a combination of factors prepared the way for the development of an Atlantic economy based on slavery.

While blacks were being subjected to the most degrading forms of bondage, whites in the colonies enjoyed more freedom than ever before. Virtually left to themselves during the upheavals in England, the fledgling English colonies in
North America developed representative government on their own. Almost every colony had a two-house legislature. William and Mary reluctantly allowed emerging colonial elites even more control over local affairs. The social and political elite among the settlers hoped to impose an English social hierarchy dominated by rich landowners. Ordinary immigrants to the colonies, however, took advantage of plentiful land to carve out their own farms using white servants and, later, in some colonies, African slaves.

For native Americans, the expanding European presence meant something else altogether. They faced death through disease, warfare, and the accelerating loss of their homelands. Many native Americans believed that land was a divine gift provided for their collective use and not subject to individual ownership. Europeans’ claims that they owned exclusive land rights consequently resulted in frequent skirmishes. In 1675–1676, for instance, three tribes allied under Metacomet (called King Philip by the English) threatened the survival of New England settlers, who savagely repulsed the attacks and sold their captives as slaves. The benefits of constitutionalism were reserved for Europeans.

**REVIEW QUESTION** Why did constitutionalism thrive in the Dutch Republic and the British North American colonies, even as their participation in the slave trade grew?

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**Absolutism in Central and Eastern Europe**

Constitutionalism had an outpost in central and eastern Europe, too, but there it collapsed in failure. A long crisis in Poland-Lithuania virtually destroyed central state authority and pulled much of eastern Europe into its turbulent wake. Most central and eastern European rulers followed Louis XIV’s model of absolutist state building, though they did not blindly emulate him, in part because they confronted conditions peculiar to their regions. Everywhere in eastern Europe, nobles lorded over their serfs but owed almost slavish obedience in turn to their rulers.

**Poland-Lithuania Overwhelmed**

In the version of constitutionalism adopted in Poland-Lithuania, the great nobles dominated the Sejm (parliament). To maintain an equilibrium among themselves, these nobles each wielded an absolute veto power. This “free veto” constitutional system deadlocked parliamentary government and left the monarch, elected by the nobles, with little room to maneuver.

Ukrainian Cossack warriors revolted against the king of Poland-Lithuania in 1648, inaugurating two decades of tumult known as the Deluge. Cossack was the name given to runaway serfs and poor nobles who formed outlaw bands in the no-man’s-land of southern Russia and Ukraine. In 1654, the Cossacks offered Ukraine to Russian rule, provoking a Russo-Polish war that ended in 1667 when the tsar annexed eastern Ukraine and Kiev.
Many towns were destroyed in the fighting, and as much as a third of the Polish population perished. The once prosperous Jewish and Protestant minorities suffered greatly: some fifty-six thousand Jews were killed by the Cossacks, the Polish peasants, or the Russian troops. Surviving Jews moved from towns to shtetls (Jewish villages), where they took up petty trading, moneylending, tax gathering, and tavern leasing—activities that fanned peasant anti-Semitism. Desperate for protection amid the war, most Polish Protestants backed the violently anti-Catholic Swedes, who tried to intervene militarily, and the victorious Catholic majority branded the Protestants as traitors. In Poland-Lithuania, people came to assume that a good Pole was a Catholic. The commonwealth had ceased to be an outpost of toleration.

The commonwealth revived briefly when a man of ability and ambition, Jan Sobieski (r. 1674–1696), was elected king. Sobieski gained a reputation throughout Europe when he led twenty-five thousand Polish cavalrymen into battle in the siege of Vienna in 1683. His cavalry helped rout the Turks and turned the tide against the Ottomans. Despite his efforts to rebuild the monarchy, Sobieski could not halt Poland-Lithuania’s decline into powerlessness. The Polish version of constitutionalism fatally weakened the state and made it prey to neighboring powers.

**Brandenburg-Prussia: Militaristic Absolutism**

The contrast between Poland-Lithuania and Brandenburg-Prussia could not have been more extreme. The first was huge in territory and constitutional in government but in the end failed as a state. The second was puny, made up of disparate far-flung territories, and moving toward absolutism. In the nineteenth century Prussia would unify the different German states into modern-day Germany.

The ruler of Brandenburg was an elector, one of the seven German princes entitled to select the Holy Roman Emperor. Since the sixteenth century, the ruler of Brandenburg had also controlled the duchy of East Prussia; after 1618, the state was called Brandenburg-Prussia. Despite meager resources, **Frederick William of Hohenzollern**, who was the Great Elector of Brandenburg-Prussia (r. 1640–1688), succeeded in welding his scattered lands into an absolutist state.

Frederick William was determined to force his territories’ estates (representative assemblies) to grant him a dependable income. The Great Elector struck a deal with the Junkers (nobles) of each province: in exchange for allowing him to collect taxes, he gave them complete control over their enserfed peasants and exempted them from taxation. By the end of his reign, the estates met only on ceremonial occasions. Frederick William was able to expand his army from eight thousand to thirty thousand men. Peasants filled the ranks, and Junkers became officers.

As a Calvinist ruler, Frederick William avoided the ostentation of the French court, even while following the absolutist model of centralizing state power. He boldly rebuffed Louis XIV by welcoming twenty thousand French Huguenot refugees after Louis’s revocation of the Edict of Nantes. In pursuing foreign and domestic policies that promoted state power and prestige, Frederick William adroitly switched sides in Louis’s wars and would stop at almost nothing to crush resistance at home. In 1701, his son Frederick I (r. 1688–1713) persuaded Holy Roman Emperor Leopold I to grant him the title “king in Prussia” in exchange for support in the War of the Spanish Succession. Prussia had arrived as an important power.
An Uneasy Balance: Austrian Habsburgs and Ottoman Turks

Holy Roman Emperor Leopold I (r. 1658–1705) ruled over a variety of territories of different ethnicities, languages, and religions, yet in ways similar to his French and Prussian counterparts, he gradually consolidated his power. Like all other Holy Roman Emperors since 1438, Leopold was an Austrian Habsburg. He was simultaneously duke of Upper and Lower Silesia, count of Tyrol, archduke of Upper and Lower Austria, king of Bohemia, king of Hungary and Croatia, and ruler of Styria and Moravia (Map 16.3). Some of these territories were provinces in the Holy Roman Empire; others were simply ruled from Vienna as Habsburg family holdings.

In response to the weakening of the Holy Roman Empire by the ravages of the Thirty Years’ War, the emperor and his closest officials took control over recruiting, provisioning, and strategic planning and worked to replace the mercenaries hired during the war with a permanent standing army that promoted professional discipline. Intent on replacing Bohemian nobles who had supported the 1618 revolt against Austrian authority, the Habsburgs promoted a new nobility made up of Czechs, Germans, Italians, Spaniards, and even Irish who used German as their

MAP 16.3 State Building in Central and Eastern Europe, 1648–1699

The Austrian Habsburgs had long contested the Ottoman Turks for dominance of eastern Europe, and by 1699 they had pushed the Turks out of Hungary. In central Europe, the Austrian Habsburgs confronted the growing power of Brandenburg-Prussia, which had emerged from relative obscurity after the Thirty Years’ War to begin an aggressive program of expanding its military and its territorial base. As emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, the Austrian Habsburg ruler governed a huge expanse of territory, but the emperor’s control was in fact only partial because of guarantees of local autonomy.
common tongue, professed Catholicism, and loyally served the Austrian dynasty. Bohemia became a virtual Austrian colony. In addition to holding Louis XIV in check on his western frontiers, Leopold confronted the ever-present challenge of the Ottoman Turks to the east. Austria had fought the Turks for control of Hungary for more than 150 years. In 1682, war broke out again. As they had in 1529, the Turks in 1683 pushed all the way to the gates of Vienna and laid siege to the Austrian capital. With the help of Polish cavalry, the Austrians finally broke the siege and turned the tide in a major counteroffensive. By the Treaty of Karlowitz of 1699, the Ottoman Turks surrendered almost all of Hungary to the Austrians, marking the beginning of the decline of Ottoman power.

Once the Turks had been beaten back, Austrian rule over Hungary tightened. In 1687, the Habsburg dynasty’s hereditary right to the Hungarian crown was acknowledged by the Hungarian diet, a parliament revived by Leopold in 1681 to gain the cooperation of Hungarian nobles. The diet was dominated by a core of pro-Habsburg Hungarian aristocrats, who would support the dynasty until it fell in 1918. To root out remaining Turkish influence and assert Austrian superiority, Leopold systematically destroyed Turkish buildings and rebuilt Catholic churches, monasteries, roadside shrines, and monuments in the flamboyant Austrian baroque style.

The Ottoman Turks pursued their state consolidation in a different fashion. Hundreds of thousands of Turkish families had moved with Turkish soldiers into the Balkan peninsula in the 1400s and 1500s. As locals converted to Islam, administration passed gradually into their hands. The Ottoman state, ultimately, would last longer than the French absolutist monarchy, even though the Ottoman rulers, the sultans, were often challenged by mutinous army officers. Despite frequent palace coups and assassinations of sultans, the Ottoman state continued to pose a massive military threat on Europe’s southeastern borders.

Russia: Setting the Foundations of Bureaucratic Absolutism

Seventeenth-century Russia seemed a world apart from the Europe of Leopold I and Louis XIV. Straddling Europe and Asia, the Russian lands stretched across Siberia to the Pacific Ocean. Western visitors either sneered or shuddered at the “barbarism” of Russian life, and Russians reciprocated by nursing deep suspicions of everything foreign. But under the surface, Russia was evolving as an absolutist state; the tsars wanted to claim unlimited autocratic power, but like their European counterparts they had to surmount internal disorder and come to an accommodation with noble landlords.

In 1649, the Russian tsar Alexei (r. 1645–1676) convened the Assembly of the Land (consisting of noble delegates from the provinces) to consult on a sweeping law code to organize Russian society in a strict social hierarchy. The code of 1649—which held for nearly two centuries—assigned all subjects to a hereditary class according to their current occupation or state needs. Slaves and free peasants were merged into a serf class. As serfs, they could not change occupations or move; they were tightly tied to the soil and to their noble masters. To prevent tax evasion, the code also forbade townspeople to move from the community where they resided. Nobles owed absolute obedience to the tsar and were required to serve in the army, but in return no other group could own estates worked by serfs. Serfs became the
chattel of their lord, who could sell them like horses or land. Their lives differed little from those of the slaves on the plantations in the Americas.

Some peasants resisted enserfment. In 1667, Stenka Razin (1630–1671), the head of a powerful band of pirates and outlaws in southern Russia, led a rebellion that promised liberation from the great noble landowners. Captured four years later by the tsar’s army, Razin was taken to Moscow, where he was dismembered in front of the public and his body thrown to the dogs. Thousands of his followers also suffered grisly deaths, but Razin’s memory lived on in folk songs and legends.

Like his Western rivals, Tsar Alexei wanted a bigger army, exclusive control over state policy, and a greater say in religious matters. The size of the army increased dramatically from 35,000 in the 1630s to 220,000 by the end of the century. The Assembly of the Land, once an important source of consultation for the nobles, never met again after 1653. Alexei also imposed firm control over the Russian Orthodox church. The state-dominated church took action against a religious group called the Old Believers, who rejected church efforts to bring Russian worship in line with Byzantine tradition. Whole communities of Old Believers starved or burned themselves to death rather than submit to the crown.

Nevertheless, modernizing trends prevailed. Tsar Alexei set up the first Western-style theater in the Kremlin, and his daughter Sophia translated French plays. The most adventurous nobles began to wear German-style clothing. Some even argued that service, not just birth, should determine rank. Russia’s long struggle over Western influences had begun.

**Review Question**

Why did absolutism flourish everywhere in eastern Europe except Poland-Lithuania?

**The Search for Order in Elite and Popular Culture**

In the period of state building from 1640 to 1715, questions about obedience, order, and the limits of state power occupied poets, painters, architects, and men of science as much as they did rulers and their ministers. How much freedom of expression could be allowed? How did the individual’s needs and aspirations fit with the requirements of state authority? The greatest thinkers and writers wrestled with these issues and helped frame debates for generations to come. At the same time, elites worked to distinguish themselves from the lower classes by developing new codes of correct behavior and teaching order and discipline to their social inferiors. Their repeated efforts show, however, that popular culture had its own dynamics that resisted control from above.

**Freedom and Constraint in the Arts and Sciences**

Most Europeans feared disorder above all else. The French mathematician Blaise Pascal vividly captured their worries in his Pensées (Thoughts) of 1660: “I look on all sides, and I see only darkness everywhere.” Reason could not determine whether God
existed or not, Pascal concluded. Poets, painters, and architects all grappled with similar issues of faith, reason, and authority, but most of them came to more positive conclusions than Pascal about human capacities.

The English Puritan poet John Milton (1608–1674) wrestled with the inevitable limitations on individual liberty. In 1643, in the midst of the civil war between king and Parliament, he published writings in favor of allowing married couples to divorce. When Parliament enacted a censorship law aimed at such literature, Milton responded in 1644 with one of the first defenses of freedom of the press, Areopagitica. In it, he argued that even controversial books about religion should be allowed. Forced into retirement after the restoration of the monarchy, Milton published his epic poem Paradise Lost in 1667. He used the biblical Adam and Eve’s fall from grace to meditate on human freedom and the tragedies of rebellion. His Satan, the proud angel who challenges God and is cast out of heaven, is so compelling as to be heroic. In the end, Adam and Eve learn the limits to their freedom, yet personal liberty remains essential to their humanity.

The dominant artistic styles of the time—the baroque and the classical—both submerged the ordinary individual in a grander design. The combination of religious and political purposes in baroque art is best exemplified in the architecture and sculpture of Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1598–1680), the papacy’s official artist. His architectural masterpiece was the gigantic square facing St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome. Bernini’s use of freestanding colonnades and a huge open space was meant to impress the individual observer with the power of the popes and the Catholic religion.

Although France was a Catholic country, French artists, like their patron Louis XIV, preferred the standards of classicalism to those of the baroque. As its name suggests, classicism reflected the ideals of the art of antiquity: geometric shapes, order, and harmony of lines took precedence over the sensuous, exuberant, and emotional forms of the baroque. Rather than being overshadowed by the sheer power of emotional display, in classicism the individual could be found at the intersection of converging, symmetrical, straight lines. These influences were apparent in the work of the leading French painters of the period, Nicolas Poussin (1594–1665) and Claude Lorrain (1600–1682), both of whom tried to re-create classical Roman values in their mythological scenes and Roman landscapes.

Art could also serve the interests of science. One of the most skilled illustrators of insects and flowers was Maria Sibylla Merian (1647–1717), a German-born painter-scholar whose engravings were widely celebrated for their brilliant realism and microscopic clarity. Merian separated from her husband and accompanied missionaries to the Dutch colony of Surinam, in South America. She painted watercolors of the exotic flowers, birds, and insects she found in the jungle around the cocoa and sugarcane plantations.

Despite the initial religious controversies associated with the scientific revolution, absolutist rulers quickly saw the potential of the new science for enhancing their prestige and glory. Various German princes supported the work of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716), who claimed that he, and not Isaac Newton, had invented modern calculus. A lawyer, mathematician, and philosopher who wrote about metaphysics, cosmology, and history, Leibniz also helped establish scientific societies in the German states. Government involvement in science was greatest in France. In 1666, Jean-Baptiste Colbert founded the Royal Academy of Sciences, which supplied fifteen scientists with government stipends. In contrast, the
Royal Society of London grew out of informal meetings of scientists at London and Oxford. It received a royal charter in 1662 but maintained complete independence.

Because of their exclusion from most universities, women only rarely participated in the new scientific discoveries. In 1667, nonetheless, the Royal Society of London invited the writer Margaret Cavendish to watch the exhibition of experiments. Labeled “mad” by her critics, she attacked the use of telescopes and microscopes because she detected in the new experimentalism a mechanistic view of the world that exalted masculine prowess and challenged the Christian belief in freedom of the will. Yet she urged the formal education of women, complaining that “we are kept like birds in cages to hop up and down in our houses.”

**Women and Manners**

Although excluded from the universities and the professions, women played important roles not only in the home but also in more formal spheres of social
interaction, such as the courts of rulers. Under the tutelage of their mothers and wives, nobles learned manners, or the fine points of social etiquette. In some ways, aristocratic men were expected to act more like women; just as women had long been expected to please men, now aristocratic men had to please their monarch or patron by displaying proper manners and conversing with elegance and wit.

The upper classes began to reject popular festivals and fairs in favor of private theaters, where seats were relatively expensive and behavior was formal. Clowns and buffoons now seemed vulgar; the last king of England to keep a court fool was Charles I. Some tastes spread downward from the upper classes, however. Chivalric romances that had long entranced the nobility, such as Ariosto’s Orlando Furioso, now appeared in simplified form in cheap booklets printed for lower-class readers.

Molière, the greatest French playwright of the seventeenth century, wrote sparkling comedies of manners that revealed much about the new aristocratic behavior. His play The Middle-Class Gentleman, first performed for Louis XIV in 1670, revolves around the yearning of a rich middle-class Frenchman, Monsieur Jourdain, to learn to act like a gentilhomme (both “gentleman” and “nobleman”). Monsieur Jourdain buys fancy clothes; hires private instructors in dancing, music, fencing, and philosophy; and lends money to a debt-ridden noble in hopes that the noble will marry his daughter. Only his sensible wife and his daughter’s love for a worthier commoner stand in his way. The message for the king’s courtiers seemed to be a reassuring one: only born nobles can hope to act like nobles. But the play also showed how the middle classes were learning to emulate the nobility: if one could learn to act nobly through self-discipline, could not anyone with some education and money pass himself off as noble?

As Molière’s play demonstrated, new attention to manners trickled down from the court to the middle class. A French treatise on manners written in 1672 explained proper behavior:

- Formerly one was permitted . . . to dip one’s bread into the sauce, provided only that one had not already bitten it. Nowadays that would be a kind of rusticity.
- Formerly one was allowed to take from one’s mouth what one could not eat and drop it on the floor, provided it was done skillfully. Now that would be very disgusting.

The key words rusticity and disgusting reveal the association of unacceptable social behavior with the peasantry, dirt, and repulsion. Similar rules governed spitting and blowing one’s nose in public.

Courtly manners often permeated the upper reaches of society by means of the salon, an informal gathering held regularly in a private home and presided over by a socially eminent woman. The French government occasionally worried that these gatherings might challenge its authority, but the three main topics of salon conversation were love, literature, and philosophy. Before publishing a manuscript, many authors, including court favorites like Pierre Corneille and Jean Racine, would read their compositions to a salon gathering.

Some women went beyond encouraging male authors and began to write their own works, but they faced many obstacles. Madame de Lafayette wrote several short novels that were published anonymously because it was considered inappropriate for aristocratic women to appear in print. Following the publication of The Princess
of Clèves in 1678, she denied having written it. Despite these limitations, French women began to turn out best sellers of that new type of literary form, the novel. Their success prompted the philosopher Pierre Bayle to remark in 1697 that “our best French novels for a long time have been written by women.”

The new importance of women in the world of manners and letters did not sit well with everyone. Although the French writer François Poulain de la Barre, in a series of works published in the 1670s, used the new science to assert the equality of women’s minds, most men resisted the idea. Clergymen, lawyers, scholars, and playwrights attacked women’s growing public influence. Women, they complained, were corrupting forces and needed restraint. Molière wrote plays denouncing women’s pretension to judge literary merit. English playwrights derided learned women by creating characters with names such as Lady Knowall, Lady Meanwell, and Mrs. Lovewit.

A real-life target of the English playwrights was Aphra Behn (1640–1689), one of the first professional woman authors. Her short novel Oroonoko (1688) told the story of an African prince mistakenly sold into slavery. The story was so successful that it was adapted by playwrights and performed repeatedly in England and France for the next hundred years.

Reforming Popular Culture

Controversies over female influence had little effect on the unschooled peasants who made up most of Europe’s population. Peasant culture had three main elements: religion, which shaped every aspect of life and death; knowledge needed to work at farming or in a trade; and popular forms of entertainment such as village fairs and dances. What changed most noticeably in the seventeenth century was the social elites’ attitude toward lower-class culture.

In the seventeenth century, Protestant and Catholic churches alike pushed hard to change popular religious practices. Their campaigns against popular “paganism” began during the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation and Catholic Counter-Reformation but reached much of rural Europe only in the seventeenth century. Puritans in England tried to root out maypole dances, Sunday village fairs, gambling, taverns, and bawdy ballads. In Lutheran Norway, pastors denounced a widespread belief in the miracle-working powers of St. Olaf. The word superstition previously meant “false religion” (Protestantism was a superstition for Catholics, Catholicism for Protestants); in the seventeenth century it took on its modern meaning of irrational fears, beliefs, and practices that anyone educated or refined would avoid.

Catholic bishops in the French provinces trained parish priests to reform their flocks by using catechisms in local dialects and insisting that parishioners attend Mass. The church faced a formidable challenge. One bishop in France complained in 1671, “Can you believe that there are in this diocese entire villages where no one has even heard of Jesus Christ?” In some places, believers sacrificed animals to the Virgin; prayed to the new moon; and, as in pre-Christian times, worshipped at the sources of streams.

Like its Protestant counterpart, the Catholic campaign against ignorance and superstition helped extend state power. Clergy, officials, and local police worked together to limit carnival celebrations, to regulate pilgrimages to shrines, and to
replace “indecent” images of saints with more restrained and decorous ones. In Catholicism, the cult of the Virgin Mary and devotions closely connected with Jesus, such as the Holy Sacrament and the Sacred Heart, took precedence over the celebration of popular saints who seemed to have pagan origins or were credited with unverified miracles.

The campaign for more disciplined religious practices helped generate a new attitude toward the poor. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the upper classes, the church, and the state increasingly regarded the poor as dangerous, deceitful, and lacking in character. The courts had previously expelled beggars from cities; now local leaders, both Catholic and Protestant, tried to reform their character. Municipal magistrates and local notables worked together to transform hospitals into houses of confinement for beggars. In Catholic France, upper-class women's religious associations, known as confraternities, set up asylums that confined prostitutes (by arrest if necessary) and rehabilitated them. Such groups advocated harsh discipline as the cure for poverty.

Even as reformers from church and state tried to regulate popular activities, villagers and townspeople pushed back with reassertions of their own values. For hundreds of years, peasants had maintained their own forms of village justice — called variously “rough music,” “charivari,” or in North America, “shivaree.” If a young man married a much older woman for her money, for example, villagers would serenade the couple by playing crude flutes, banging pots and pans, and firing muskets. If a man was rumored to have been physically assaulted by his wife, a reversal of the usual sex roles, he (or effigies of him and his wife) might be ridden on a donkey facing backward (to signify the role reversal) and pelted with dung before being ducked in a nearby pond or river. Others directed their mockery at tax officials, gamekeepers on big estates who tried to keep villagers from hunting, or unpopular preachers.

No matter how much care went into controlling religious festivals, such events almost invariably opened the door to popular reinterpretation and sometimes drunken celebration. When the Spanish introduced Corpus Christi processions to their colony in Peru in the seventeenth century, elite Incas dressed in royal costumes to carry the banners of their parishes. Their clothing and ornaments combined Christian symbols with their own indigenous ones. They thus signaled their conversion to Catholicism but also reasserted their own prior identities. The Corpus Christi festival, held in late May or early June, conveniently took place about the same time as Inca festivals from the pre-Spanish era. Carnival, the days preceding Lent on the Christian calendar — of which Mardi Gras (“Fat Tuesday”) is the last — offered the occasion for public revelry of all sorts. Although Catholic clergy worked hard to clamp down on the more riotous aspects of Carnival, many towns and villages still held parades, like those of present-day New Orleans or Rio de Janeiro, that included companies of local men dressed in special costumes and gigantic stuffed figures, sometimes with animal skins, animal heads, or elaborate masks.

**REVIEW QUESTION**

How did elite and popular culture become more separate in the seventeenth century?
Conclusion

The search for order took place on various levels, from the reform of the disorderly poor to the establishment of bureaucratic routines in government. The absolutist government of Louis XIV served as a model for all those who aimed to increase the power of the central state. Even Louis’s rivals—such as the Holy Roman Emperor Leopold I and Frederick William, the Great Elector of Brandenburg-Prussia—followed his lead in centralizing authority and building up their armies. Whether absolutist or constitutionalist in form, seventeenth-century states aimed to penetrate
more deeply into the lives of their subjects. They wanted more men for their armed forces; higher taxes to support their projects; and more control over foreign trade, religious dissent, and society’s unwanted.

Some tears had begun to appear, however, in the seamless fabric of state power. The civil war between Charles I and Parliament in England in the 1640s opened the way to new demands for political participation. When Parliament overthrew James II in 1688, it also insisted that the new king and queen, William and Mary, agree to the Bill of Rights. In the eighteenth century, new levels of economic growth and the appearance of new social groups would exert pressures on the European state system. The success of seventeenth-century rulers created the political and economic conditions in which their critics would flourish.

Chapter 16 Review

**KEY TERMS AND PEOPLE**

Be sure that you can identify the term or person and explain its historical significance.

- absolutism (p. 416)
- constitutionalism (p. 416)
- Louis XIV (p. 417)
- revocation of the Edict of Nantes (p. 421)
- bureaucracy (p. 421)
- mercantilism (p. 421)
- Levellers (p. 426)
- William, prince of Orange (p. 428)
- Glorious Revolution (p. 429)
- social contract (p. 430)
- Frederick William of Hohenzollern (p. 435)
- Stenka Razin (p. 438)
- classicism (p. 439)
- salon (p. 441)

**REVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. How “absolute” was the power of Louis XIV?
2. What differences over religion and politics caused the conflict between king and Parliament in England?
3. Why did constitutionalism thrive in the Dutch Republic and the British North American colonies, even as their participation in the slave trade grew?
4. Why did absolutism flourish everywhere in eastern Europe except Poland-Lithuania?
5. How did elite and popular culture become more separate in the seventeenth century?
MAKING CONNECTIONS

1. What accounts for the success of absolutism in some parts of Europe and its failure in others?
2. How did religious differences in the late seventeenth century still cause political conflict?
3. What were the chief differences between eastern and western Europe in this period?
4. Why was the search for order a major theme in science, politics, and the arts during this period?

IMPORTANT EVENTS

1642–1646 English civil war between Charles I and Parliament
1648 Peace of Westphalia ends Thirty Years’ War; Fronde revolt challenges royal authority in France; Ukrainian Cossack warriors rebel against king of Poland-Lithuania; Spain formally recognizes independence of Dutch Republic
1649 Charles I of England executed; new Russian legal code assigns all to hereditary class
1651 Thomas Hobbes publishes Leviathan
1660 Monarchy restored in England
1661 Slave code set up in Barbados
1667 Louis XIV begins first of many wars that continue throughout his reign
1678 Madame de Lafayette anonymously publishes The Princess of Clèves
1683 Austrian Habsburgs break Turkish siege of Vienna
1685 Louis XIV revokes Edict of Nantes
1688 Parliament deposes James II; William, prince of Orange, and Mary take the throne
1690 John Locke publishes Two Treatises of Government and Essay Concerning Human Understanding