

The Monarchs of Europe

In the Age of Absolutism

A Centers Investigation, Comparison,
& Prediction Activity

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Age of Absolutism

A Period of rule by powerful monarchs in the 1500s and 1600s throughout Europe.

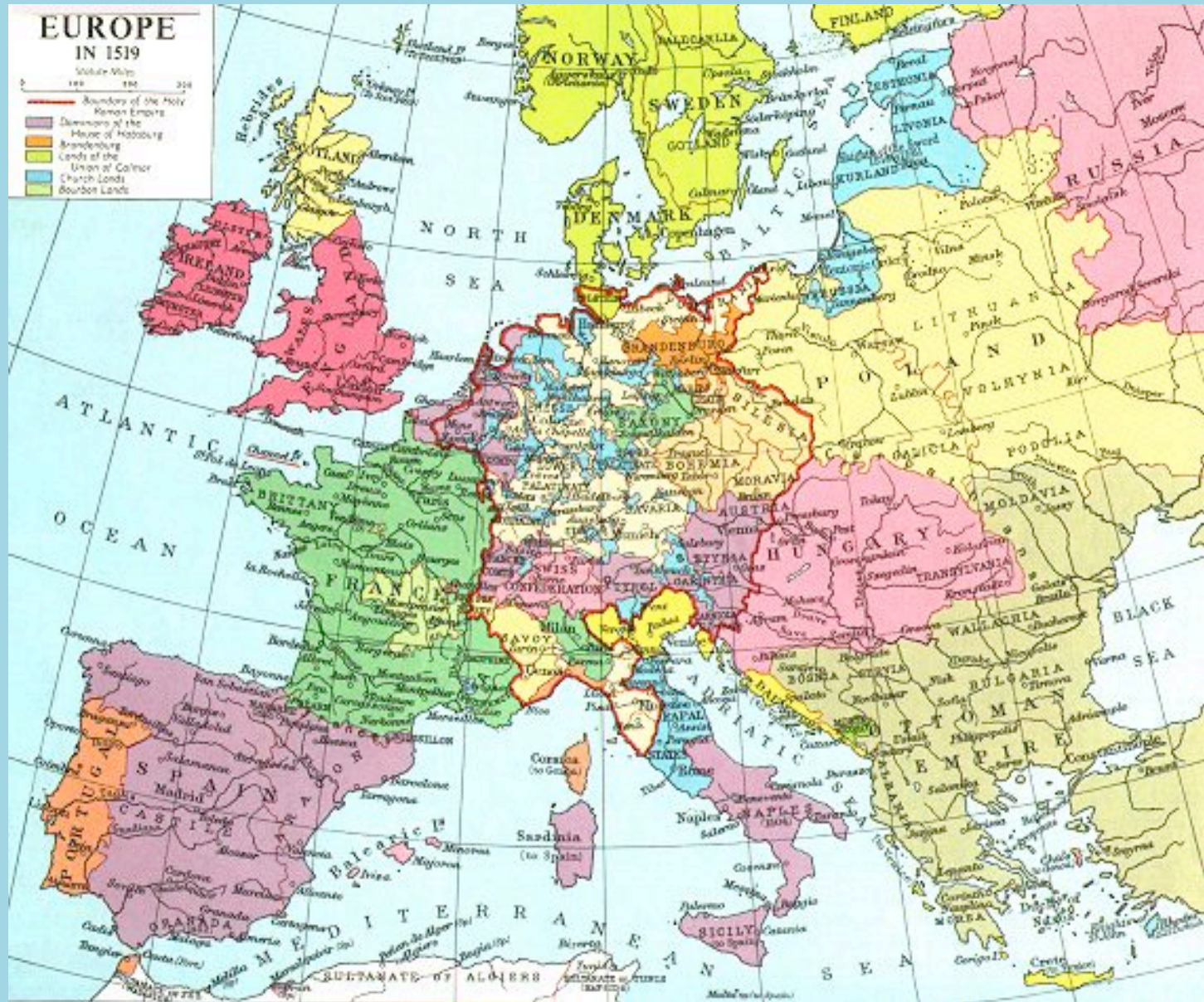
Absolutism – absolute or unlimited power in the hands of a monarch and his or her advisors. An absolute ruler would be granted their power through divine right and would rule with complete and undoubted loyalty.

Divine Right – the belief that monarchs received their power from God, and therefore had absolute control over all things. Through divine rule, one would create a better kingdom with harmony and efficiency.

Age of Absolutism

After years of **chaos, confusion, and competition** across Europe, the **monarchs** of the 1500s worked to create **stability** for their kingdoms. To create this stability, kings and queens set out to **unify territory**, to establish effective **systems of government**, and to create a **sense of loyalty** and obligation among the people in their kingdoms. This would establish the **leading countries** of the world in the years between 1500 and 1600 in **Europe**.

Europe during the Age of Absolutism



Activity Directions

- Visit each center as directed by your teacher.
- Read the information cards, and view any images, quotes, or other primary sources provided.
- Document the key facts onto your student handout, and discuss the station questions with your partners.
- Once finished with all centers, return to your seat to complete the wrap-up questions.
- Be prepared to discuss all of the centers' information with the class.

The Kings of Spain

Introduction

One royal family, the Hapsburgs, controlled much of Europe and parts of the new lands in the Americas. They were extremely powerful, and ruled with the true belief that they were in rule due to God's desire for them to rule, and to spread the Christian word. Once Charles V, the head of the Hapsburg family, decided to retire from his rule, he divided the kingdom up, giving some areas to his brother, and the rest to his son, Philip II.

Questions to Discuss

- What successes were seen by the Spanish monarchs?
- What problems were encountered by the Spanish monarchs?
- How did the Spanish monarchs deal with those problems?
- Were the Spanish monarchs effective? Why or why not?

Philip II



Philip II was the son of Charles V, and the most powerful of the Spanish Hapsburg family who ruled from 1556 to 1598. During his rule, he made many changes, including moving the capital to Madrid, and led Spain in many wars to defend the Catholic Church. This led to numerous wars which cost Spain a lot of money, but only weakened the empire in the end. The greatest of these losses was the loss of the Spanish Armada in the English Channel against England.



Spanish Armada

The Spanish Armada was a great naval force for Spain that was known across Europe for their great strength and abilities. However, after entering the English Channel to attack England for their defense of Protestant ways, the Armada was devastatingly defeated at the hands of the English with the aid of a violent storm. The English claimed that God defeated the Spanish with the “Protestant winds.”

Charles II

After Philip's rule of Spain, weak and ineffective rulers continued the decline of Spain, leading to eventual rebellions. Charles II, who ruled from 1665 to 1700, was the last of the Hapsburgs. He was seen as weak by the rest of Europe, he maintained no authority in his rule, and his lack of an heir for the throne left Spain in the hands of the other, more powerful rulers after his reign. His one act of calling for an investigation on the Inquisition only brought back incriminating reports on the acts of the state.





Spanish Inquisition

From the late 1400s through the 1800s, the Spanish monarchs called for the censorship, isolation, and even execution of those opposed to Catholicism. This included persecution of the Jews, attacks on the Muslims, expulsion and attacks on the Protestant Christians, and massive book burnings and restriction of written materials not approved by the Pope.

The Kings of England

Introduction

In England, the Tudor royal family strengthened the country and united the lands they conquered across the seas. This determined and popular family line were able to bring unity and stability to the region that had previously been in decline, and through that achievement, they were able to extend their power until the limits of law and Parliament were placed on them.

Questions to Discuss

- What successes were seen by the English monarchs?
- What problems were encountered by the English monarchs?
- How did the English monarchs deal with those problems?
- Were the English monarchs effective? Why or why not?

Henry VII



Henry VII was the first Tudor monarch from 1485 to 1509, and he was very smart in weakening his rivals to take and keep the throne. He called up merchant friends to serve as his advisors, and created a new aristocratic class in England. During his rule, he was also very good with the economy, encouraging foreign trade, avoiding costly wars, and limiting governmental spending. He was also fair in his collection of taxes, keeping the common people more pleased than they had been with other kings.

Henry VIII

King Henry VIII, ruling from 1509 to 1547, was the most powerful and most controversial of the Tudor monarchs. He did not follow in his father's leadership ways, and instead led England into many wars, manipulated Parliament to get his ways, and broke from the Catholic Church to make his own decisions on his divorce. Married six times to try to have an heir to the throne, he divorced wives, had wives killed, and divided the people of England over their religious beliefs in the process. He also took monastery lands to sell them to rich landowners for his own support, and often ruled in ways that angered the country.



Mary I



Queen Mary, or Bloody Mary as she was known, came to the throne in 1553 after Edward VI's death and ruled until her death in 1558. She was his Catholic half-sister, and she immediately ruled that Catholicism would be the religion of England, and ordered over 400 Protestants killed for their beliefs and for heresy. She also led England into war against France, losing the port of Calais. Fortunately, her death came before she did further damage to weaken England.

Elizabeth I

Queen Elizabeth I was known as the queen of the people. She was very opinionated and stern, often fighting with Parliament, but also brought many advancements to the people of England. Ruling from 1558 to 1603, she encouraged advancements in the arts, supporting the works of William Shakespeare in theatre, utilized selected nobles and the system of courts to uphold fair and peace-keeping laws, worked to maintain a balance of power for England in European affairs, and carried out military campaigns to increase and strengthen the English empire. From establishing nobility and social order to stabilizing the economy through the selling of government lands, she set that standard in England for monarchical rule. With her death also came the end of the Tudor Dynasty.





Elizabethan England

Queen Elizabeth brought in an era of style and status for England that set the standards for future generations. From fashion to the arts to the establishment of the ideal noble class, her England was one of elegance, cultural education, and influence advancement.

The Kings of France

Introduction

The Bourbon monarchy of France was one that set the standard for absolute rule. Starting with Henry IV, or Henry of Navarre, peace and stability was brought to the country. Along with that peace came a time of development and prosperity, at least for the royal family and the other elites of society.

Questions to Discuss

- What successes were seen by the French monarchs?
- What problems were encountered by the French monarchs?
- How did the French monarchs deal with those problems?
- Were the French monarchs effective? Why or why not?

Henry IV



Henry of Navarre started his rule of France in 1589. Until his assassination in 1610, he attempted to repair the French economy through trade and the build up of industry, he ordered the repair of roads and the building of bridges, and he re-established discipline in the royal army to attempt to strengthen France. He also issued the Edict of Nantes, allowing Protestants and Catholics the rights to worship in France. The Huguenots were granted civil rights and were permitted the same rights as the Catholics. Most of the decisions he made, he acted on without the consent or notification of the Estates-General. While this set the stage for the future Bourbon family kings, it also started a trend toward the dividing of the people from the king and the lessening of their loyalty.

Louis XIII



At 9 years old, Louis XIII became king after his father's assassination. While his mother controlled the throne until 1617, the king exiled her to regain his power, however, later turning over much of his power to his advisor, Cardinal Richelieu. Richelieu took away power from the nobles and weakened the power of the Protestant Huguenots. He also attempted to bring cultural focus in to France, supporting the arts and sciences in a movement toward bringing unity to the nation.

Louis XIV

In 1643, at age 5, Louis XIV came to power. He remained king of France for 72 years, making himself the most powerful Bourbon monarch and the most influential in absolute rule. Calling himself the Sun King, he declared himself as the ultimate rule. "L'etat, c'est moi!" I am the state!

With paranoid rule, he built up a large nobility, a powerful army, and the idea that he was the god of the people and they had no right to be displeased.

He also built the Palace of Versailles to flaunt the wealth and power of France, and also to serve as a protector from his fears.

He worked to continue the previous policies of the Bourbons, but the system of taxation was beginning to fail in France during his reign. While his long reign brought great cultural advances for France, it also left in it debt and with conflict arising from all sides.





Palace of Versailles

The grand palace at Versailles was built to demonstrate the wealth, power, and glory of France and of King Louis' rule. In addition to being elaborate in design and decoration, with detailed gardens, sculptures and artwork, it was also elaborate in its design to keep the nobles under the careful watch of the king. Providing unarguable defense to the king, he felt free and protected to live his extravagant life.

The Kings of the German States

Introduction

In the German States, an attempt at unity and the establishment of an absolute monarchy only brought further chaos and division, followed by the Thirty Years War over the religion of the region. While some monarchs were able to bring positive change, the region continued to experience controversy and conflict throughout the 1600s and into the 1700s.

Questions to Discuss

- What successes were seen by the German States' monarchs?
- What problems were encountered by the German States' monarchs?
- How did the German States' monarchs deal with those problems?
- Were the German States' monarchs effective? Why or why not?

Ferdinand of Styria

In 1617, King Ferdinand began his rule with the desire to strengthen the Hapsburg family and to end Protestantism in the Holy Roman Empire. This desire only fueled uprisings, civil wars, and wars against neighboring countries, resulting in a very divided German region with added debt and continued conflict over religion.





Thirty Years War

In Germany, after the Protestant Reformation and the creation of the religions of Lutheranism and Calvinism, conflict between all of the new and the old religions arose. This conflict between the different Protestant groups and the Catholics led to a civil war in the German territory, with each fighting for their own foothold in the region.

Maria Theresa of Austria



In Austria, Maria Theresa came to rule for the Hapsburg family in 1740 at just 23 years old, after her father establishing a royal decree to allow a woman to hold the throne. To prove herself worthy, she strengthened the central government, won over the support of the ministers of state, increased the number of roads across the country, and stabilized the tax collection system. Encouraging education, production and trade, she also helped Austria to develop a more knowledgeable populous and a stronger economy. Maria Theresa was the only female ruler of Austria and she ruled for 40 years.

Frederick William

The Hohenzollern family came to rule in Prussia and the Great Elector, Frederick William served as king from 1640 to 1688. During his reign, he increased and strengthened the army and raised the taxes to bring Prussia power in the 1600s. By allying with the Junkers, or nobles, of Prussia, he was able to control the country without any opposition.



Frederick William I



From 1713 to 1740, Frederick William I came to power and ruled with a strong centralized government and a bureaucracy under his direct control. He also focused on creating an “army of giants” with tall soldiers trained with great skill. This army became of the most efficient in Europe.

Frederick II

Frederick II, or Frederick the Great, worked as king to extend the territory of Prussia. This led him and his region into conflict and war with the other nations of Europe also attempting to extend their territory such as Austria. Despite his military exploits, he was also considered an enlightened despot, and ruled with the idea that he wanted what was best for the people of Prussia. He established freedom of the press and offered his people religious tolerance, while also modernizing the legal system and the economic system to help encourage production and overall success for this region. His rule from 1740 to 1786 brought Prussia great advancement and reform.



The Czars of Russia

Introduction

In Russia, the czars, or absolute leaders, ruled without opposition or any lack of control in their massive kingdom. With that powerful rule, they were able to conquer vast territory, make drastic economic changes, and bring some social advancements for their kingdom. This, however, was not always met with acceptance and praise from the people of the country.

Questions to Discuss

- What successes were seen by the Russian czars?
- What problems were encountered by the Russian czars?
- How did the Russian czars deal with those problems?
- Were the Russian czars effective? Why or why not?

Ivan IV



Ivan IV ruled Russia from 1533 to 1584, and was one of the most controversial Russian rulers of all time. While Ivan brought increased trade and extended territory to Russia, he also acted in very paranoid ways, having lands taken from the boyars (nobles) and having many exiled or killed if he considered them in opposition. Known as Ivan the Terrible, his obsessive policing of the region and the stories of his killing sprees stood to represent him more than the gains he made for Russia.

Peter I

From 1689 to 1725, Peter the Great of the Romanov family ruled Russia with energy, creativity, and a desire for learning. He was fascinated by the Western World and wanted to make Russia an updated, industrialized nation. He moved the capital city to St. Petersburg, extended Russia's territory, build up relations with other European countries, created a new class of nobles with their own rights and land, and brought new production centers and industry to the country. Some controversy came as Peter attempted to change the traditional ways of the Russian people to a more modern, more Western European style. This upset some Eastern Orthodox groups, and brought some division to his reign.





St. Petersburg

The newly built city on the Baltic coast ordered by Peter the Great became a model of a capital city. He brought in the finest materials of the time and hired the greatest builders to add the palaces and production centers needed to make this city comparable to the other great cities of Europe.

Catherine II



Catherine the Great ruled Russia from 1762 to 1796 as a very effective and culturally aware empress. She loved to study, and pushed many of her cultural loves onto the people of Russia, hoping to advance the entire nation in education and production. While she brutally crushed peasant uprising, she gave more power to the nobles, keeping them as her allies. She gained additional territory for Russia, and successfully took a warm water port on the Black Sea. While she set great standards for absolute rule during her reign, those that followed would not be as effective in their reign, and the monarchy of Russia would see problems and conflict in the future.

Wrap-up Questions

1. How did some monarchs bring stability to their kingdoms while others created chaos? Provide examples.
2. How were different absolute rulers (or families) similar in their rule? How were they different?
3. Which ruler or ruling family do you think was most successful? Why?
4. Do you think absolute rule is a good type of rule for a country? Why or why not?
5. What do you predict may arise as a result of the Age of Absolutism and the Absolute rulers? Explain.

Introduction Information & Discussion Points

Age of Absolutism –

Absolutism –

Divine Right -

Spain

England

Introduction Information & Discussion Points

France

German States

Russia

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