

bandits were known as *chauffeurs* because they held their victims' feet to the fire to force them to reveal the hiding place of their valuables. Yet many poor people considered some bandits as heroic Robin Hoods, who stole from the rich to give to the poor.

## A CENTURY OF CONTRASTS

The eighteenth century was a period of contrasts. Musical performances at court and in châteaux and elegant townhouses took place while peasants and rural day laborers struggled to survive, toiling in fields they rarely owned or working as dock or market porters, chimney sweeps, or common laborers in town. The well-heeled financier, wholesale merchant, manufacturer, or lawyer in Paris, Amsterdam, Barcelona, or Vienna lived in a vastly more cosmopolitan world, increasingly shaped by consumerism, than did their counterparts in the relatively few cities and towns in Prussia, Russia, and the Balkans. In many ways a century still dominated politically by nobles, the eighteenth century also was a dynamic period of economic and social transformation, beginning with the Industrial Revolution in England. Commerce and manufacturing increased on the continent, as well. Developing trade across oceans changed patterns of consumption in Europe. Trade remained the basis of the British Empire, which stretched across the world. Rivals Spain and France, too, were colonial powers.

Economic and social changes brought remarkable political consequences during the 1760s and 1770s. English country gentlemen who invariably supported court policies and those who sometimes opposed them began to look and act like political parties. And the domination of political life by an oligarchy of landowners came under challenge from ordinary people without the right to vote. In the North American colonies, the king's subjects protested the fact that they were taxed without representation, and they rebelled against British rule.

On the continent, denunciations of unwarranted privilege began to be heard, including calls for reform of the French absolute monarchy. Public opinion gradually began to see parlements as blocks against absolute rule and defenders of the rights of the "nation," a term that increasingly came into use. Elsewhere on the continent, too, opposition to entrenched privilege became more insistent.

# EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY DYNASTIC RIVALRIES AND POLITICS



King George III (ruled 1760–1820) proclaimed that he “gloried in the name of Britain.” Indeed during his reign, despite his personal failings, a nationalist cult developed around the British monarchy, significantly after the empire suffered its biggest loss, that of the thirteen American colonies.

The king projected the image of an ordinary family man, surrounded by his homely wife and fifteen children. Less interested in goings-on in Hanover, his family’s dynastic home, than his predecessors, he won popular affection in Britain. “This young man,” assessed the writer Horace Walpole, “don’t stand in one spot with his eyes fixed royally on the ground, and dropping bits of German news; he walks about and speaks to everybody.” The king’s domesticity also made him a target for the gentle spoofs of caricaturists. His nervousness led him to bombard almost everyone he encountered with questions, ending with “hey, hey?” By the last decade of the century, symptoms of a hereditary disease made George III appear to be quite mad.

Early in his reign, King George III held strongly to royal prerogatives, even within the context of the British constitutional monarchy. Yet not only did British nationalism develop rapidly with him on the throne, but the idea developed in and beyond Parliament that a party of opposition formed an essential part of the parliamentary system of representation.

The nature of the European state system itself also underwent fundamental change in the eighteenth century as the rivalries between Great Britain, France, Spain, and the Dutch Republic (the United Provinces) broadened to a global scale. Whereas Europe in the period of Louis XIV had been marked by frenetic war-making—much of it at his instigation—and the pursuit of alliances against France, Europe’s dominant state, the wars fought between the great powers in the middle of the eighteenth cen-

ture reflected a more even distribution of power. This balance of power was increasingly affected not only by events overseas but also by those in Eastern Europe. There, Russia expanded its empire at the expense of the Ottoman Empire, and Russia, Prussia, and Austria dismembered Poland in a series of Partitions, the last in 1795.

The increasingly global nature of conflicts between empires put strains on the structures of states in Europe. They were forced to reorganize themselves to become more efficient. In Britain, as the role of the House of Commons expanded and political parties emerged, newspapers and organizations in which politics was discussed created public opinion, transforming the public sphere as more people demanded political reform. A precocious sense of British national identity and patriotism developed.

Reform movements and even uprisings in Europe alarmed rulers and intrigued intellectuals, who in increasing numbers denounced unwarranted privilege and despotism. American colonists rose up against British rule. Public opinion on the continent demanded reform; in France, the parlements began to defend the "nation" against monarchical despotism. As contemporaries sought explanations for movements that sought to limit monarchical authority, the Bavarian envoy in Vienna went so far as to claim in 1775 that "the spirit of revolt has become universal."

## THE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY STATE SYSTEM

In eighteenth-century Europe, the powers danced together in temporary partnership until the music changed and old partners were deserted and new ones embraced. The eighteenth-century state system was a pattern of rivalry and alliance in which powerful states vied for dynastic and global power. Few borders or thrones were secure from challenge by other rulers coveting more territory. Rulers sought to expand their power through marriage, inheritance, alliances, or warfare. Other states sought to maintain the balance of power, so that one state did not grow more powerful at the expense of the others. Spain, France, the Dutch Republic, Sweden, Poland-Lithuania, the Holy Roman Empire, and the Ottoman Empire found themselves with less power than in the seventeenth century, while Britain, Russia, and Prussia continued to extend their reach.

The emergence of a global economy increasingly linked to colonial trade engendered rivalries as Britain, France, Spain, and the Dutch Republic battled for commercial and colonial advantage, preparing the way for European expansion in the nineteenth century. The wars between the great powers spilled into the Americas and India. The powers were motivated by the hope of economic gain and reflected the primacy of the economic theory of mercantilism, which assumed that there was a finite amount of wealth available in the world, and that the might of any state depended on its success in bringing in more gold than it paid out.

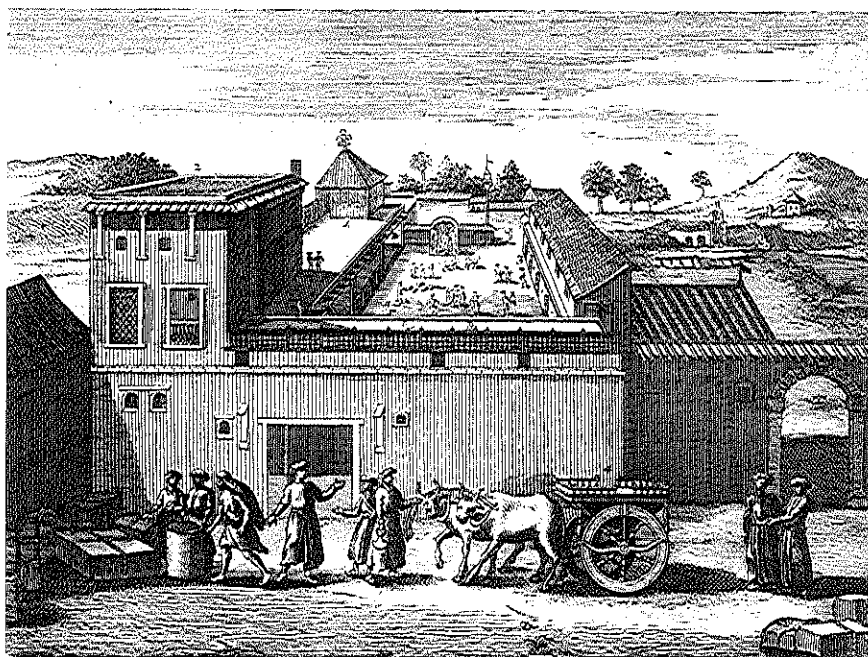
In the meantime, dynastic rivalries remained a major source of conflict. George I from the German state of Hanover succeeded to the throne of England in 1714, but his German origins and interests complicated British foreign policy and led to unsuccessful attempts by the Catholic Stuart pretenders to take back the British throne. On the continent, Frederick the Great of Prussia and Maria Theresa of Austria locked horns in a battle of expansion for the former and survival for the latter. The other great powers lined up in alliances on the side of each.

### *Global Rivalries*

As voyages of discovery opened up new horizons to Europeans, the stakes of colonial rivalry between the great powers rose. During the seventeenth century, England, the Dutch Republic, France, Spain, and Portugal had gradually expanded their trading routes across the seas. Coffee, tea, molasses, ginger, indigo, Indian calicoes, tobacco, and other colonial products—for the most part luxury goods—fetched high prices at home. The discovery of gold in Brazil in 1694 and 1719 further whetted the appetites of commercial companies. By the end of the seventeenth century, Dutch and French traders began to sail to China in greater numbers. There the K'ang-hsi emperor and the Ch'ing dynasty had expanded toward the south even while affirming Chinese cultural unity, even within the context of a vast and varied land. The Chinese rulers manifested little interest in the traders from the West. (When a diplomat representing King George III of Britain arrived in China to try to convince the emperor to begin diplomatic relations with his country and brought presents from England, the emperor's message to him said "I set no value on objects strange and ingenious.") Ambitious European merchant-traders still brought back spices and fine silks from Asia, but sea routes had largely supplanted the old land trade routes that had stretched through the Middle East and Central Asia. Chinese prints, porcelain, silk, and rugs became popular in Western Europe.

In the eighteenth century, the British East India Company established new posts in South India and Bengal. Parliament licensed the company to operate as a military force. Ships of the British East India Company carried Chinese porcelain, silks, spices, and tea to England in exchange for silver and, increasingly, opium grown in India. British traders exchanged slaves taken from West Africa and textiles and other manufactured goods for colonial products. If at the middle of the eighteenth century there were about 3 to 4 million Europeans living in British, French, Spanish, and Portuguese colonies in America, several times that number of slaves had been carried there by European ships from Africa.

Spain still had the largest empire. It included the largest Caribbean islands, the Philippines in the Pacific, and most of South America except for



The trading post established by the British East India Company in Surat, India, late eighteenth century.

Brazil, which belonged to Portugal. The Dutch had bases on the northern coast of South America, West Africa, South Africa (their colony at the Cape of Good Hope was the only permanent European settlement at the time in South Africa), the island of Mauritius in the Indian Ocean, the Indian subcontinent, and Southeast Asia, where they conquered three Islamic states in the late seventeenth century. The Dutch were also in Japan, which in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century had expanded trade in East Asia and Southeast Asia. The Dutch presence in Japan during the 1630s and 1640s had been limited to the port of Nagasaki, as Japan rejected more than superficial contacts with foreigners. As in the case of China, the Japanese exhibited little knowledge of or interest in other cultures.

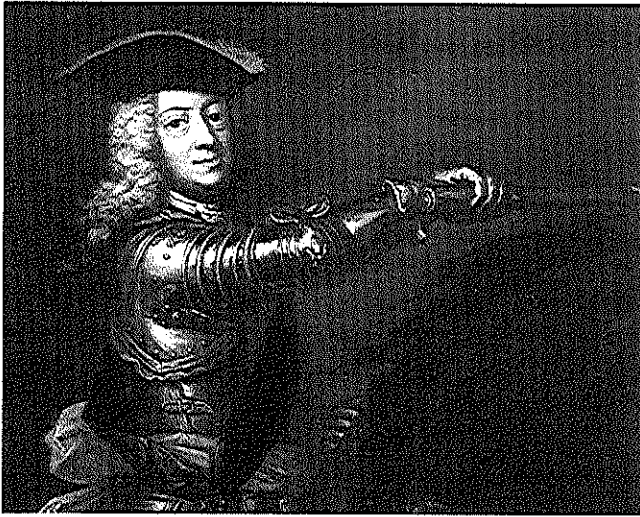
French forts and settlements dotted the North American colony of Nouvelle (New) France. French trappers established posts on the Mississippi River, with the port of New Orleans at its mouth far to the south. The territories claimed by the French, on which they had only scattered military and trading posts, almost tripled in size by the middle of the eighteenth century, but by the 1760s the French population of Nouvelle France stood at only about 80,000 people.

Global rivalries led to conflicts between the great powers. French and British armies and navies battled in North America, the West Indies, and India, believing that the loss of Canadian furs, Caribbean spices, or Indian jewels might be a damaging blow to prosperity and prestige. Spanish colonial rivalry with Britain led to the only war ever fought over an ear. Both Spain and Britain insisted that their colonies ship goods only on vessels flying their flag. Since 1713 the Spanish had granted the right to Britain to supply its colonies with 4,800 slaves each year; in exchange for this sale, a single English ship each year could trade at one Spanish colonial port. Illegal trade, however, continued as before. The Spanish navy sank several British ships, and in 1731 one of its vessels accosted an English frigate suspected of smuggling. A Spanish sword cut off one of the ears of the captain, Jenkins. The incident led to the "War of Jenkins's Ear" in 1739 after a member of Parliament whipped up anti-Spanish sentiment by waving the severed ear in the air during a speech. The war, highlighted by the successful Spanish defense of the port of Cartagena in what now is Columbia, went on with neither side claiming victory, a settlement coming only with the conclusion of the War of the Austrian Succession (see pp. 394–396).

### *The Hanoverians and the Stuarts in Great Britain*

In 1702, Queen Anne (1665–1714), the Protestant daughter of James II, succeeded her brother-in-law, William III, to the throne of England. Despite eighteen pregnancies and five live births, Anne had no surviving children. The House of Commons had passed the Act of Succession in 1701 to prevent any future restoration of the Catholic Stuart line to the throne. By this act, which broke strict rules of dynastic succession, the Protestant ruling dynasty of Hanover, related by blood to the English royal family, would become the English royal line upon Anne's death.

In 1707, the Act of Union created the Kingdom of Great Britain, which took the Union Jack as its flag, and linked Scotland to England and Wales. Scotland received seats in the House of Commons, but fewer than its population should have warranted. Parliament's goal in formalizing the dynastic union was fear that Scotland might seek to summon Queen Anne's exiled Catholic half-brother (James III; the Stuart son of James II) to be king of Scotland, instead of going along with England and Wales's awarding of the throne to the house of Hanover. Ireland, in which English Protestants owned seven-eighths of the land, continued to pay dearly for having supported the Catholic monarch James II after the Glorious Revolution of 1688 had evicted him from the throne. Legal restrictions prevented Irish Catholics from being merchants, lawyers, or members of the Irish Parliament, the powers of which were strictly limited. In England itself, Parliament had not extended the Toleration Act of 1689 to Catholics. British Catholics could not vote, be elected to Parliament, or hold state offices; they also were subject to special taxes, could not possess weapons,



George I, the Hanoverian king of Great Britain who never learned English.

be admitted to Oxford or Cambridge Universities, or worship freely, at a time when Protestant Dissenters—that is, Protestants not belonging to the Church of England—were able to rise to respectable positions within the British state.

The Hanoverian George I (1660–1727), a distant cousin of Queen Anne, became king in 1714. He never learned English, brought some of his own advisers from Hanover, was stubborn and obese (some of his subjects referred to their monarch as “King Log”), and may have ordered the murder of his wife’s lover in Hanover. All of this was more easily forgiven by wealthy Englishmen than his apparent indifference toward the crown he wore, seemingly demonstrated by the fact that he spent long periods in his beloved Hanover.

The Hanoverian dynasty’s accession to the throne complicated British foreign policy. The Treaty of Utrecht (1713), the first of two treaties that concluded the War of the Spanish Succession (1701–1714, see Chapter 7), confirmed Britain’s colonial supremacy, adding Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, the Hudson Bay territory, and New Brunswick, as well as Gibraltar and the island of Minorca to the empire, and it also granted the right to trade in Spanish colonial ports. But George I looked with disfavor on the treaty because it had not advanced the interests of Hanover. Furthermore, some in Parliament considered the compromise treaty as too much of a compromise and thus humiliating for Britain. It was ratified by the House of Lords only because Queen Anne had created enough new peers to assure passage.

The new Hanoverian dynasty was threatened by remaining support for the Catholic Stuart dynasty. In 1715, the intransigent supporters (Jacobites)

of James III rose up in Scotland. Although by the Treaty of Utrecht the king of France had officially renounced support for James, Catholic France still wanted him on the British throne. But troops loyal to George I quickly quelled the rebellion.

George II (1683–1760) became king in 1727. Like his father, he was courageous and had led troops into battle in the German states. But unlike his father, he took the time to learn English (although it remained decidedly his second language). He spoke it with a strong accent that his subjects mocked (“I hate bainting and boetry!” he once announced). He had a stiff, tedious personality, displaying impatience and a bad temper. On one occasion he bellowed, “I am sick to death of all this foolish stuff, and wish with all my heart that the devil may take all your bishops, ministers, Parliament, and the devil take the whole island—provided I can get out of it and go to Hanover!”

In 1745, the dreamy pretender Charles Edward Stuart (1720–1788) planned an invasion of England, similar to the one his father had undertaken thirty years earlier. “Bonnie Prince Charlie” landed in Scotland with a small army of enthusiasts. Adding Scottish clansmen from the Highlands to his force, he then marched into England with about 9,000 men. The threat to the throne was serious enough to give birth to the British anthem “God Save the King,” which dates from this time.

But Charles Edward found in England almost no support for his cause. The young pretender hesitated a hundred miles from London and then retreated to Scotland. Many highlanders deserted his ranks as English troops ravaged their country, defeating Bonnie Prince Charlie at Culloden Moor near Inverness in April 1746. It was the last battle fought on British soil to this day. The pretender hightailed it back to France. The government ordered the execution of two Scottish peers who had thrown their support to the pretender, and forbade the wearing of kilts or tartans, symbols of the highlanders. Thereafter, a handful of Jacobites continued to celebrate Stuart birthdays. They toasted “the king over the water” living in French exile by holding their glasses of spirits over another glass filled with water.

### *The Prussian-Austrian Dynastic Rivalry in Central Europe*

Prussia threatened Habsburg interests in Central Europe. Charles VI (ruled 1711–1740), the decent but mediocre Holy Roman emperor, had never recovered from the Habsburg loss of Spain in the War of the Spanish Succession. He remained obsessed with keeping the remaining Habsburg lands together. As Charles had no son, he spent years during his reign trying to bribe or otherwise convince the other European powers to recognize the integrity of the Habsburg inheritance upon his death. In 1713, he tried to get them to recognize the Pragmatic Sanction, which asserted the indivisibility of the Habsburg domains and recognized the right of female as well as male succession, should Charles have no sons.



When Charles VI died without a male heir, his twenty-three-year-old daughter Maria Theresa (ruled 1740–1780) assumed the Habsburg throne. While Maria Theresa could, as a woman, be archduchess of Austria and queen of Hungary and Bohemia, she was barred from becoming Holy Roman empress, thus opening up the question of imperial succession. The young queen had little money, no army, almost no bureaucracy, and bad advisers, and hence was in a poor position to defend her throne against aggressive hostile powers. France and Prussia, despite having pledged to uphold the Pragmatic Sanction, were each preparing to dismember the Habsburg Empire.



Frederick the Great, King of Prussia.

The immediate threat to Maria Theresa came from the Prussian King Frederick II (ruled 1740–1786). As a young man, Frederick had little in common with his raging father, Frederick William I. The royal son was intelligent, played the flute, enjoyed reading, preferred French to his native German, and as a boy expressed little interest in the army. At the age of eighteen, he tried to run off to England to catch a glimpse of his intended English bride. When young Frederick's scheme, planned by his best friend—and perhaps his lover—was foiled, the furious Frederick William decided to have his son executed. When dissuaded by his officials, Frederick William made the young prince watch from a prison cell the decapitation of his friend. Forced by his father to serve in the royal bureaucracy and as an army officer, Frederick became an aggressive absolute monarch.

Frederick, called “the Great” by his subjects, worked twelve hours a day lovingly overseeing minute details of army administration. His own physical courage was legendary—six times horses were killed beneath him in battle. At the same time, he eschewed an extravagant court life.

Frederick the Great's “enlightened” reforms (see Chapter 9) made Prussia a more efficient absolutist state. He improved the state bureaucracy by introducing an examination system. Talented commoners could be awarded positions in the courts of law. “Old Fritz” strengthened the Prussian economy by establishing state-operated iron- and steelworks, ordering the construction of more canals to haul goods, and encouraging the establishment of workshops in Berlin to produce textiles, glass, clocks, and porcelain. Because he ordered officials to accumulate stocks of grain in good times,

Prussia never suffered the desperate periods of dearth that occurred in France. With careful budgeting, Frederick the Great managed to pay for his wars, closely monitoring state tax revenues and expenses. He refused to undertake expensive loans, sell noble titles and privileges, or impose new levies on the peasantry, policies that were wreaking financial and social havoc in France.

Frederick continued the exemptions of the Junkers from many taxes and preserved their domination of the bureaucracy and army. He personally planned educational reforms with an eye to improving the performance of his officials. Nobles oversaw regional government, as well as the collection of taxes. But Frederick also wanted to keep the Junkers in a position of subordination to the crown. Noble army officers could not marry or travel abroad without the king's authority. He tolerated no appeal of royal decisions. In a society with a relatively rigid social structure, aristocratic and military virtues were henceforth inseparable in Prussia, a fact fraught with significance for modern German history.

## CONFLICTS BETWEEN THE GREAT POWERS

The rise of Prussia and Russia (see Chapter 7) carried European dynastic rivalries and warfare into Central Europe. The War of the Austrian Succession (1740–1748) revealed the fundamental principle in eighteenth-century power politics: the balance of power. The unchecked success of any one power seeking to expand its territory inevitably brought a combined response from the other powers to maintain a rough balance between the states. The expansion of Prussian power engendered the “Diplomatic Revolution” of 1756, when Austria and France put their long-standing rivalry aside to join forces against Prussia and Britain in the Seven Years’ War (1756–1763). The long, costly war between France and Britain was truly global in extent, as both powers battled in North America (where the war became known as the French and Indian War), the Caribbean, and in India. The armies that fought in the war were larger and better drilled than ever before. At the same time, the French and British navies played a greater role in transporting troops and supplies, as well as guarding commercial vessels in the global struggle.

### *The War of the Austrian Succession*

The War of the Austrian Succession reflected naked absolutist aggression. Frederick the Great coveted Silesia (now part of Poland), a Habsburg territory south of Prussia and then squeezed between Saxony, Poland, and Austria. With its textile, mining, and metallurgical industries, Silesia was a relatively wealthy province within the Habsburg domains. Frederick II had come to the throne in the same year as Maria Theresa and quickly sought

to take advantage of the lone queen in a world of kings. Confident that the recent death of the Russian empress would preclude Russian assistance to Austria, Frederick sent his army into Silesia.

Frederick the Great was the latest in the line of aggressive Prussian kings who identified the interests of the state with a powerful army complemented by a centralized bureaucracy able to raise money through taxes. The Habsburg monarchy embodied, by contrast, the complexity of Central Europe. Austrian Germans dominated the administrative structure of the empire of many different peoples and languages. The multiplicity of privileges (particularly those of Magyar and Croatian nobles), traditions, and cultures undermined the authority, resources, and efficiency of the state. The Habsburg Empire also lacked the trading and manufacturing base of Great Britain and the Dutch Republic, foremost among the non-absolutist states, or of France or even Prussia. Mercantilists in Austria hoped that foreign trade would add to the coffers of the state, but the overwhelmingly rural Habsburg lands had little to export.

Maria Theresa's troubles were not limited to Silesia. The nobles of Bohemia, the richest Habsburg province, rebelled against Habsburg rule, offering the throne to the ruler of Bavaria, Austria's rival in southern Germany. Dependent on the good will of the provincial Diets, no Habsburg monarch could be sure of having either sufficient support from the Estates or money with which to raise an effective army.

Now, with Prussian troops occupying Silesia, Maria Theresa traveled to Hungary to ask for the support of the Hungarian Diet, which had agreed to the Pragmatic Sanction in exchange for recognition of Hungary's status as a separate kingdom within the Habsburg Empire. Dressed in mourning clothes following the recent death of an infant daughter and clutching one of her sixteen children to her, Maria Theresa convinced the Diet to provide an army of 40,000 men. The Magyar nobles held out their swords to her, shouting their promise to give "life and blood" for her. The gesture could not restore Silesia to the Habsburgs, but it may have saved the Habsburg monarchy. Aided by Hungarian troops, imperial forces put down the Bohemian revolt.

Fearing a disproportionate expansion of Prussian power in Central Europe, other states now joined an alliance against Frederick the Great. Yet, confronted by Austria, Russia, Sweden, Piedmont-Sardinia, and Denmark, states with a combined population twenty times that of Prussia, the Prussian army more than held its own, with the help of France as well as Spain and Bavaria, each hoping to help bring about the disintegration of the Habsburg Empire. France joined the anti-Austrian coalition because it coveted the Austrian Netherlands (Belgium); Spain participated because it wanted to recapture influence in Italy at Habsburg expense; and the king of Piedmont-Sardinia cooperated because he coveted Milan. Frederick, satisfied for the moment with the acquisition of Silesia, withdrew from the war in 1745 after the Peace of Dresden. But Britain was drawn into the



Aristocratic officers safely above the carnage at the Battle of Fontenoy, 1745.

conflict by its need to protect the dynastic territory of Hanover from Prussia and France. Indeed, at Dettingen in 1743, King George II became the last British monarch to fight in battle. His horse was spooked and rode off with its frightened royal rider still astride. In North America, a British force captured the French fort of Louisbourg, which guarded access to the Saint Lawrence River. France's army defeated the combined Dutch and British forces in the Battle of Fontenoy in what is now Belgium in 1745, the bloodiest battle of the century until the French Revolution. Fifteen thousand soldiers were dead or wounded among the 95,000 soldiers who fought at Fontenoy. In 1748, the inconclusive Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle ended the War of the Austrian Succession (see Map 11.1). French forces withdrew from the Austrian Netherlands in return for the English abandoning the captured fort of Louisbourg. The northern Italian city of Parma passed to a branch of the Spanish Bourbons, and Piedmont-Sardinia absorbed parts of the duchy of Milan.

### *The Seven Years' War*

The Seven Years' War (1756–1763) was remarkable for several reasons. First, it was arguably the first truly global conflict. The commercial interests of France and Britain clashed in North America (where the two powers claimed large reaches of the American interior as far as the Mississippi River

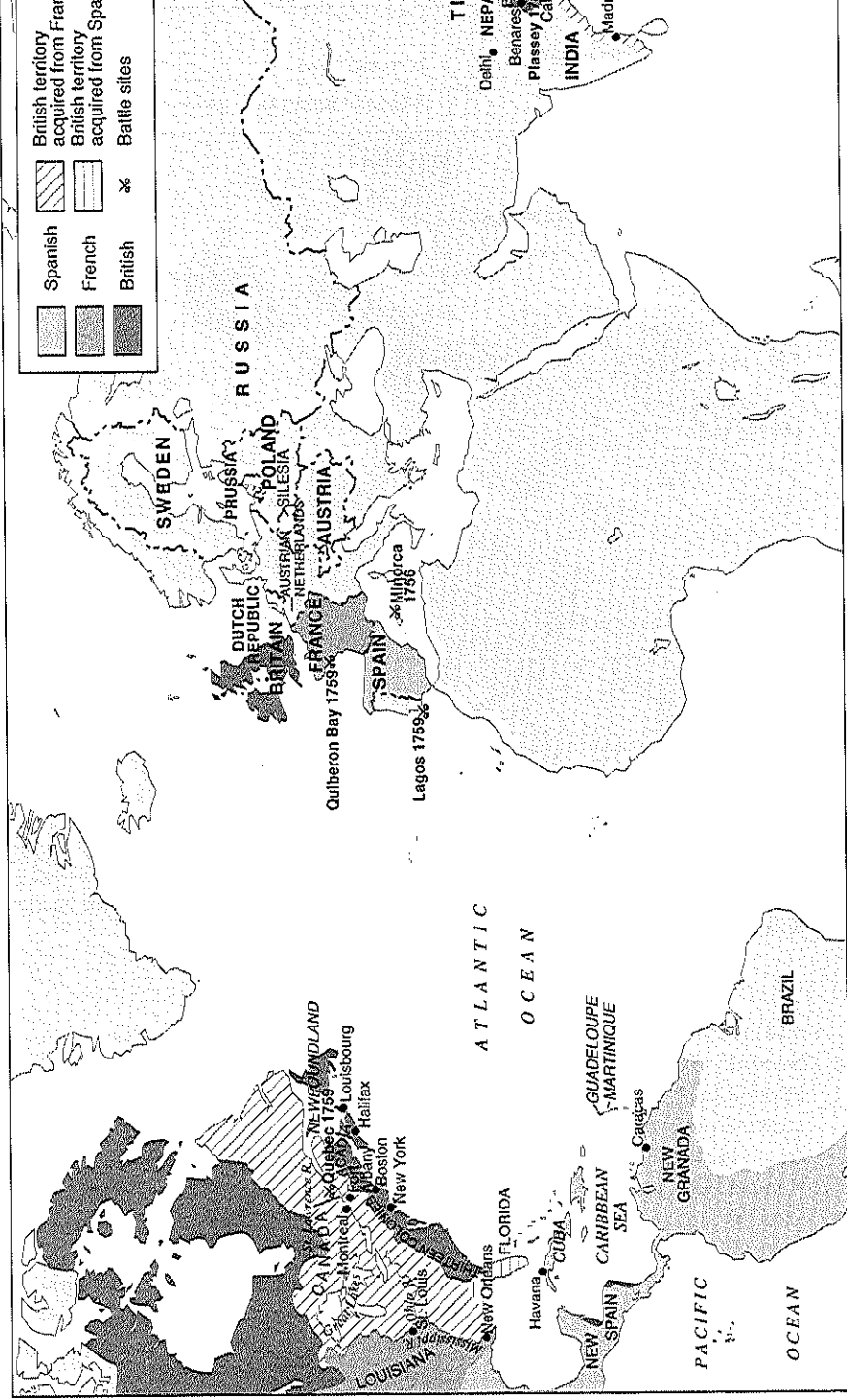


MAP 11.1 THE WAR OF THE AUSTRIAN SUCCESSION, 1740–1748 Major battles and territorial changes at the end of the war.

and had been at war since 1754), the Caribbean, and India (see Map 11.2). Second, for the first time we can speak of a war not just of kings but self-consciously of nations, at least in the cases of Britain and France. Both states underwent a surge of patriotic enthusiasm, marked, for example, in the case of France by calls for “patriotic gifts” to support the war. In Britain, the sense of being “Briton” developed among all classes, accentuated by an overwhelmingly popular war against Catholic France. In both countries there were calls for the more efficient management of the war, seen as part of pursuing national interests, arguably for the first time.

Prussia's gains in the War of the Austrian Succession engendered the Diplomatic Revolution of 1756. France had previously undertaken alliances with Prussia and the Ottoman Empire to counter the threat of Austrian

MAP 11.2 THE SEVEN YEARS' WAR, 1756–1763 Areas of conflict, including battle sites, during the Seven Years' War, as well as territorial changes at the end of the war.



and Russian expansion and was thus determined that Poland survive as an independent state. The Diplomatic Revolution of 1756 now ended more than a century of intermittent warfare between France and the Austrian Habsburgs. Alarmed by the expansion of Prussian power, Austria now allied with France, and then Russia, with the goal of recapturing Silesia. The cost of France's support would be its future annexation of the Austrian Netherlands and Austrian neutrality in the war between Britain and France (which in 1756 had been going on in North America for two years). Frederick the Great, determined to keep Silesia, turned to Britain, France's enemy. To France and Russia, Britain's sudden and shocking alliance with Prussia seemed a betrayal, even as France reversed its century-old opposition to Habsburg interests. Having changed partners, the great powers went to war again.

In 1757, Frederick defeated a large French army and then a Habsburg force. But a Russian army attacked from the north, occupying Berlin, while more Austrian troops marched on Prussia from the south. Prussia's situation seemed desperate, leading the king to compare his state to "a man with many wounds who has lost so much blood that he is on the point of death." But as luck would have it, Peter III became tsar of Russia in 1762, succeeding Empress Elizabeth, Frederick's determined enemy. The new tsar admired the Prussian king and called the Russian troops home. At the cost of perhaps 300,000 soldiers, Prussia preserved its full independence.

The rivalry between the European powers in India took the shape of a struggle between the British and French East India Companies against the background of intrigues and warfare among Indian rulers. The Mughals had conquered most of the subcontinent in the seventeenth century, but along the southern coast, where Mughal control was limited, the European trading network had continued to expand. In the meantime, India became the largest producer of textiles in the world, threatening the production of English cloth. The Mughal Empire collapsed during the first half of the eighteenth century following invasions from Iran and Afghanistan. Bengal, the wealthiest part of the Indian subcontinent, became autonomous. The resulting political chaos in the 1740s aided the subjection of India by Britain, even if in 1750 there were only about 5,000 British residents (and 20,000 soldiers) in the subcontinent.

Robert Clive (1725–1774), the son of a provincial gentleman and lawyer, led troops of the East India Company and Indian mercenaries into Bengal. There the prince preferred French to British traders and in 1757 had incarcerated more than a hundred British subjects in a room so small and stuffy that most of them died—the "Black Hole of Calcutta." That same year, Clive's force defeated the prince's army at Plassey, north of Calcutta. After putting a pliant puppet on the Bengali throne, Clive continued to use British troops to further not only the interests of the British East India Company, but himself as well. He became very rich through imperial acquisitions and secured a British peerage. By 1761, the stage was set for



General Wolfe's forces scale the heights of the Plains of Abraham in Quebec.

British control of most of the Indian subcontinent, with the British navy preventing French traders and soldiers from receiving sufficient supplies. The East India Company's great successes opened up new trade between Britain, India, and South China, a vast new market.

In what became Canada, there was much more at stake because Britain and France were fighting for control of a vast territory. In this struggle, France had a decided disadvantage. Even after more than a hundred years as a colony, at mid-century "New France" had a French population of only about 80,000 people, for the most part clustered in three towns along the St. Lawrence River—Montreal, Quebec, and Trois-Rivières. By contrast, the thirteen British colonies already had more than 2 million residents. British incursions into their territory led Native Americans to ally informally with the French. During the French and Indian War (1754–1763), British troops forced over 10,000 French-speaking Acadians living in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick to emigrate. Many of them settled in the French colony of New Orleans, where the word "Cajun" emerged as a corruption of the French "*acadien*."

The British navy accentuated its advantage on the seas by seizing 300 French merchant ships and capturing 8,000 sailors even before hostilities formally began. Despite the capture by French troops of several forts in the Great Lakes region, British ships reduced French reinforcements and supplies to a trickle, also besting a French fleet at Quiberon Bay off the coast of Brittany in 1759.

In 1759, General James Wolfe (1727–1759) led an audacious, successful British attack on the French near Quebec, his forces climbing up the



cliffs from the St. Lawrence River to surprise their enemy. British forces captured Fort Duquesne in 1758, driving the French from the Ohio River Valley, and in 1760 took Montreal. In the Caribbean, the British picked off French islands and their small garrisons one by one.

War left all the combatants exhausted. The British national debt had doubled. The French monarchy entered a period of financial crisis. The Seven Years' War ended the domination of France on the continent and cleared the way for the expansion of the British Empire. By the Treaty of Paris of 1763, Austria recognized Prussia's absorption of Silesia in 1740 in exchange for Saxony's retention of independence. The Southern Netherlands, however, remained an Austrian Habsburg territory. The settlement in North America and the Caribbean was much more far-reaching. Canada became British. France retained fishing rights on the Grand Banks off Newfoundland, but accepted British claims to territory east of the Mississippi River, and those of Spain to all territory west of the Mississippi. This enormous western region, known as the Louisiana Territory, stretched from the almost tropical climate of New Orleans to the freezing plains of central Canada. France retained the Caribbean islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe, only because English colonists feared competition from sugar produced on those islands if they became British. Spain ceded Florida to Britain (though only, as it turned out, until 1783).

Britain then tried to mend fences in Europe, where the balance of power had been preserved. However, Austrian troops occupied Bavaria, leading to the brief War of Bavarian Succession (1778–1779). The resistance of Prussia and Saxony foiled the Habsburg plan. Like Franco-British enmity, Austro-Prussian rivalry for domination of German-speaking Central Europe continued unabated.

### *Armies and Their Tactics in the Eighteenth Century*

Long after monarchs succeeded in putting an end to private noble armies, warfare remained part of noble culture. Military schools in France, Russia, and several German states trained the sons of nobles in the skills of war. In Prussia, Frederick William I believed that any attempt to allow commoners to become officers would be "the first step toward the decline and fall of the army." Noble officers had much more in common with the officers of the enemy than with their own troops, who were conscripted or impressed from the lower classes. Indeed, the Habsburgs often appointed foreign nobles as officers in its army. Officers captured during a war were treated to a nice glass of wine and a good meal, and then exchanged for their own officers who had fallen into enemy hands. War was fought over territory. In some ways, it seemed like a game of chess played between aristocrats in a manor house parlor. It is said that the French officers at the Battle of Fontenoy in 1745 gallantly shouted to their British counterparts, "Fire first, *messieurs les anglais!*" before the slaughter began.

Recruitment practices differed in the various European states. The Prussian army's military recruitment system was the most comprehensive. Each of its regiments was assigned a district from which to draw recruits. In France, military recruitment was placed directly under the control of the state bureaucracy, which relieved officers of the responsibility for filling a quota of recruits. In Russia, each commune (*mir*) had to provide at least one soldier. Throughout Europe, certain categories of the population were exempt from service, including prosperous farmers, the servants of French nobles, Russian merchants, and, in some countries, men with families. England was alone among the major powers in not having a standing army, at least in principle.

Yet mercenaries still sometimes provided the bulk of eighteenth-century European armies, the notable exception being France. Military service provided those who joined up with regular meals, shelter, and adventure. Swiss guards served the French royal family as well as the popes in Rome, and their countrymen fought with a variety of armies. The Dutch army included a brigade of Scottish highlanders. Military service could still provide respectability. Criminals and other men with something unpleasant in their past often turned up as soldiers. Non-military officials, servants, wives, children, and prostitutes accompanied armies: "We are a marching brothel," assessed one British commander.

Desertion remained widespread, affecting up to 35 percent of an army, despite threats of mutilation for those caught leaving. During the Seven Years' War, about 62,000 soldiers deserted the Habsburg army, 70,000 left the army of France behind, and 80,000 Russian soldiers disappeared into the night. Tightly packed formations served to discourage desertions, as they were intended to do, because soldiers were under more constant control. Harsh, even brutal, discipline in army camps complemented that in the field. Frederick the Great was not alone in believing that "[the soldier] must be more afraid of his officers than of the dangers to which he is exposed." Although strategies for supplying troops improved during the century, armies rarely moved far from their supply camps. The lack of commitment and unreliability of mercenary and levied troops often helped end fighting.

Military technology had evolved slowly since the invention of gunpowder. In the seventeenth century, the soldier wielding a bayonet, a musket topped with a razor-sharp knife, had pushed the pike man, a foot soldier armed with only a spear-like weapon, off the battlefield. Other significant changes in warfare in the seventeenth century included improved flintlock muskets, with cartridges and iron ramrods that permitted riflemen to fire three times per minute and increased their range. Handheld firearms became practical weapons for the first time. Artillery pieces were also lighter and more mobile, with somewhat greater range. The training of artillery officers improved.

Soldiers in the eighteenth century were now far better trained and disciplined than in the previous century; armies were far larger than ever

before. The discipline and efficiency of troops in formation won or lost battles. Muskets, inaccurate beyond a short distance, were fired in deadly volleys by rows of soldiers taking turns reloading. Cavalry charges, which generally took place on the flanks of battle with the goal of neutralizing the enemy's cavalry, usually were over quickly.

New tactics had brought greater maneuverability in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, including linear formations involving coordinated movements that required well-trained and disciplined troops. In the eighteenth century, even greater troop mobility was achieved by combining line and column formations in a "mixed order." Moreover, the British and Prussian armies were the first to create a light infantry division that could engage the enemy more rapidly, often fighting with bayonets. Yet defense still dominated in battle, as symbolized by the impregnable fortresses along the northern frontier of France built in the late seventeenth century. Line formations were more conducive to defense than offense.

Following the unrestrained carnage of the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648), warfare became somewhat more civilized, or at least somewhat more predictable, with fewer civilian casualties. Prisoners of war, even commoners, were kept in relatively decent conditions and were sometimes exchanged for their counterparts. The development of logistical support and professionalized, well-drilled armies meant that soldiers no longer had to live off the land. The goals of warfare were now generally restrained by traditions of monarchical and aristocratic civility. Once victory was achieved, there seemed no reason to pursue one's enemy to finish him off. Civilians were now generally spared in times of war.

### *Navies*

British statesmen knew that to maintain superiority over France on the seas, their enemy had to be kept busy on the continent, whether by direct military operations or by large subsidies paid to France's enemies among the German states. The Royal Navy had begun to grow in size during the second half of the seventeenth century. As its role in protecting commerce increased, it expanded further, from 105 ships in 1750 to 195 in 1790, while the smaller French navy increased only modestly in size to 81 warships, 9 more than those of the Spanish navy.

Building on earlier improvements in sails, rigging, charts, and navigational techniques, the size and quality of ships improved. Shipbuilding drew on scientific assistance from experts in mathematics and navigation. The British first added copper to hulls, which made their ships sturdier. Short-barreled cannon of greater caliber proved deadly in close combat.

Navies were also beset by problems of desertion, at least when ships were in port. Almost one-fourth of the men who joined the British navy between 1776 and 1780 deserted—many of whom had been dragged to the docks by press-gangs. Shipboard disease killed many sailors, despite

the use of lemon juice to counter scurvy, an illness caused by a vitamin C deficiency.

As the British naval supremacy established the basis for the expansion of commerce and empire, there were few decisive naval confrontations in the eighteenth century. "Do you know what a naval battle is?" asked a French minister. "The fleets maneuver, come to grips, fire a few shots, and then each retreats . . . and the sea remains as salty as it was before." The cost of full-fledged battles seemed too high; ships were enormously expensive to build and maintain. Fifteen times more British sailors died of disease between 1774 and 1780 than succumbed to battle wounds.

## POLITICAL CHANGE IN GREAT BRITAIN

In England, the Glorious Revolution of 1688 had put an end to fifty years of social and political turmoil. The Bill of Rights of 1689 guaranteed Parliament's right to approve taxation and prohibited the monarch from suspending or dispensing with laws. Parliament also maintained control of military funding and the size of the army. Only with the consent of Parliament could a standing army be raised in peacetime (even though this in itself was technically unconstitutional and the House of Commons had to annually approve funding). Thus, the political struggles of the seventeenth century had demonstrated that the king had to work with Parliament in governing the nation. In turn, the state served as a guarantor of rights of property and patronage. The rights of Parliament and the elective nature of the House of Commons, even if based on an extremely narrow electoral franchise, distinguished British political life from that of its continental rivals.

The period of "aristocratic consensus" that followed the Glorious Revolution was not as free from political contention as the term suggests. But it brought major changes in British political life. The interests of wealthy property owners were represented in the House of Commons, which gradually became a far more important political forum than the House of Lords, which only represented peers. It also became more difficult for the king to manage the House of Commons.

Political differences between Tories and Whigs (see Chapter 6) became more consistent. The former were now clearly identified with the prerogatives of the throne, the latter with the rights of Parliament. Whigs believed that the role of Parliament was to defend liberty, property, and the rule of law and thereby preserve the British constitution against possible abuses of power by the throne. In the words of the Irish-born political theorist Edmund Burke (1729–1797), the British "mixed constitution" (which balanced the institutions of monarchy, the House of Lords, and the House of Commons), stood as an "isthmus between arbitrary power and anarchy." During this period, there emerged a sense that opposition within Parliament to government policies was an intrinsic part of a political process in

which competing interests were struggling for primacy. Moreover, during the eighteenth century, political life began to spill beyond the narrow confines of the British political elite as ordinary people demanded a voice in political life with increasing insistence. In Britain's North American colonies, a similar and in some ways parallel struggle for liberty began, leading to the American War of Independence (1775–1782).

### *Expanding Central Government in Britain*

Britain was justly renowned for its political preoccupation with liberty. An essential part of eighteenth-century British identity included the victory of Parliament during the English Civil War in the mid-seventeenth century in defense of constitutional monarchy. Yet, as with the continental powers France, Spain, Austria, and Russia, in non-absolutist Great Britain, too, the powers of central government expanded, creating what has been called a "British version of the fiscal-military state, complete with large armies and navies, industrious administrators, high taxes and huge debts." By the end of the eighteenth century, the British state had perhaps ten times more revenues than a century earlier. At the same time, the increasingly global nature of trade and warfare made greater demands on the state's administrative abilities. The growth, greater centralization, professionalization, and efficiency of military and civilian administration permitted Britain to replace France as the strongest power on the globe. British landed, financial, commercial, and manufacturing interests followed British military engagements across the globe with rapt attention. Britain's financial community, centered in what would become called "The City"—London's financial district—became ever more tied to and financially dependent on Britain's wars in Europe and abroad. The British Empire became closely linked not only to British prosperity but also identity.

Between 1680 and 1780, Britain built and consolidated its empire. The British army and navy tripled in size. The power and reach of the treasury also increased, along with its capacity to raise money for foreign wars and imperial conquest. As the economy grew rapidly, the British state raised and efficiently collected taxes, including land taxes, excise taxes (on commodities), and customs taxes, which provided an increasing share of revenue. The government borrowed as never before, increasing the national debt. Britain's bureaucracy also grew in size and complexity. Government officials became more professional, technical expertise more important, and government offices more clearly defined. Civil service posts offered educated men chances for social advancement.

The British government, like its continental rivals, continued to confront the problem of paying off the massive national debt amassed by loans that financed dynastic and trade wars. The government spent more than three-quarters of its expenditures on the army, navy, or paying back debts from previous wars. In 1719, the government had awarded the South Sea



first great financial crash (and coincided with the bursting of smaller speculative “bubbles” in Amsterdam and Paris).

The financial scandal hung over political life when Robert Walpole (1676–1745) became chancellor of the exchequer in 1721, a post he would hold for more than twenty years. The son of a gentry landowner of relatively modest means, the short, ruddy-cheeked Walpole was energetic and ambitious, making himself quite rich at state expense. In office, he was determined to restore political confidence to Britain. Parliament passed a law that allowed only companies chartered by the government to sell stock shares to the public. Walpole created a sinking fund (intended to retire the debt by paying off, or “sinking,” part of it each year). This helped restore confidence. George II trusted Walpole’s judgment, and the latter survived the wrath of some members of Parliament (MPs) who disliked his unpopular financial reforms, including greater taxes on imports and on salt, and his goal of keeping Britain out of war.

Walpole perfected the system of political patronage, virtually managing the House of Commons and making the Anglican Church part of a state structure that would last more than a century. He placed MPs loyal to him—“placemen”—in well-paying governmental positions, some of which were veritable sinecures. In return, they voted with the government. On the local level, the bigger fish became county lord-lieutenants and the smaller fry justices of the peace. One tombstone epitaph flaunted the harvest of political patronage reaped by a well-connected lady lying therein: “By means of her alliance with the illustrious family of Stanhope, she had the merit to obtain for her husband and children twelve appointments in church and state,” not a bad haul. Walpole also worked to isolate Jacobites, smoothing the Hanoverian succession to the British throne.

However, Walpole’s support in Parliament eventually began to crumble. His attempt to extend the excise tax to wine and tobacco failed in 1733, after generating riots. William Pitt the Elder (1708–1778) led a coalition of “boy patriots” against Walpole. Specifically, they objected to his inaction against Spain, whose ships were harassing British ships in the Atlantic. After being forced by public outcry to declare war on Spain in 1739—the War of Jenkins’s Ear—Walpole resigned two years later.

The duke of Newcastle (Thomas Pelham-Holles, 1693–1768), whose notorious incoherence led him to be known as “Hubble-Bubble,” succeeded Walpole and ably manipulated the patronage of his position. Then Pitt became prime minister. The “Great Commoner” Pitt was a lonely, unstable man who alternated between feverish excitement and dark depression. He was demagogic, arrogant, and ruthless, commanding respect through fear.

### *The Role of the House of Commons*

The British monarch could declare war or make peace, call or dissolve Parliament, and appoint whomever he or she wanted to serve as cabinet

minister, officer, bishop, general, or admiral. The cabinet and government officials carried out the functions of state. But they did so against the backdrop of ongoing practical compromises between Parliament and the monarch.

During the early decades of the eighteenth century, the House of Commons gradually emerged as an epicenter of political life. Unlike the House of Lords, all of whose members were nobles, members of the House of Commons were elected by Britain's narrow electoral franchise based on landed wealth. Although still dominated by "gentle," or landed, interests, the number of merchants elected to the Commons increased, for families that had made fortunes in business, whether they were titled nobles, nontitled gentry, or commoners, invested their money in land. Wealthy MPs could easily control blocs of votes in their countries through patronage. In 1776, only 5,700 men in Britain elected half of the members of Commons, most of whose members were routinely reelected every seven years. In only three boroughs did more than 4,000 men have the right to vote, and in several others, fewer than 15 men could cast ballots. Thus, one lord confidently assured his son in 1754, "Your seat in the new Parliament is at last absolutely secured and that without opposition or the least necessity of your personal trouble or appearance." Some MPs were returned from "rotten" and "pocket" boroughs. Rotten boroughs ranged from the infamous "Old Sarum," which had no inhabitants but two representatives in Commons, and another that had been under water for centuries, to those with several hundred voters almost as easily managed. Pocket boroughs were in the pocket of the MP because his election was uncontested.

Some of England's growing industrial towns were not represented in Parliament. Many urban elites no longer bought the idea that their interests were "virtually represented" by MPs from districts represented in the House of Commons. Furthermore, emerging political discontent reflected alarm that the role of the House of Commons as the defender of the constitution against possible tyrannical abuse was being compromised by institutionalized patronage and outright corruption, symbolized by rotten and pocket boroughs.

### *The Development of Party Politics in the 1760s: Whigs and Tories*

Whigs and Tories had governed in reasonable harmony during the Robert Walpole era. But after Walpole, many Whigs came to believe that ministers ought to be acceptable to Parliament as well as to the king. In contrast, Tories traditionally took the view that the prerogatives of king and Church had to be maintained at all costs.

After coming to the throne in 1760, George III gave the impression that he intended to rule without Parliament. When the king refused to declare war on Spain in 1761 during the Seven Years' War, Pitt resigned as prime minister. Subsequently, the king appointed his former tutor, the aristo-



cratic, aloof Scotsman John Stuart, the earl of Bute (1713–1792), as secretary of state and then as prime minister. But Bute was an unpopular choice because he was not an MP, had little political experience and even less influence, and did not want Britain to undertake hostilities against Spain.

The king's appointment of his "dearest friend" seemed to Whigs to violate the unwritten agreement that the king act with Parliament's consent. Determined opposition merely served to strengthen the king's resolve. The press castigated Bute, and crowds in the street howled against him. Rumor insisted that he owed his controversial appointment to having been the lover of the king's mother. On the verge of a nervous breakdown, Bute resigned in 1763.

Bute's appointment, raising the question of ministerial responsibility, divided Commons along ideological lines. George III turned against the Whig country gentlemen who no longer could be counted upon to support him on all matters. The king insisted on the monarchy's independence and particularly on his right to choose whomever he wished as minister.

MPs representing the interests of the "country gentlemen" began to use the term "party," but without the trappings of formal organization that would come late in the next century. Although they traditionally upheld the rights of Parliament, Whigs, to be sure, remained loyal to the throne, even if King George accused them of being otherwise. While the issues dividing Tories and Whigs remained in some ways the same as those that had characterized the Walpole period, or even the English Civil War, the emerging notion of political parties was probably of more lasting significance than the political groupings themselves.

The term "party" had existed since the time of the Glorious Revolution of 1688; it had the sense of a group of people sharing a belief on a specific matter of political controversy. It had been somewhat synonymous with "faction," which since the 1670s had the negative connotation of a cabal of individuals working for their own interests. With the exception of the Jacobite Tories, however, the differences between Whigs and Tories were vague and uncertain during the reign of the first two Georges. George III's seeming determination to create a government above parties revived the solidarity of the old Whigs. The idea developed that a party of parliamentary opposition formed an essential part of the parliamentary system of representation.

George III insisted that it was his duty to defeat the forces of "faction." Burke, for one, rejected the king's efforts to discredit the concept of "party." In *Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents* (1770), he defined a party as "a body of men united for promoting by their joint endeavors the national interest upon some particular principle in which they are all agreed." He believed that political parties stood as the basis of representative government and therefore of political order. A newspaper article in 1770 went even further: "Opposition, in parliament, to the measures of government, is so far from being in itself an evil, that it has been often productive of good to the state." Parties alone could ensure the preservation

“of responsible government,” specifically, the notion that ministers ought to be acceptable to Parliament. This concept of a loyal parliamentary opposition did not exist in France or anywhere else on the continent. Nor, for that matter, did it exist in all constituencies in Britain; in many places, politics, dominated by family ties and outright patronage, went on as before.

George III could count on about a third of the members of Commons for unconditional support, at least partially because they held court-appointed posts. Unfailing voters for “court” became increasingly known as Tories, particularly to the Whig opposition. Supporters of the government rejected the term, as they did all labels, but at the same time they lent credence to the concept by cohesively defending a patriarchal society based on the prerogatives of monarchy, aristocracy, and the Anglican Church.

In 1766, George III turned to Pitt, who was immensely popular, again to serve as prime minister; he hoped to split the Whigs, because the “Great Commoner” was alienated from aristocratic Whigs. Pitt lost support even among his political friends by accepting a peerage, becoming duke of Chatham. Vigorous debates among Whigs, principally between the imperious Pitt and the duke of Newcastle and his followers, however, did not diminish the emerging notion of “party” that most Whigs now accepted. For Whigs, the most significant issue remained the extent to which the king could act without the support of Parliament.

### *The Rise of British Nationalism*

Although king and Parliament had been bitterly divided during the crises that led to the English Civil War and the Glorious Revolution, they were thereafter unified in the quest for British commercial and international predominance. During the eighteenth century, a strong sense of nationalism developed in Great Britain. This included pride in the nation’s high degree of freedom and reverence for Parliament as the Protestant institution that had turned back the threat of Catholicism and prevented absolute rule.

The fear of Catholicism, endemic in England since the Reformation, fired British nationalism. Faced with the threat of French invasion during the Anglo-French wars, British patriots across the social spectrum embraced the British Isles as the chosen land of God. They boasted of Britain’s prosperity and social stability while belittling France and Spain, Catholic powers.

William Pitt the Elder was an empire builder. Believing that the throne’s Hanoverian interests were dominating foreign policy, and having made his reputation accusing Walpole of indifference to British interests abroad, Pitt turned his attention to expanding the colonies. “Who will laugh at sugar, now?” he thundered in 1759 to nobles who had scorned colonial trade. Horace Walpole (1717–1797), Robert Walpole’s youngest son, a novelist and the beneficiary of lucrative posts that left him plenty of time to write, was among the few who had some doubts about all of this. “No man ever

went to the East Indies with good intentions," the younger Walpole said, adding sarcastically that "it really looks as if we intended to finish the conquest of the world during the next campaign."

The lure of commercial profit and empire thus helped define British nationalism. As we have seen, the financial community of investors in London closely followed not only the vicissitudes of the economy but the ups and downs of British warfare. A good many financiers had, after all, loaned money to their state and therefore eagerly watched what was done with it. Foreign and colonial trade often depended on naval protection, further linking their interests to the Union Jack, the flag of Great Britain. The state itself depended on expanding commercial activity for tax revenue. Representatives of economic interest groups and lobbies made contacts in the London financial community and in government circles to put forward their views, for example, on excise and customs taxes. New patriotic societies, some of them drawing ordinary people into the wave of nationalist enthusiasm, sprang up.

The generally harmonious relationship between the landed elite and the commercial community was a source of social and political stability and of rising British nationalism. They joined together in the pursuit of empire. Nobles and gentry benefited from the expansion of state activity, diversifying their investments with loans to the crown. Unlike the continental powers, in Britain all subjects paid taxes. This afforded all social groups the sense of being Britons. At the same time (in contrast to the case in France), improved communications and the development of a national market aided the process of national integration in Britain.

Their commitment to the nation also enabled the British elite, proud of their freedoms and their country's more decentralized form of government, to accept a stronger state apparatus without complaining about infringements on their liberty. Thus, they did not feel the need for constitutional guarantees (based upon equality before the law) against arbitrary tyranny. The stronger state did not diminish the status of British landowners, and it in no way infringed on their personal freedoms within civil society.

Anglo-Irish, Scottish, and Welsh landowners became more integrated into a national British elite, as the increasing intermarriage among these groups indicated. Many Scots, though hardly all, began to see themselves as British, just as fewer English people considered Scots or Welsh to be outsiders who were potentially disloyal to the crown, views they continued to hold, however, of the Catholic Irish. The prerogatives of Parliament notwithstanding, the British monarchy and its army and navy became increasingly revered and celebrated as a rallying point for the nation.

## CHALLENGES TO ESTABLISHED AUTHORITY

In the 1760s and 1770s, movements for reform emerged in several countries. In Britain, "liberty" became the watchword of political opposition to

the government. In a parallel struggle on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, the American colonists of Britain's thirteen colonies demanded "no taxation without representation," and then, when rebuffed, these "Patriots" rebelled against British rule in the War of American Independence. Elsewhere, similar reform movements on the European continent sought to reduce absolute rule (as in Denmark), prevent it from lapsing into despotism (as in France), or wanted to prevent the imposition of a stronger centralized authority (as in the Dutch Republic). Other movements for reform challenged what seemed to be unwarranted privileges, again most notably in France. In every Western country, more information about political events in other states was available through newspapers and gazettes, as well as from merchants, travelers, and diplomats. In Britain and parts of Western Europe, political clubs also reflected greater preoccupation with politics. These reform movements, then, influenced each other, however indirectly.

### *British Radicals*

In the 1760s in Britain, ordinary people demanded electoral reform, and some even called for universal male suffrage. Reformers asked that constituencies be redrawn so that rapidly growing industrial regions in the north of England be appropriately represented in Parliament, and that London, which was grossly underrepresented, elect more MPs. Moreover, shouts for more liberties came from ordinary people without the right to vote.

John Wilkes (1727–1797), the son of a successful London malt distiller, was an MP of modest means and a Protestant Dissenter. Charming, witty, and reckless, Wilkes leapt into the public eye in 1763 with the publication of his newspaper, the *North Briton*. Issue number 45 attacked the government—and the king himself directly—for signing the compromise Treaty of Paris with France that year, ending the Seven Years' War. The king ordered "that Devil Wilkes, a trumpet of sedition," arrested for libel. Wilkes announced that he considered his arrest a blow against liberty and the constitution by the unjust, arbitrary power of government; it was "a question of such importance," as he declared at his trial, "as to determine at once, whether English Liberty be a reality or a shadow." The court freed Wilkes after a week in jail on the basis of parliamentary immunity. Wilkes triumphantly boasted that his fate was tied to "that of the middling and inferior set of people" in Britain.

Fearing prosecution for pornography—the government had dug up a bawdy old poem he had written—since the House of Commons had lifted parliamentary immunity, Wilkes left for France in 1764. Upon his return four years later, he was arrested, tried, and convicted, and then freed after thousands of people demonstrated on his behalf. Wilkes then stood for election in Middlesex, the county making up most of metropolitan London north of the Thames and outside of "The City." With the support of mer-

chants and small manufacturers wealthy enough to be eligible to vote, Wilkes was reelected to Parliament. Four times he was elected, and four times Parliament refused to seat him because of his previous conviction. Cloaking himself in a patriot's garb, he became a rallying symbol for the campaign for the rights of the unrepresented in a time of economic hardship, grain riots, and work stoppages.

The phrase "Wilkes and Liberty" echoed in speeches, conversation, and song. In 1769, the Society of the Supporters of the Bill of Rights invoked the name of Wilkes as it called for the government to "restore the constitution." The number 45—the libelous issue of the *North Briton*—became a rallying cry. Wilkes's rather misshapen face appeared on posters, handbills, verses, cartoons, tea mugs, and dinner plates. He was elected sheriff of London in 1771 and even lord mayor three years later, though he was not allowed to occupy either position.

More "respectable" reformers now began to demand greater freedom of the press, specifically a redefinition of libel laws, so that the government could be criticized, and the right to publish parliamentary debates. They further demanded that Parliament meet each year and that MPs be required to live in the districts they represented. However, most Whigs now

(Left) John Wilkes, in an etching by William Hogarth. (Right) Wilkes's supporters take to the streets.



*John Wilkes Esq.*  
*Caricature from the life and death of John Wilkes by William Hogarth.*

disassociated themselves clearly from Wilkes, in part because of his rather unsavory reputation and identification in upper-class eyes with "the mob." They were wary of demonstrations for universal male suffrage. Few Whigs were willing to go beyond insisting on the principle of ministerial responsibility.

Literary and "philosophical" societies, which had sprung up in most large towns, facilitated the emergence of an even wider political culture than that which had developed during the political crises of the seventeenth century. Inns and coffeehouses added special reading rooms to accommodate their clientele. By 1760, London printing presses, the number of which had increased from seventy-five in 1724 to about two hundred at the time of Wilkes's first arrest, churned out eighty-nine newspapers, four of which were dailies. Another thirty-five newspapers were published outside London. By 1790, there were fourteen daily London newspapers, and the number of provincial papers had multiplied by four times. Political pamphlets, handbills, and caricatures inundated the capital and the larger provincial towns. By the 1760s, artists stopped omitting the names of the targets of their satirical wit. Like its Whig opponents and the extra-parliamentary radicals, the government found itself obliged to utilize newspapers, pamphlets, brochures, and handbills to argue its case before public opinion.

### *American Revolutionaries*

During the 1760s, another challenge to the British crown was smoldering far across the Atlantic Ocean in North America. The thirteen American colonies, many times the size of England, had become ever more difficult for the British government to administer. The population of the colonies, which took in 20 percent of British exports and supplied 30 percent of its imports, had grown by tenfold in just seventy years, from about 250,000 in 1700 to more than 2.5 million in 1775, compared to about 6.4 million people in England at the same time. Those arriving in the colonies found a land of opportunity. Many were able to purchase land that would have been beyond their means at home. Artisans and even common laborers commanded relatively high wages because of the shortage of labor in the colonies.

Over the decades in the eighteenth century, the residents of the colonies had developed a sense of living in a British-American society with its own distinct culture. The North American colonies had developed without the kind of centralized organization for economic exploitation and determination to conquer that had characterized the Spanish Empire. The English settlement colonies had been founded in the quest for trade and economic opportunity, as well as religious freedom, as in the case of Massachusetts Puritans, and religious toleration, as in the case of Maryland Catholics. Thus, the colonies' insistence on the liberty of "freeborn Englishmen" (and, after 1707, British subjects) was easily transferred into a demand for a more encompassing liberty that included rejection of the idea that British

sovereignty could not be challenged. Merchants, lawyers, and wealthy landowners, like the Virginians George Washington (1732–1799) and Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826), who stood on top of the social hierarchy, led the colonists. They resented the continued presence of the British army and the attempt of British officers to try to impose on colonial forces the same standards of discipline that applied in Britain. The American colonists believed that they had the right to resist unjust laws in the name of liberty.

The quest of George Grenville (1712–1770), who had succeeded Pitt in 1763 as prime minister, for supplementary revenue aggravated the strained relations between the colonists and the mother country. In 1765, Parliament passed the Stamp Act, which forced Americans to purchase stamps for virtually anything printed. A year later, Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790) of Philadelphia made the colonists' case to the House of Commons. He argued that the act represented the unfair domination of England over another part of the empire. The House of Commons repealed the Stamp Act, but the government then initiated other taxes. Furthermore, Parliament proclaimed a Declaratory Act in 1766, which asserted its right to tax the colonies as it pleased. A year later, the Townshend Acts levied duties on colonial imports of paper, tea, and other products.

Some British Whigs began to identify themselves with the colonists, who took the name Whigs themselves, claiming that corruption was threatening Britain's constitutional balance between monarchy and Parliament. They saw the two movements as parallel struggles for freedom. For radicals in Britain, rotten boroughs symbolized the threat to liberty; for the American colonists, as expressed by John Adams, "liberty can no more exist without virtue and independence than the body can live and move without a soul." The colonists' claim that they were being taxed without having the right to representation played nicely into the hands of political radicals in Britain. American political pamphlets and brochures found an eager audience among British merchants, manufacturers, artisans, and others eager for representation in Parliament. Colonists lobbied in Britain, claiming that "the cause of America is the common cause of the realm . . . both countries have the same complaint, and therefore claim the same friends."

The British government was at first divided and uncertain in the face of an upsurge of demonstrations at home and agitation in the colonies. Popular protest quickly revealed the limits of the hold Britain had on its thirteen American colonies. In March 1770 in Boston, British soldiers fired on a crowd that was vociferously protesting the quartering of British troops in that city. The "Boston Massacre," which took five lives, outraged colonists. That year, George III appointed Frederick Lord North (1732–1792) as prime minister. North, an amiable, sensible man who got along well with the king, was skilled at putting together political coalitions and was a brilliant debater in the House of Commons. He sponsored the Tea Act of 1773. North hoped to aid the East India Company by allowing the company to



Paul Revere's depiction of the Boston Massacre.

ship a surplus of tea to the colonies, with the British government collecting its tariff when the tea arrived in American ports. The move would reduce the price colonists paid for tea but would maintain the British government's assertion that it could tax goods imported into the colonies. It would also threaten the interests of American smuggling, a widespread money-making operation.

On December 16, 1773, colonists dressed as Native Americans forced their way aboard British merchant ships docked in Boston and dumped the cargo of tea into the harbor. Parliament responded to the Boston Tea Party by passing the "Intolerable Acts," which announced that the port of Boston be blocked until the colonists had reimbursed the merchants and government for the tea dumped into the harbor. In September 1774, representatives from the colonies met in the First Continental Congress. Benjamin Franklin drew a distinction between "uncorrupted new states," by which he meant the colonies, and "corrupted old ones," one of which seemed to be waging war on liberty. More troops arrived from England. In April 1775, in the first open fighting between colonists and British regulars, the colonial militia held its own against British troops searching for weapons at Concord and Lexington, Massachusetts, and then in the pitched battle at Bunker Hill near Boston.

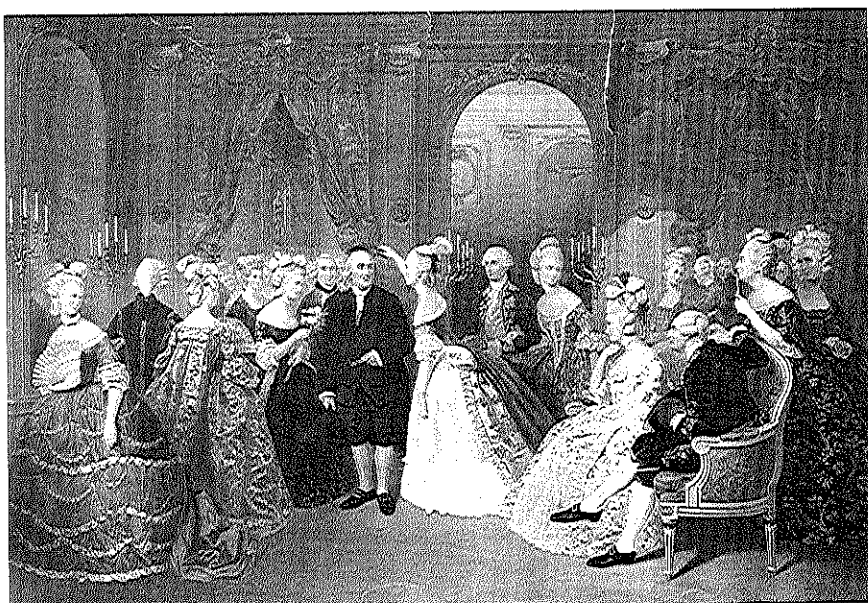


In his pamphlet *Common Sense* (1776), 100,000 copies of which circulated in the colonies, Thomas Paine (1737–1809) launched a devastating attack on the king. *Common Sense* reflected the influence of the Enlightenment, particularly Rousseau's notion of the "social contract." Paine reiterated Locke's argument that governments received "their just powers from the consent of the people." He helped convince delegates to the Second Continental Congress to adopt Thomas Jefferson's Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776. It declared the equality of all people, based on "inalienable rights," and it asserted that the authority of government stems from the consent of the governed. It also stated that when governments violate the "unalienable rights" to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" of their people, they had the right to rebel.

American resistance became a war for independence. The Continental Congress appointed George Washington to command its troops. The British government hoped to recover the colonies at the lowest possible cost; military campaigns were therefore compromised by halfhearted and often inept leadership by the British commanders. The initial British policy of isolating and punishing the rebels quickly failed. There were too few British troops to fight a war on unfamiliar territory against an increasingly determined foe. Next, the British undertook conventional military operations. But the colonial troops simply scattered. In 1776, Washington's army managed to cross the Hudson River into New Jersey. By the time Admiral Richard Howe (1726–1799) tried to negotiate with the rebels at the end of 1776, the colonists refused to listen because they had no reason to negotiate. Washington captured Trenton that December.

In contrast to British soldiers, the colonial army was virtually self-sufficient and broadly supported by the colonists. It became far more than what a loyalist (someone who supported the British cause) dismissed as "a vagabond Army of Ragamuffins, with Paper Pay, bad Cloathes, and worse Spirits." The most significant battles of the war were fought in the classic European style of confrontations, not as engagements between hit-and-run patriots and British regulars. The brutality of the British soldiers in requisitioning goods and maintaining order in the territories they controlled was self-defeating. In the meantime, during the war more than 60,000 American loyalists left the United States, many resettling—some taking their slaves with them—in distant reaches of the British Empire, including Canada, the Caribbean, and Africa.

France signed an alliance with the American rebels in February 1778, agreeing to provide substantial loans in gold. The French monarchy realized that favorable commercial treaties with an independent United States might more than compensate for having lost all rights to territory east of the Mississippi River in 1763. Thereafter, the French navy harassed British supply routes. In 1779, Spain joined the war on the American side, hoping to recapture Gibraltar and the island of Minorca, off the east coast of Spain. Seeking to prevent the North American colonies from purchasing



Benjamin Franklin was a favorite of the French, a relationship that was representative of the alliance between America and France against the British.

Dutch supplies, the British also fought the Dutch Republic. Britain confronted the refusal of Russia, Sweden, Prussia, Portugal, and Denmark to curtail trade with the rebellious Americans.

Great Britain had overextended its capacity to wage war. Its naval advantage, the basis of its strength in modern times, had been eroded. Despite swelling the army to 190,000 men, campaigns on land went badly. On October 19, 1781, Lord Cornwallis surrendered his outnumbered army at Yorktown, Virginia, to a combined force of American and French troops. Britain officially recognized the independence of the American colonies by signing the Treaty of Versailles in 1783.

Having lost its richest colony, Great Britain did not want to lose any others. In 1774, as the resistance in the thirteen colonies became more determined, Parliament had passed the Quebec Act, in an effort to prevent tensions between the British Anglican conquerors and the Catholic population of Quebec from boiling over. The Test Act, which required all officials to take communion in the Anglican Church, was abolished in Quebec, and the Catholic Church was given the status of an established church. The British government also strengthened its control over its other colonies. The India Act (1784) created a board responsible to Parliament to which the East India Company had to report. Another parliamentary act in 1791 created more centralized administration in Canada, with a governor-general exercising far more authority than two colonial assemblies elected by restricted suffrage.

The British government looked to extend the empire further, ordering the systematic charting of the oceans and their winds and currents. James Cook (1728–1779) sailed around New Zealand and along the eastern coast of Australia in 1770, claiming half of the continent for Britain. He was killed by indigenous people upon arriving in Hawaii, showing the dangers of venturing into unfamiliar waters. In 1788 the African Institution was established in London to encourage the exploration of Australia, only some coastal regions of which were known. At the same time, British Evangelicals imagined the conversion of the peoples with whom commerce and empire brought the British into contact.

British sea power and growing commercial empire expanded global trade beyond the luxury goods that had dominated it, particularly with the beginning of the Industrial Revolution in England (see Chapter 10). English textile production began to outproduce India by many times. Mercantilism's hold on the economic thinking of states disappeared forever. Britain became the world's major supplier of capital.

In the meantime, the advent to power in 1784 of William Pitt the Younger (1759–1806) restored political stability in Britain. The next year, Pitt introduced a wide-ranging bill for political reform. It proposed to reduce the minimum tax required for the electoral franchise and to abolish thirty-six rotten boroughs, awarding their representation to manufacturing regions and cities. Opposition among the country gentlemen, as well as that of the king himself, however, led to the bill's defeat. But Pitt did manage to eliminate useless offices that had become sinecures, introduce more accurate accounting methods into government, and facilitated the collection of excise taxes. Despite the personal failings of George III, Britain emerged from the turbulent decades of the 1760s and 1770s with its constitutional monarchy strengthened.

### *The Parlements and the French Monarchy*

In France, two interrelated struggles in the early 1770s challenged the nature of absolute rule. The first was against privileges held by nobles and other corporate groups. The second opposed royal policies and pretensions that seemed to verge on despotism. In a way, this debate somewhat paralleled political issues in Britain.

In France, reformers seeking to limit royal authority had a daunting task because of the absolute nature of monarchical rule. The kings of France nonetheless depended on the support of the parlements. These law courts were made up primarily of nobles, seated in Paris and in twelve provinces. Their principal function was to give royal edicts the force of law by registering them. By refusing to register them, the parlements could impede the functioning of the absolute state. Thus, when the king's edicts had to do with increased or new taxation, political opposition to royal policies sometimes emerged in the parlements.

The increased centralization of the French state had in itself helped create contact between more people and the officials of the king. The concept of a "public" emerged, to which the monarch was in some sense considered responsible and before which the layers of privilege in French society no longer seemed to some acceptable. The crises that embroiled the king and the parlements from the 1750s to the 1780s helped shift public opinion toward the view that the parlements represented the rights of the "nation," threatened by a monarchy that seemed to be ruling in a despotic way.

The issue of Jansenism set the parlements against royal absolutism by raising the constitutional issue of the right of the monarch to circumscribe the parlements' traditional prerogatives. The Jansenists (see Chapter 7) were a dissident group within the Catholic Church. The pope had condemned Jansenism in 1713 with the papal bull *Unigenitus*, which Louis XV supported. But Jansenists, with a considerable following in Paris, found support within some of the parlements, which identified with Jansenist resistance against what they considered the papacy's undue interference in French affairs.

The period of conflict between the parlements and the crown really began in 1749. The controller-general attempted to make the *vingtième* tax (a tax applying to both nobles and commoners) permanent, drawing heated opposition from the parlements. And the Church again sought, without success, to force the French clergy to accept the papal bull *Unigenitus*. Many bishops threatened that sacraments would be refused to laymen who did not have a certificate signed by a priest attesting that the person had made his or her confession to a priest who had accepted the papal bull. Seven years later, the pope tried to defuse the crisis by banning these certificates.

But this concession did not placate the Parlement of Paris. Many of the parlements were manipulated by a handful of Jansenist magistrates and lawyers who managed to convince their colleagues that French acceptance of the papal edict amounted to an abandonment of French sovereignty over the temporal affairs of the Church. The king, refusing to hear the parlements' grievances, made clear that he considered the parlements nothing more than rubber stamps, a means of promulgating his will. When the Jesuit order continued to crusade against Jansenism, the Parlement of Paris responded by ordering Jesuit schools closed in 1761, citing the fact that members of the order took a vow of obedience to the pope.

The successive crises over Jansenism may have weakened the authority of the French monarchy by allowing the Parlement of Paris, and several provincial parlements as well, to claim they were defending constitutional liberties and the independence of the Gallican (French) Church—since Jansenists saw themselves as part of it—against royal encroachment and against Rome. By weakening the authority of the Catholic Church in France, the crisis over Jansenism also eroded the prestige of the absolute monarchy. Jansenism ceased being a political issue after 1758, when the

Parlement of Paris won judicial authority over many ecclesiastical matters. But the self-proclaimed role of magistrates as representatives of public opinion and protectors of the sovereign political will of the nation against abuses of power was a legacy of the Jansenist crisis.

The layers of economic privilege in France had proliferated with the extension of state power, as each monarch sought revenues with increased desperation. Despite increasing calls for reform, even critics who vociferously challenged monopolies (for example, those maintained by guilds) did not intend to end privileges *per se*. Rather, many of them wanted a share of the privileges and wanted to eliminate "unjust" monopolies that seemed to benefit others unfairly. Wealthy commoners, enriched by the economic changes, sought the kind of privileges nobles enjoyed—above all, exemption from many kinds of taxation. Thus, the issue of taxation would mobilize some of the parlements against the monarchy because it raised questions about the layers of privilege within the French state and about the limits of absolute authority.

In 1771, Chancellor René-Nicolas de Maupeou (1714–1792) provoked the parlements by attempting to make the *vingtième* tax permanent. Many nobles feared that general tax increases might lead to peasant uprisings, in which nobles stood to lose the most. Facing mounting resistance, Louis XV abolished the parlements. He then created new, more docile law courts that would not resist royal authority, staffed by magistrates who did not own their offices.

Both sides in the conflict between the parlements and Chancellor Maupeou appealed to public opinion. A declaration of high-ranking nobles stated that the king had abused "the constitution of the government and the rights of the people" by trying to establish "a despotism without bounds, without limits, and consequently without rights." The nobility asserted its "right of assembly," recalling that "the nation, in its assemblies, had charged the parlements with defending its rights." Influenced by the ideas of the Enlightenment, lawyers called for judicial reform, religious toleration, and the end to the abuse of privilege. When the monarchy tried to silence the lawyers, the latter turned courtrooms into forums for political opposition. Lawyers explored notions of national sovereignty while putting forward the case of the parlements against the crown.

As the idea of the nation gradually entered political discourse, the possibility emerged that when the interests of the monarchy and the nation clashed, popular allegiance could ultimately pass exclusively to the nation. Some degree of popular identification with parlements as defenders of the nation against despotism would not be effaced. The Maupeou "coup" lasted only three and a half years, but it had far-reaching effects on the nature of the opposition to the monarchy. It demonstrated that the parlements were not powerful enough to protect "the nation" against royal despotism, suggesting to some that only a body such as the Estates-General, which had not been convoked since 1614, could do so.



Chancellor René-Nicolas de Maupeou (*left*) and his supporter, Anne-Robert Turgot (*right*).

Louis XV was no stranger to unpopularity. He was held to be lazy and indifferent, and rumor had him obediently following the orders of his favorite mistress. The Seven Years' War had exhausted the treasury. Furthermore, France had lost Canada and several Caribbean islands to Britain. This loss of prestige, as well as income, increased the number of the king's critics. The structures of absolute rule seemed inadequate to the task of managing and paying for the cumbersome French state.

Louis XV's death in 1774 did not resolve the crisis. Following demonstrations and a spate of publications in support of the parlements, the twenty-year-old Louis XVI (ruled 1774–1793) dismissed Maupeou and reinstated the parlements. Public opinion seemed to have helped turn back what was popularly conceived to be a despotic assault on restraints on absolute rule.

Convinced that the financial difficulties of the monarchy stemmed from the stifling effect of privileges on the economy, a new minister, Anne-Robert Turgot, undertook ambitious reforms (see Chapter 9). His goal was to cut away some of the web of privileges, thus making the monarchy more efficient. Turgot convinced the young king to issue royal edicts, despite the opposition of the Parlement of Paris. These ended noble and clerical tax exemptions, abolished the guilds, freed the internal commerce of grain (the price of which had been first set free in the 1760s), and exempted peasants from having to work a certain number of days each year repairing roads. Economic liberalization would, he hoped, increase agricultural production and manufacturing, thereby augmenting tax revenue.

But like Louis XV's attempts to override the traditional role of the parlements, Turgot's reforms aroused vociferous opposition. Nobles—with some significant exceptions—rallied against the proposed financial reforms. The parlements, still smoldering over their treatment by Maupeou and Louis XV several years earlier, refused to register—and thereby give the status of law to—the reforms of Turgot, who had supported Maupeou. Grain merchants and guilds voiced strident opposition. Ordinary people rose up in protest, blaming the freeing of the grain trade for the higher prices of flour and bread in a period of dearth. Accusations of hoarding abounded. Grain riots, in which women played the leading roles, swept across the country during the spring “flour war” of 1775. Lawyers once again insisted on the difference between absolute and despotic rule.

The king ended the most significant reform effort on the continent by dismissing Turgot in 1776. When the American colonists declared their independence from Britain, France allied with them, forcing Louis XVI to borrow ever more money at high interest rates and to sell more offices and titles (about 3,700 venal offices conferred noble title). This helped shift power within the nobility from the embittered “nobles of the sword” to “nobles of the robe,” ennobled through the purchase of office or title. The latter had a different way of looking at the world, even as they embraced aristocratic privilege. The more recently ennobled families remained in some ways outsiders, their titles the result of worldly achievements, thus undercutting the very essence of noble status passed down by heredity. In the meantime, the French monarchy slid into an even deeper financial crisis.

### *Other Movements for Reform*

In other cases, movements for reform came from below. In the Swiss Republic of Geneva, native-born artisans during 1765–1768 demanded equality with the citizens possessing political rights. They were rebuffed by wealthy Genevans, who tried to placate them with reductions in their taxes. An uprising in 1782 unseated the ruling oligarchy before the intervention of France, Sardinia, and the Swiss canton of Bern put an end to it.

In 1761, an uprising on the Mediterranean island of Corsica in the name of “fatherland and liberty” ended rule by the northern Italian port city of Genoa. France occupied Corsica seven years later. In 1770, the Greeks, with Russian assistance, rose up against Turkish domination. Russia was eager to enter the world of Mediterranean politics because it desired ultimately to conquer Constantinople. The accession of Catherine the Great in 1762 had ended a long succession crisis, palace plots, and assassinations, bringing stability to the Russian Empire. She sent an army and a small fleet in the hope that Greek success might encourage other peoples to rise up against Ottoman rule. Turkish troops crushed the revolt, but the Greek movement for independence, by virtue of the special place of classical Greece in the development of Western civilization, helped ignite Panhellenism.

In Denmark, where the king had imposed absolute rule in 1660 by suppressing the parliament and refusing to consult with the estates, a current of reform emerged early in the 1770s. In part, it was the inspiration of Johann Struensee (1737–1772), a German doctor, who convinced King Christian VII (ruled 1766–1808) to undertake reforms to strengthen the state economically so that, with Russian support, Sweden's residual Baltic ambitions could be thwarted. The king abolished censorship and the death penalty for thieves, extended religious toleration, and promised to undertake more agricultural reforms in the interests of creating a free peasantry. But the king's widowed mother and some nobles conspired against the reforms. Struensee was tried and convicted of, among other things, living "without religion or morality," and was executed in 1772. A decade later, however, the reforms Struensee had encouraged became part of a program for the future, a sign of the times.

Political struggles in the Dutch Republic—like the struggles between Whigs and the crown in Britain—were followed by the emergence of extra-parliamentary demands by ordinary people for political reform. The regents of the Dutch cities, defending the republic's federalism embodied in the Estates-General, opposed the policies of the bumbling William V of Orange (stadholder 1751–1795). The regents declared war on Britain in 1780 in the hope of weakening their commercial rival. As the war dragged on, they also sought to undercut the monarchical pretensions of William V.

In 1785, in the midst of political crisis, the Dutch Republic allied with France. The immediate goal was to counter the Austrian plan to reopen the Scheldt River and restore Antwerp to some of its former commercial glory, which would have undercut Amsterdam's prosperity. The possibility that France might annex the Southern Netherlands made the British government uneasy, further irritating the pro-British stadholder William V.

In the meantime, a radical "Patriot Party," primarily drawn from the middle class and artisans, put forward democratic reforms. Influenced by the success of the American revolutionaries, they demanded more democratic representation in the Estates. These Dutch reformers unseated the stadholder. Prussian King Frederick William II (ruled 1786–1797), whose sister was the stadholder's wife, sent an army in 1787, occupying Amsterdam and ending the challenge to William V's authority as stadholder. France seemed on the verge of offering the Patriots assistance, but distracted by a mounting political crisis, it backed down against the opposition of Prussia and Britain, powers that supported William V. The balance of power had once again been preserved. Dutch Patriot refugees poured into the Austrian Southern Netherlands and France.

The Austrian Netherlands, too, experienced political turmoil. Powerful nobles opposed to Austrian King Joseph II's enlightened reforms, which threatened their privileges, drove out Austrian troops in 1789. In the Austrian Netherlands, too, a movement for democratic reform emerged, calling for the transformation of the Estates into a representative assembly.



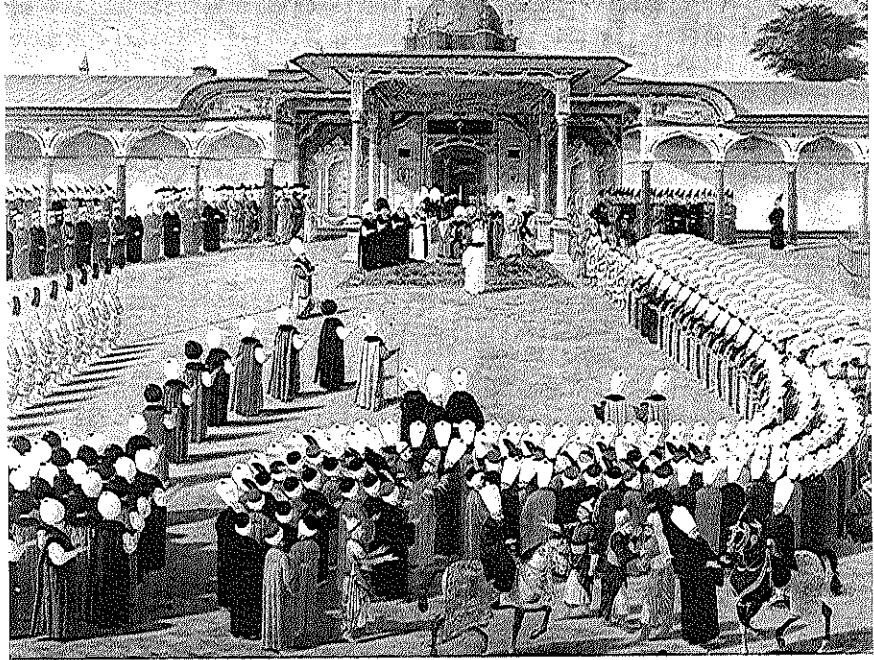
The Dutch (and, as we will see, French) mood seemed to be catching. Dutch Patriots invaded the Southern Netherlands in October 1789, driving away the Austrians. But a popular movement appealed to the nobles even less than did Austrian rule. Backed by the clergy and with the tacit support of most peasants, the nobles wrested control of the short-lived state from the urban-based reformers. The return of Austrian troops in 1790 occurred without resistance.

## DECLINING POWER, DISAPPEARING STATE: THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE AND POLAND

The structure of international power in eighteenth-century Europe was not fundamentally changed by the quest for reform during the 1760s and 1770s. But in the new, more competitive European environment of the late eighteenth century, two other states that did not have access to the fruits of international trade and that were unwilling to restructure themselves lost their power in Europe: the Turkish Ottoman Empire and Poland. The Ottoman Empire, its power overextended and lacking a centralized structure of government, began to decline slowly but surely as its territories in the Balkans and Caucasus were eaten away by Austria and Russia. Poland, in which reforms had arguably come too late, fell prey to its aggressive absolutist neighbors: Russia, Prussia, and Austria, which divided up the state in three partitions in 1772, 1793, and 1795.

### *The Decline of Ottoman Turkish Power in Europe*

In contrast to other absolute sovereigns, the Ottoman Turkish sultans ruled indirectly, governing through Islamic or village officials. Indeed, indirect rule itself may ultimately have hastened the decline of Ottoman absolutism. Like the Spanish Empire at its peak, the Ottoman domains were so extensive that they defied effective control. Insurrections, including some by the janissaries, the once-loyal court militia now increasingly subject to the influence of local elites, challenged the authority of the sultans—whose government in Constantinople became known as the Porte. Imperial officials, Muslim and Christian Orthodox alike, became notoriously corrupt, including the Greek-educated Phanariots, who served the sultans by collecting taxes, while making their families very wealthy. As the system of indirect rule declined in effectiveness, some local Christian and Muslim leaders commanded their own military forces, virtually independent of the sultan's authority in Constantinople. Sultans awarded large estates to those who served them well. This was precisely the same phenomenon that the absolute monarchs of France, Prussia, Russia, and Austria had overcome. However, the Ottoman Empire did not have a hereditary aristocracy. And unlike Russia and parts of Central and Eastern Europe, peasants within the



Sultan Selim III in his palace in Istanbul, with a line of followers stretching in front of him. The Turkish sultans ruled indirectly over a vast network of domains, a tactic that may have hastened the decline of Ottoman absolutism.

empire were free. But Turkish authority virtually collapsed in mountainous Montenegro and Bosnia, where the Turks battled Habsburg and Venetian forces. The government began to run out of money. Stop-gap measures, such as the debasement of the currency, failed to provide sufficient revenue.

Incapable sultans unwilling or unable to impose reforms further weakened the Ottoman Empire. As boys they lived in virtual isolation in a world of uncertainty among court eunuchs and palace intrigue. No regular pattern of succession had ever been established. Whereas Peter the Great of Russia undertook Western military reforms, the sultans did not. The Turkish economy, army, and navy could not keep pace with the Western powers. Turkish cavalymen, with curved swords and magnificent horses, fell before Western artillery. The advice of officials who had been sent to Vienna and Paris to study methods of state went unheeded in Constantinople. Long wars fought against Persia in the east made it more difficult to repress disturbances in the Balkans. In some parts of the empire, a system of land inheritance replaced the old system, and new landowners began to force peasants into serfdom. European merchants took over Ottoman sea trade. The haphazard and inefficient collection of taxes, increasingly by dishon-

est tax farmers, engendered peasant resistance. As in the cases of China and Japan, Ottomans and the scholar class (*ulama*) showed little interest in Western ideas or technology. The single printing press in the empire, which dated only from the 1720s, was shut down sixty years later; no newspaper was published until 1828, and that in Cairo, not Istanbul. The classical literary tradition, as in China and Japan, continued to hold sway. The long decline of Ottoman power in Europe began when the Turks were turned back at the gates of Vienna in 1683. Austria's subsequent conquest of Hungary and Transylvania was confirmed by the Treaty of Carlowitz in 1699. However, the Turks continued to control the Black Sea by virtue of holding Constantinople and the straits. Major Ottoman defeats left the way open for continued Russian expansion. Although the Ottomans took advantage of inter-European wars to maintain their peripheral territories, in the 1760s this began to change. In 1774, following the destruction of the Turkish fleet in the Black Sea, the Ottoman Turks granted Russia the right to oversee Turkish authority in the Danubian principalities and to serve as the official protector of Christians living within its empire. In the meantime, in Morocco, Algiers, Tripoli, and Tunis, which remained nominally part of the Ottoman Empire, local dynasties set up shop. Yet we should not exaggerate the decline of the Ottoman Empire, which remained a power capable of effectively defending its interests well into the nineteenth century.

### *The Partitions of Poland*

While the Ottoman Empire survived, Poland did not endure as an independent state (at least until the end of World War I). Poland was, for all intents and purposes, a republic. It had a king who was elected by citizens, a Senate (which included bishops and other important personages), and an elected Chamber of Deputies (the Sejm). The Sejm, which met every two years but which the king could convene in an emergency, elected the king for life and retained the right to pass laws, approve taxes, and ratify treaties. The king could not travel out of the country without the approval of the Sejm. Moreover, the "liberum veto" ("I freely forbid") accentuated the influence of the wealthiest nobles, who sometimes combined forces to block legislation. The rise of even more powerful aristocrats who owned vast estates exacerbated the impact of the "liberum veto" within the Sejm, preventing reforms that might have strengthened Poland.

During the first decades of the eighteenth century, the kingdom, its population reduced by wars and bubonic plague to only 6 million people, became increasingly dependent on Russia. Indeed, Poland's eclipse made possible Russia's gains in Ukraine. The War of Polish Succession (1733–1735) began when Russia attempted to impose its candidate on the Polish throne over the opposition of the Polish nobles. Because of France's interest in maintaining Sweden, the Ottoman Empire, and Poland as checks against

Austrian Habsburg domination of Central Europe, Louis XV proposed a candidate for the throne, his father-in-law, Stanislas Lesczinski, who had reigned as king of Poland from 1704 to 1709 and now had the support of most Polish nobles. But a Russian army forced the election of Augustus III of Saxony (ruled 1733–1763), the Austro-Russian candidate.

In 1763, the Polish throne again fell vacant with the death of Augustus III. A long period of legislative stagnation that accompanied the conflict between the Sejm and the Saxon kings ended the following year when the Sejm, reflecting Russian influence, elected as king the cultured, cosmopolitan Stanislas Poniatowski (ruled 1764–1795), one of the many lovers of the insatiable Russian Empress Catherine the Great (“many were called, and many were chosen,” as one wag put it). Stanislas was somewhat influenced by Enlightenment thought. Sensing the necessity of reform, he hoped to advance manufacturing in Poland and looked to Britain as a model. He tried to end the *liberum veto* and to curtail the right of seigniorial courts to impose death sentences. He also established a number of schools. Only by such measures, he believed, could Poland escape poverty and backwardness. But some of the more powerful Polish nobles, who resented Russian influence, now opposed Stanislas and his reforms. They hoped that the French monarch or the Ottoman sultan might intervene on their behalf.

Catherine, like the Prussian king, feared that Stanislas’s reforms might lead to a stronger, less subservient neighbor. Since 1764, Russia and Prussia had worked against an expansion of French influence in the Baltic, while preventing Poland from reviving its fortunes. Furthermore, Polish nobles had begun to persecute non-Catholics. Catherine, in the interest of the Orthodox Church, demanded that all non-Catholics be granted toleration in Poland. When Polish nobles formed an anti-Russian and anti-Orthodox confederation, Catherine sent troops into Poland. Ukrainian peasants took advantage of the chaos to rise up against their Polish lords. When they burned a Turkish town while chasing out Poles, Turkey entered the war against Russia (1768–74). Catherine annexed Wallachia and achieved Russia’s dream since Peter the Great by reaching the Black Sea, annexing several territories at Turkish expense. In 1783, the Crimean peninsula, too, became part of the Russian Empire.

Alarmed by the expansion of the Russian Empire, Austria and Prussia demanded territorial compensation. Catherine suggested that the three powers might help themselves to parts of Poland. The First Partition in 1772 reduced Poland by about a third (see Map 11.3). Maria Theresa of Austria “wept and then took her share,” the large province of Galicia, which lay between Russian Ukraine and Austria. Prussia absorbed West Prussia, which had formed a corridor separating East Prussia from the rest of the kingdom. Russia snatched large chunks of territory of eastern Poland.

The Polish Diet in 1791 voted what arguably was the first written constitution in Europe, a liberal document that established a hereditary monar-



MAP 11.3 THE PARTITIONS OF POLAND Poland at its greatest extent in 1660–1667, and the loss of territory to Austria, Prussia, and Russia during the Partitions of 1772, 1793, and 1795.

chy, abolished the system of noble veto, and proclaimed that all authority stemmed from the nation. Reflecting the influence of the French Revolution (see Chapter 12), Poland became a constitutional monarchy, with the king naming ministers but with the parliament and Poland's major towns retaining privileges.

But Poland's days were numbered as an independent state, particularly given the fact that its old protector, France, was in the throes of revolution and had lost influence in East Central Europe. When Poles rose up in 1792 against Russian authority in the part of Poland that had been absorbed by Russia twenty years earlier, Russian troops intervened. They were backed by Polish nobles who opposed the liberal constitution. Prussia refused to come to Poland's aid, receiving in exchange for looking the other way annexation of more Polish territory in the Second Partition in 1793. With the Third Partition in 1795, Prussia and Russia ended Poland's independence for more than a century. The Constitution of 1791, perhaps the most progressive constitution of the century, was torn to shreds. Russia's new gains drew its interests farther into Central Europe, and it now shared a border with the Habsburg monarchy. Poles were now subject to the authority of three different states. In the lands acquired by Prussia, serfs gained some protection against abuses by landlords, but, as in the case of lands absorbed into the Habsburg Empire, the Polish secondary-school system was ended, imposing the German language.

## CONCLUSION

Some historians have argued that movements against absolutism and against privilege, such as the political unrest in Great Britain and the successful rebellion of its North American colonies, constituted a general Western "democratic revolution." But despite the quest for political change in several Western states, demands for universal male suffrage were rare, and calls for the extension of political rights to women even more so (an exception being Geneva in the early 1780s). Even in Britain, after a contentious decade marked by demonstrations for political reform, the most widespread riots of the 1780s were the anti-Catholic Gordon riots. In France, calls for reform were less an attack on the nobles, *per se*, than on privilege. The institutions of the Old Regime in continental Europe demonstrated not only resiliency, but also some capacity to undertake reform.

Nonetheless, denunciations in France against privilege, shaped in part by Enlightenment thought, would be revived in the late 1780s. The Seven Years' War and assistance to the Americans worsened the financial crisis of the French monarchy, as the increasingly global dynastic rivalries and wars

placed further strains on European states. France entered a serious political crisis when critics of the monarchy accused the king of ruling despotically and attacked the layers of economic and social privilege that seemed to constrain effective government and constrict freedom. Demands for sweeping reform led to the French Revolution of 1789, which proclaimed the principle of the sovereignty of the nation. Once again, the eyes of Europe turned toward France.

