

# Enlightened Absolutism

## POLITICS

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ENGLAND: **Charles II** dies (1685) and leaves throne to brother, **James II**, a Catholic. Throne is offered in 1688 to **Mary**, his daughter, and **William** of Orange (Netherlands), with conditions:

- Accept the English Bill of Rights (1689)
- Share power with parliament (Constitutional monarchy)

THIS IS THE GLORIOUS REVOLUTION!

- **Mary** dies in 1692. After **Queen Anne** (sister of **Queen Mary**) dies without heir, **House of Hanover** (German cousins of English Royal family) provides ruler **George I** in 1714. Parliament evolves:
- **Whigs** were the dominant group. They advocated parliamentary supremacy and were anti-Catholic.
- **Tories** favored traditional Stuart Succession and the King (more conservative and traditional). **Robert Walpole** is the first designated minister (Prime minister). He guides legislation and maintains a steady hand with the economic crisis of the Bubbles (see Economics). However, he also supports a system of patronage in order to enlist support. This causes problems in the future during the 1800's as corruption in Parliament enrages the middle and lower classes.

FRANCE and other countries: Last war of **Louis XIV**, **The War of Spanish Succession**. –The Pyrenees were no more! Grand Alliance is formed with Prussia, England, and Dutch Republic to maintain the Balance of Power. Ends with Treaty of Utrecht (1714):

- Spanish territories pass to Britain (Gibraltar) and Austria (Spanish Netherlands now become Austrian Netherlands)
- Britain gains Newfoundland and Nova Scotia in Canada
- Scotland and England formally unify (Great Britain)
- Britain also gains right (*asiento*) to provide African slaves to Spanish America – this will end with abolition, but British merchants get rich in the interim.

RUSSIA: **Peter the Great** (1689-1725) transforms Russia. Great Northern War between Sweden and Russia ends in 1721, but most significant defeat of Sweden is in 1709 at Poltava. Peter expands into Baltic. Incredible modernization and area expansion!

- Establishes Table of Ranks, which confers nobility upon State Service. Tries to advance able men.
- Travels to Europe twice and to learn shipbuilding, skills, encourages technical schools and Academy of Sciences.
- Builds city of **St. Petersburg** at mouth of Baltic
- Serfdom (Slavery) enforced by statute in 1754.
- Establishes 10 territorial areas, which is meant to closely copy Colbert's reforms in France.

POLAND: Problems with succession weakens Poland and sets it up for its eventual partitions in 1772, 1793, and 1795.

## ECONOMICS – ATLANTIC SYSTEM

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A triangular pattern of trade that binds Europe, Africa and Americas. Dependent upon slavery. Plantations export sugar, coffee and tobacco. Spanish dominate South America.

AGRICULTURAL REVOLUTION Farmers cultivate more land by draining wetlands. Enclosure movement begins. Scientific knowledge applied to crops/livestock. In Eastern Europe the large estates with serfs remain.

BANKING The Bubbles: South Seas (English) and Mississippi Company (France) sell stocks beyond capacity to earn. Both collapse with disastrous results. **John Law**, Scottish Financier, was involved with the French Company.

FRANCE: the debt became the responsibility of the crown, while in England, Parliament plans to absorb debt. The Bank of England survives the bubbles. It increases its borrowing capacity. Financial center shifts from Amsterdam to London.

## RELIGION

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New Skepticism toward religion. **Pierre Bayle** writes *Historical and Critical Dictionary*, which cites errors and delusions of all past and present writers of all religions. Stresses religious tolerance: No opinion worth burning your neighbor for. For the first time, **Atheists** identify their non-beliefs, while **Deists**, who acknowledge a supreme being, attack Catholic intolerance. **Voltaire** led the criticism of the church with his famous saying – *Ecrasez l'infame* ("Crush the infamous (religious) bigotry").

## SOCIAL

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Cities grow. Pressure on nobility as upper class merchants intermarry. English peers continue to run large estates. Social classes try to reinforce distinctions in all aspects of everyday life. Nobility reasserts privileges when pressed for money. Peasants resent tithes and taxes. The term *bourgeois* now refers to the emerging middle class. Literacy increases – especially in Protestant countries. Britain and Holland led in print output. Newspapers were widely read. More travel literature about different countries. **Voltaire** and **Montesquieu** begin their writings. Satire is used to observe other countries and contrast them with injustices at home.

**Women** – **Mary Astel** (1666-1731) questions women's traditional roles. The debate over the role of women begins. Middle class or aristocratic women host Salons, weekly gatherings of *philosophes*, where public opinion, political events, culture and ideas discussed.

## INTELLECTUAL – ENLIGHTENMENT

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Emerges in 1740.

*Philosophes* dedicated to solving problems of the real world. The *philosophes* were men, women, even monarchs who wrote and published. Many works were banned as they become more critical of state. Voltaire and Rousseau publish.

- **Diderot** publishes *Encyclopedie* from 1751-1772
- **Montesquieu** publishes *The Spirit of Laws* (influences U.S. Constitution on Separation of Powers) and *Persian Letters*.
- **Rousseau** (1712-1778) writes the *The Social Contract* which introduces ideas of the **General Will** (influential in French Revolution). His ideas of education were found in *Emile*: back to nature.
- **Voltaire** (1694-1778) Attacks organized religion, bigotry, despotic governments. Exonerates Callas, who was wrongly executed. Writes *Candide* as a critic of corrupt society.

MEDICINE Statistics were used to study disease. Some public sanitation and hospitals. Inoculation for Smallpox begins and will continue after Jenner develops serum from cowpox.

## ARTISTIC

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Rococo painting reflects new taste. More feminine, shell work, decorative qualities were found in furniture and smaller objects.

Music: Court and church patrons support Bach, Handel (Messiah). Mozart a Classical composer. Opera develops with lighter themes. Marriage of Figaro mocks the social order of the Old Regime.

Novels: Closely tied to expansion of reading public. Golden age of political newspapers read in coffee shops.