Absolutism in Europe

The Emergence of the First Global Age (1450–1750)

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Absolutism in France

By the end of this section, you will have learned about the rise of absolutism in France, and be able to answer the following key questions:

- How did France develop an absolute monarchy?

- Who was Louis XIV and what were his policies?
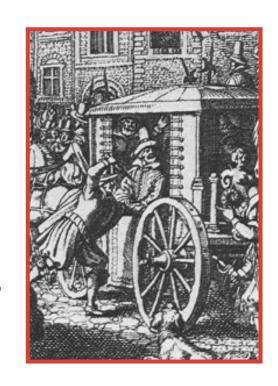
- What was Louis XIV's legacy?

In 1589, the Huguenot prince Henry of Navarre became **Henry IV**, the first king in the French Bourbon dynasty.

Hoping to end religious wars in his country, Henry converted to Catholicism, the majority religion in France. He issued the **Edict of Nantes** in 1598, granting his subjects religious freedom.

Unfortunately, these actions were not enough to end the violence that had wracked the country since the Reformation. In 1610, a religious fanatic leapt into Henry's carriage and stabbed him to death.

Do you think a leader should convert in order to appease his or her subjects?

In the fifty years following the death of Henry IV, France was largely governed by two cardinals who acted as advisors to the king.
Press on the tabs to learn more about these two men and how they shaped France and the monarchy.

Press **start** to begin.

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Why did the cardinals want to strengthen the king?

Louis XIV's goal was to make France the greatest nation in Europe. His minister of finance, **Jean Baptiste Colbert**, had a plan to do just that.

Colbert wanted to make France economically self-sufficient.
To encourage domestic trade, he put high tariffs on imports and gave tax benefits to French companies.

He also encouraged people to move to France's colonies in Canada to stimulate the growing fur trade.

What are some pros and cons of Colbert's system?

Louis XIV wanted to make himself an absolute monarch. He exerted strict control over his nobles and frequently displayed his wealth and power.
His efforts to expand his territory would bring France into several wars.

Press **start** to learn more.

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Why did Louis force courtiers to live at Versailles?

By 1690, the other European nations had joined together to prevent French expansion. The League of Augsburg rivalled France's power, particularly as France was weakened by poor harvests and constant warfare.

When King Charles of Spain died in 1700, his crown passed to Philip of Anjou, Louis XIV's grandson. This meant that the two most powerful nations in Europe would be controlled by the Bourbons.

In 1701, England, Austria, the Dutch Republic and Portugal joined forces to prevent the union of France and Spain. The result was the **War of Spanish Succession**.

Why did other nations fear the union of France and Spain?

The war dragged on until 1714, ending with the **Treaty of Utrecht**. Philip was permitted to rule Spain as long as France and Spain remained separate nations.

When Louis XIV died in 1715, France was a great military power and the cultural capital of Europe. Yet his death was met with celebration throughout France.

Louis' expensive tastes and frequent wars created an enormous national debt. In 1685, Louis had ended the Edict of Nantes, causing many Huguenots to flee France for fear of religious persecution. This, and his cancellation of many of Colbert's financial policies, damaged the French economy and created lasting resentment among the people.

What makes Louis XIV an absolute monarch?

Several key figures were instrumental in France's path to absolute monarchy. Can you match each key figure to his description?

Press **start** to begin.

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