

New States in Europe
AP World History
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Early England

By the early 800s, small Anglo-Saxon kingdoms covered the former Roman province of Britain. In Europe, the decline of the Carolingian Empire in the 900s left a patchwork of feudal states controlled by local lords. Gradually, the growth of towns and villages, and the breakup of the feudal system were leading to more centralized government and the development of nations. The earliest nations in Europe to develop a strong unified government were England and France. Both would take similar paths.

For centuries, invaders from various regions in Europe landed on English shores. The Angles and the Saxons stayed, bringing their own ways and creating an Anglo-Saxon culture. In 1016, the Danish king Canute conquered England, molding Anglo-Saxons and Vikings into one people. In 1066 one of England's early kings, Edward the Confessor, died without an heir. A great struggle for the throne erupted, leading to one last invasion. The invader was William, duke of Normandy, who became known as William the Conqueror. Normandy is a region in the north of France that had been conquered by the Vikings. The Normans were descended from the Vikings, but they were French in language and in culture. As King Edward's cousin, William claimed the English crown and invaded England with a Norman army. After his victory, William unified control of the lands and laid the foundation for centralized government in England.

Over the next centuries, English kings tried to achieve two goals. First, they wanted to hold and add to their French lands. Second, they wanted to strengthen their own power over the nobles and the Church. William the Conqueror's descendants owned land both in Normandy and in England. The English king Henry II added to these holdings by marrying Eleanor of Aquitaine from France. The marriage brought Henry a large territory in France called Aquitaine. He added Aquitaine to the lands in Normandy he had already inherited from William the Conqueror. Henry was succeeded first by his son Richard the Lion-Hearted, hero of the Third Crusade. When Richard died, his younger brother John took the throne. John ruled from 1199 to 1216. He failed as a military leader, losing Normandy and all his lands in northern France to the French under Philip Augustus. This loss forced a confrontation with his own nobles. Some of John's problems stemmed from his own personality. He was cruel to his subjects and tried to squeeze money out of them. He alienated the Church and threatened to take away town charters guaranteeing self-government. John raised taxes to an all-time high to finance his wars. His nobles revolted. On June 15, 1215, they forced John to agree to the most celebrated document in English history, the Magna Carta (Great Charter). This document, drawn up by English nobles and reluctantly approved by King John, guaranteed certain basic political rights. The nobles wanted to safeguard their own feudal rights and limit the king's powers. In later years, however, English people of all classes argued that certain clauses in the Magna Carta applied to every citizen. Guaranteed rights included no taxation without representation, a jury trial, and the protection of the law. The Magna Carta guaranteed what are now considered basic legal rights both in England and in the United States.

Hundred Years War

England and France battled with each other on French soil for just over a century. The century of war between England and France marked the end of medieval Europe's society. When one of the early French kings died without a successor, England's Edward III claimed the right to the French throne. The war that Edward III launched for that throne continued on and off from 1337 to 1453. It became known as the Hundred Years' War. England won most of the early battles in the Hundred Years War. Then, in 1429, a teenage French peasant girl named Joan of Arc felt moved by God to rescue France from its English conquerors. When Joan was just 13 she began to have visions and hear what she believed were voices of the saints. They urged her to drive the English from France and give the French crown to France's true king, Charles VII. After winning several battles and unifying French forces, the Burgundians, England's allies, captured Joan in battle. They turned her over to the English. The English, in turn, handed her over to Church authorities to stand trial. Although the French king Charles VII owed his crown to Joan, he did nothing to rescue her. Condemned as a witch and a heretic because of her claim to hear voices, Joan was burned at the stake on May 30, 1431.

The long, exhausting war finally ended in 1453. Each side experienced major changes. A feeling of nationalism emerged in England and France. Now people thought of the king as a national leader, fighting for the glory of the country, not simply a feudal lord. The power and prestige of the French monarch increased. The English suffered a period of internal turmoil known as the War of the Roses, in which two noble houses fought for the throne.

Absolutism in Spain

In the 1500s, Spain emerged as the first modern European power. Spain's king, Charles V, was involved in almost constant warfare due to the Reformation and attempts to control areas of Europe that his family, the Habsburgs, once controlled. His son, Philip II, expanded Spanish influence, strengthened the Catholic Church, and, believing he ruled by divine right, made his own power absolute. Despite strengthening his power within Spain, Philip's efforts met with negative results outside Spain. The Netherlands tired of Spanish rule and rebelled in 1579, eventually winning independence in 1648. Philip also tried to conquer England and force a return of Catholicism. Philip lost the War of the Spanish Armada against England's Elizabeth I in 1588. While not immediate, the loss of European lands and the expenses associated with European wars began to impact Spain in a negative way. While absolutism made Spain temporarily strong, the country would over time become weak due to inflation and a population that tired of autocratic control. Spain would eventually be conquered, temporarily, by France during the reign of Napoleon Bonaparte in the early 19th Century.

Absolutism in France

Religious wars between Catholics and Protestants tore France apart in the late 1500s. France was at first weakened by the Thirty Years War and a civil war called the Fronde. In the 1640s, under Louis XIV, who assumed absolute power with the help of Cardinal Richelieu, France became the most powerful state in Europe. Louis, known as "The Sun King," ruled for 72 years. His claim to power was furthered by Jacques Bossuet, who argued that Louis was god's representative here on earth. During Louis' reign, France essentially took over control of Church activities within the country. While the Pope was still the formal authority over French Catholics, the French monarch in reality controlled most Church functions. Government and

absolutist philosophers in France argued that the people of France should give up their rights in exchange for the stability and order that a monarchy would create. They pointed to the disorder of religious wars in France and the Holy Roman Empire as proof that rule by the people would not work. Louis is also known for building Versailles, which became one of the largest royal palaces in the world. Absolutism in Spain had similar effects upon France as it did in Spain. Louis was one of Europe's strongest monarchs, but his spending on several disastrous wars and the lack of democratic reforms led many French people to become disenchanted with autocratic rule. The French people revolted in 1789 against Louis XIV's great grandson, Louis XVI.

Absolutism in Russia

In Russia, Peter the Great used autocratic methods to modernize Russia, pushing through social and economic reforms and importing western technology. Peter also took over control of the Russian Orthodox Church, removing the Patriarch as the leader within Russia. Peter used his newfound power to greatly expand the size of the Russian Empire through his conquest of parts of Central Asia. Later, Catherine the Great achieved the Russian dream of a warm-water port on the Black Sea by waging war against the Ottoman Empire and taking over part of the Crimean Peninsula. Both Peter and Catherine helped Russia conquer frontier areas such as Siberia and began forced settlement of those areas, often using peasant laborers, debtors, and petty criminals.

Absolutism in England

The rise of absolutism in England began with the reign of Henry VIII. There is no evidence of any great hostility towards the church before the Reformation, but all of this changed when Henry made the fateful decision that only changing England's religion could extricate him from a marriage to Catherine of Aragon that, in the absence of a male heir, now threatened the future of his dynasty. In rapid succession from 1532, legislation was passed through Parliament curbing the influence of the papacy in England and appointing the King as Supreme Head of the Church. Once this and the divorce were achieved, the king moved to take control over much of the Church's property through the dissolution of the monasteries.

As Henry's health failed in the last years of his life it became clear that his own actions had encouraged the growth of a powerful protestant party at Court. On his death in 1547 they moved quickly to establish their supremacy in the regency government made necessary by the youth of the new king, Edward VI (1547-1553). So, the short reign of Edward VI saw a determined attempt to introduce a full Protestant church polity into England.

On Edward's death in 1553, the changes were reversed easily by his Catholic half-sister, Mary (1553-1558). Only Mary's devotion to the papacy, and her determination to marry her cousin, Philip of Spain, provoked a half-hearted reaction. English Protestantism was reduced once again to a persecuted remnant; many of its ablest figures taking refuge abroad, to avoid martyrdom - the fate of those whom remained behind.

In 1558 Elizabeth acceded to a troubled throne, after a five-year period in which Catholicism had been re-established in England with little apparent difficulty. Although the changes of Mary's reign were now reversed once more, Elizabeth and her councilors were under no illusions that many of her subjects remained obstinately attached to the old ways. As such, the decision was made to introduce elements of Catholic ritual and tradition into a new Protestant church called

the Anglican Church. Like her father, Henry, Elizabeth strengthened her power by dominating both church and state.

Beginning in 1603 in England, the Stuart kings James I and Charles I, clashed with Parliament over royal authority, money, foreign policy, and religion. Charles saw himself as an absolute monarch with divine right, despite English law clearly outlining the right of England's gentry to have a representative parliament. Similar to the beliefs of leaders like Louis XIV in France, Charles believed that only a monarchy could ensure that England avoided the unrest that plagued Europe after the collapse of Catholic rule. Civil war broke out in 1642 when Charles I tried to arrest the radical leaders of the House of Commons who disagreed with his attempts at absolutism. In the end, a victorious Parliament executed Charles, abolished the monarchy, and created a republic headed by Oliver Cromwell.

Charles I's son, James II tried briefly to re-establish absolute rule in England but was overthrown by Parliament in 1688. The Glorious Revolution of 1688 established the English Bill of Rights and ensured the supremacy of Parliament over the monarchy. Under the Bill of Rights, England became a constitutional monarchy. The first monarchs under this new government were William and Mary, and their reign set a precedent whereby the king or queen would now be only a symbol for the country. This new democratic country became an model for democratic reformers in other countries such as Spain and France.