

UNIT 1 – The 18th Century in Europe

- Absolute Monarchy
 - concept
 - why it didn't succeed everywhere in Europe
- A century of balance
- Population in the 18th century
 - great increase
 - cities
 - division of the states
 - first state: the clergy
 - second state: the nobles
 - third state: the rest of the people
 - the peasants
 - the bourgeoisie
- Writers of the Enlightenment
 - Montesquieu
 - Voltaire
 - Rousseau
- Spain in the XVIII century
 - Charles II
 - Philip V
 - Charles III



Absolute Monarchy

Absolutism was the system of government in most European countries.

European kings governed without convoking Parliaments and imposed their own will.



But they made some changes with the objective of improving the administration and the economy of their states. This form of government was called **Enlightened Despotism**.

The most important ones were: Frederic II of Prussia, Joseph II of Austria, Catherine II of Russia, Louis XV of France and Charles III of Spain.

The reforms they made were:

- Develop the national industry thanks to the help of the states and the creation of public factories.
- Improve trade: enhancing the means of communication and infrastructures, like roads and channels.
- Encourage scientific development and modernize the education system.
- Centralize the administration.
- Increase and make a more professional army.
- Subject the other powers especially the church and the nobles.

Absolutism did not succeed in all European countries.

- In the **United Kingdom** Parliament Monarchy was the form of government.
- In the **United Provinces**: Parliament Republic remained during the 18th century.
- In **Poland**: Monarchy was elected. This system caused an unstable interior political life from which Prussia, Austria and Russia (nearby countries) took advantage, sharing out the country between them at the end of the 18th century.



A century of balance

In 1700 Charles II of Spain died without any children. He left the crown in his will to a grandson of Louis XIV's, Philip V from Anjou. But most of European countries did not accept the new king. They were afraid of a possible union between the crowns of France and Spain that would give rise to a



very strong monarchy in Europe, so the war of the Spanish Succession exploded (1700-1714) in which most of the European countries took part.

The war finished with the **peace of Utrecht** (1713) and Rastadt (1714).

Philip V was accepted as a king but Spain lost all the possessions in Europe. After this peace we had a continental balance system whose objective was that all European powers were balanced and none of them became dominant.

In spite of this, there were a lot of wars during the 18th century, for several reasons:

- Strong new powers like Russia, Prussia, Austria and England wanted to extend across Europe or form colonial empires.
- Old dominant countries like France and Spain tried to recover part of their power or, at least, not lose more influence in front of the new powers.

However, the 18th century wars were not as destructive as the previous centuries' wars and they killed much less of the civil population.

Population in the 18th century

During the 18th century the European population increased a lot: from 115 to 190 million people, including Russia.

The reasons for this were:

- the drop in mortality thanks to a better diet

- fewer virulent epidemic plagues and
- fewer bloody wars.

This demographic stage with a high birth rate and a high death rate but decreasing and an increasing population is called **demographic transition**.

The population increased a lot. The most important cities in Europe were: London (800.000 inhabitants), Paris (600.000) and Madrid, Moscow, Naples...

In the 18th century society was still divided in **3 states**, typical in an Ancient Regime, but changes were starting that announced the revolution.

First state: the clergy

The clergy had had a lot of influence on European society for well over a thousand years. It dominated education, laid down moral values and the values of society in general. Before the use of the printing press, the clergy wrote, published and kept in its own libraries almost every book written.

Through the pulpit it controlled the most important means of communicating with population.

They had a monopoly on education.

Bishops were great landowners and often warriors

Second state: The nobles

Noble rank in most European countries conferred privileges as well as power. They were exempt from direct taxation. In some countries (Poland...) landownership was restricted to the nobility.



In western Europe, despite their privileges, the nobility did come under financial pressure and they were forced into borrowing increasing sums of money.

Marriage to rich heiresses, sometimes from backgrounds in trade, was often necessary to maintain the family fortune.

The first and second states enjoyed certain privileges that the third state did not. Although they were the richest, they did not have to pay taxes. They were also the only members in society who could hold positions of importance such as Officers in the army.

Third state: the rest of the people

The third state was made up of the bourgeoisie, wage earners, and the peasantry. It made up the majority of the population of a country (97%).

The Peasants

In most parts of Europe, outside the Low Countries, most people lived in the countryside. Most country dwellers were either free peasants, who worked on land which they leased from landowners, or landless labourers.

In eastern Europe serfdom still existed.

The conditions of living varied enormously for the peasants: the peasantry in Spain



suffered from high levels of rent and taxation, a situation which contributed to the depopulation of the countryside, the growth of towns and emigration to the New World.

The situation was often made worse in France by the frequency of civil wars and political instability.

The Bourgeoisie

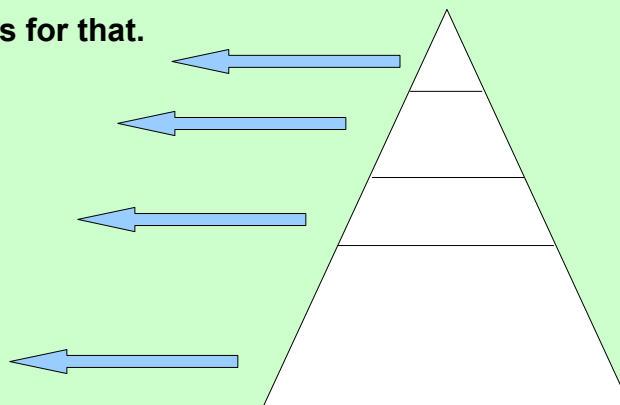
In the 16th and the 17th centuries we see the emergence of an urban bourgeoisie, but outside the Netherlands, they exercised relatively little political power.

Some members of the bourgeoisie were able to make considerable amounts of money from exploiting the emerging capitalist system, international trade...

The aspiration to acquire a landed estate was often highly developed among the urban bourgeoisie, many of them were able to acquire noble status through the acquisition of land.

TASKS

1. A day in the life of a: noble, clergy, bourgeoisie or peasant. Choose one of them. Write 12-15 lines.
2. Give some advantages of the 1st and 2nd state.
3. Write about some disadvantages of the third state.
4. Complete and explain the next graphic:
5. Differences and similarities between bourgeoisies and peasants.
6. Complete the following pyramid with the different social groups and explain the reasons for that.

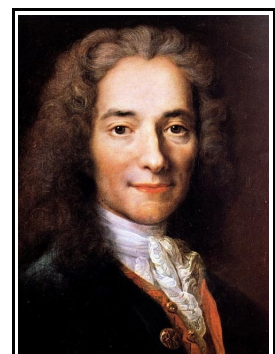


Writers of the Enlightenment

The ideas of the writers of the Enlightenment announced big changes.

Montesquieu (1689-1755). Works: *Persian letters*, and *Spirit of the laws*.

He disapproved of absolutism, he was a defender of privilege and nobility but he proposed the "separation of powers" (executive, legislative and judicial). The monarch would administer the laws (and have the power to veto them), an assembly with two houses would make the laws, while an independent judiciary would ensure that the laws were obeyed. He warned against intolerance and tyranny.



Voltaire (1694-1778): Works: *Letters philosophiques*.

He was a critic. He had no time for the Catholic Church, which he regarded as the worst example of an intolerant institution. He emphasised the importance of reason and toleration. He liked a Parliamentary Monarchy that controlled the power of kings.

Rousseau (1712-1778). Works: *The Social Contract*... "Man is born free, but everywhere in chains"

He proposed that direct participation of all people would give the government the authority to run the state. Everybody had to be involved in this ideal of democracy: people should meet in assemblies to discuss laws and either choose or sack the government.

TASKS

The people should have power, 1775.

"Man is born free. No man has any natural authority over others; force does not give anyone that right. The power to make laws belongs to the people and only to the people."

(a pamphlet, banned by the French government in 1775, Jean Jacques Rousseau.)

7. Which social group would be most influenced by this words and why?
8. Why do you think this pamphlet was banned?
9. Which members of the French society wanted it to be banned?

Spain in the 18th century

King Charles II died in 1700 without any children; this caused *The Succession war* (1701-1714): the war divided Spain in two factions, on one side the Kingdom of Aragon that supported the Archduke Charles, on the other side the Kingdom of Castille that supported Philip V.

Philip V won the war and was determined to change the Spanish political system to one like the French. With "Decretos de Nueva Planta" he abolished the local laws of

Aragon; the only exceptions were Navarra and the Basque Country because they supported the king during the war.

Philip V changed the administration:

- He introduced the Secretary of the States, similar to the present ministers.
- He created a new civil servant, the *intendente* who represented the central government in local places.
- He reorganized the army into a permanent national army.

Charles III made a lot of reforms with the aim of modernizing the country according to the ideas of the Enlightenment:

- He tried to develop the Spanish economy creating Royal Manufactures, introducing free market, improving the roads and making the Castille Channel for better transportation in the Peninsula.
- He tried to modernize agriculture to increase production.
- He tried to dominate the Church reducing its power and influence so that he could have absolute authority.
- He supported science and culture so *Sociedades de Amigos del Pais* were created.



The results of all these changes were not very important due to the opposition of the nobles and the church; and because the new ideas were against absolutism.

When the French Revolution started (1789), just one year before Charles IV became king, all the reforms finished because the king, nobility and clergy considered that the ideas of the Enlightenment were responsible for the new situation.

Galicia in the 18th century

The new institution, the **intendencia**, was created in Galicia in 1718, it was in charge of the wars, taxes, laws and police. Because of the problems between Spain and England to control American routes, there were a lot of assaults on Galician coasts by English and Dutch boats.

The Bourbons created the dockyard in Ferrol and steelworks in Sargadelos.

There were a big number of people who emigrated to Castille, Andalusia, Portugal and America due to the **demographic pressure** (more people than jobs).

Art in the 18th century

Rococo: First half of the 18th century.

- It was an exaggeration of the Baroque, and had a lot of decoration.
- In **architecture** the walls and ceilings were covered with decoration, the rooms were full of very luxurious furniture and curtains (below, cathedral of Murcia).
- The most important painters were: Tiepolo, Watteau, Fragonard and Boucher. They painted aristocratic fully decorated scenes.



Neoclassicism: second half of the 18th century.

- It was born as a reaction to the excess of the Baroque; it was a return to the simplicity and calmness of the classical greco-roman art.

- The most important artists were:
 - Sculptor: Antonio Cánova.
 - Painter: Jacques-Louis David.

- Buildings:
 - The Prado Museum.
 - The Capitol (Washington).



Find out more at...

- these websites:
 - ✓ www.schoolhistory.co.uk (general information for students - simple language)
 - ✓ www.wikipedia.com (general information)
- these books (from the school library):
 - ✓ BINGHAM, Jane et alt.: *The Usborne Internet-Linked Encyclopedia of World History*. Usborne. 2000. Pages 314-319. ISBN: 97807-4605361-4 (interesting links to their website)
 - ✓ GANERI, Anite et alt.: *Encyclopedia of World History. From the Stone Age to the 21st Century*. Parragon. United Kingdom. 2005. Pages 148-149 and 152-153. ISBN: 1-405-45-684-1
 - ✓ MURPHY, Derrick et alt.: *Europe 1760-1871. Flagship History*. Collins. 2000, 2002. ISBN: 0-00-327132-3
 - ✓ nobels by Jane AUSTEN, such as: *Pride and Prejudice*, *Emma*, etc.
- And these films:
 - ✓ *Amadeus* (1984), Mozart's life
 - ✓ *Catherine the Great* (1995) about Catherine of Russia
 - ✓ *Rob Roy* (2007) about a Scottish folk hero
 - ✓ *The Dangerous Liaisons*
 - ✓ *The Last of the Mohicans* (1992), the French and Indian War
 - ✓ *The Perfume*
 - ✓ *Treasure Island* (1990), the famous pirate story

Pictures from:

- Banco Imágenes ITE
- Map of Europe in the 18th century by Ana Arias Castro
- Picture of “*The nobles*” by Luana Rischer Ferreira from Banco Imágenes ITE