

Absolute Monarchs in Europe**Lesson 1**

Spain's Empire and European Absolutism

Key Terms and People

Philip II Spanish king who took control of Portugal but failed in his invasion of England

absolute monarch king or queen with complete control

divine right idea that a ruler receives the right to rule from God

Before You Read

In the last lesson, you read about global trade resulting from the colonization of the Americas.

In this lesson, you will learn about changes occurring in Europe in the 1500s and 1600s.

As You Read

Use a chart to record causes and effects of events in Europe.

A POWERFUL SPANISH EMPIRE

How did Spain's power increase and then decrease?

Charles V of Spain ruled the Holy Roman Empire and other European countries. In 1556, he left the throne and split his holdings. His brother Ferdinand received Austria and the Holy Roman Empire. His son, **Philip II**, got Spain and its colonies.

Philip II then took control of Portugal when the king of Portugal, his uncle, died without an heir. Philip also got its global territories in Africa, India, and the East Indies. When he tried to invade England in 1588, though, he failed. The defeat made Spain weaker. However, Spain still seemed strong because of the wealth—gold and silver—that flowed in from its colonies in the Americas.

1. Who was Philip II?

GOLDEN AGE OF SPANISH ART AND LITERATURE

How did works from the golden age of Spanish art and literature reflect the values and attitudes of the period?

Spain's great wealth allowed monarchs and nobles to become patrons of artists. Two of the greatest artists of the 16th and 17th century were El Greco and Diego Velázquez. El Greco's work reflected the religious faith of Spain during this period. The paintings of Velázquez reflected the pride of the Spanish monarchy.

Lesson 1, *continued*

In literature, Miguel de Cervantes wrote *Don Quixote de la Mancha*, which ushered in the birth of the modern European novel. The novel tells the story of a Spanish nobleman who reads too many books about heroic knights.

- Who were some of the artists and writers of Spain's golden age?

THE SPANISH EMPIRE WEAKENS
What weakened the Spanish Empire?

Spain's new wealth led to some serious problems. The prices of goods constantly rose. Unfair taxes kept the poor from building up any wealth of their own. As prices rose, Spaniards bought more goods from other lands. To finance their wars, Spanish kings had to borrow money from banks in foreign countries. The silver from the colonies began to flow to Spain's enemies.

In the middle of these troubles, Spain lost land. Seven provinces of the Spanish Netherlands rose in protest against high taxes and attempts to crush Protestantism in the Netherlands. These seven provinces were Protestant, whereas Spain was strongly Catholic. In 1579, they declared their independence from Spain and became the United Provinces of the Netherlands. The ten southern provinces (present-day Belgium) were Catholic and remained under Spanish control.

- Why did Spain lose power?

THE INDEPENDENT DUTCH PROSPER

Why did the Dutch prosper?

The United Provinces of the Netherlands was different from other European states of the time. It was a republic, not a kingdom. Each province had a leader elected by the people.

The Dutch also practiced religious tolerance, letting people worship as they wished. Dutch merchants established a trading empire. They had the largest fleet of merchant ships in the world. They were also the most important bankers in Europe.

- Give two reasons for the success of the Dutch in trading.

ABSOLUTISM IN EUROPE

What is absolutism?

Though he lost his Dutch possessions, Philip II continued to hold tight control over Spain. He wanted to control the lives of his people. Philip and others who ruled in the same way were called **absolute monarchs**. They believed in holding all power. They also believed in **divine right**. This is the idea that a ruler receives the right to rule from God.

Widespread unrest in Europe in the 17th century led to an increase in absolute rule, or absolutism, and its restrictions. Absolute rulers used their increased power to impose order. They wanted to free themselves from the limitations imposed by the nobility and government bodies.

- What did absolute monarchs believe?

Lesson 1, *continued*

As you read about the Spanish empire, briefly note the causes or effects (depending on which is missing) of each event or situation.

Causes	Effects
1. The gold and silver coming from its vast empire made Spain incredibly wealthy.	
2.	Spain suffered from severe inflation.
3.	The Spanish economy declined and at times Spain was bankrupt.
4. Philip raised taxes in the Netherlands and tried to crush Protestantism.	
5.	The Dutch became wealthy from trade and banking.
6.	European monarchs became increasingly powerful.