

Changing Social Hierarchies

We . . . order the said Jews and Jewesses of our kingdoms to depart and never to return or come back to them or to any of them.

—Ferdinand and Isabella, Edict of the Expulsion of the Jews, 1492

Essential Question: How were social categories, roles, and practices maintained or changed from 1450 to 1750?

As societies faced rebellions from outside and within, social hierarchies began to develop and transform. In Europe, the treatment of Jews showed that majorities treated non-majority ethnic groups in different ways. Jews had been expelled from England (1290), France (1394), and, as stated above, Spain (1492). The Ottoman Empire, however, provided a safe haven for Jews fleeing discrimination in Europe.

Throughout the world, civilizations developed distinctive social hierarchies. Different groups—including royalty, nobility, landowners, scholars, and soldiers—sought power and influence. In some societies, merchants and artisans began to form a middle class. And peasants, serfs, poor people, and slaves often struggled to stay alive.

Many states created policies that discriminated against some groups based on religion, ethnicity, or social class. For example, Huguenots—French Protestants in the predominantly Catholic country—suffered great persecution, and many fled to other European countries or to colonies. States also supported the formation of elite classes, including the boyars in Russia and the nobility in Europe. These elites both supported ruling power and challenged it.

Social Classes and Minorities in Gunpowder Empires

Tension between the military elite and absolutist rulers existed in three Islamic empires: the Ottoman (Turkey), the Safavids (Iran), and the Mughals (India). They are called *gunpowder empires* because they succeeded militarily by using guns and cannons when they first became widely available. (See Topic 3.1.)

Ottoman Society The Ottoman social system was built around a warrior aristocracy that soon began to compete for positions in the bureaucracy with the *ulama*, who were scholars and experts in Islamic law. Within the military, the Janissaries gained power and prestige. (See Topic 3.2.) Ultimately, the Janissaries tried to mount coups against the sultans.

As sultans became increasingly ineffective and incapable, strong advisors called *viziers* gained influential positions in government, where they spoke for the sultan. However, the sultan still had considerable powers. These included **timar**, a system in which the sultan granted land or tax revenues to those he favored. The sultan also used timar to reward soldiers and keep them loyal.

Treatment of Religious Minorities One reason for the success of the Ottoman Empire was its relative tolerance toward Jews and Christians. After the Spanish monarch exiled Jews from his kingdom in 1492, Sultan **Mehmed II** invited them to settle in Istanbul. Many did. Some Jews became court physicians and diplomats. Others contributed to the literary community and might have brought the printing press to the Ottoman Empire. While they were allowed to worship, they did not have full equality:

- They were permitted to live only in specified areas of the cities.
- They paid a tax called a *jizya* that was required of all non-Muslims in the empire.
- They could not hold top positions in the empire, which were reserved for Muslims.

Religious Toleration in the Mughal Empire The Mughal Empire in what is now India began in 1526. Probably its greatest emperor was **Akbar the Great** (ruled 1556–1605), remembered for his military successes and his administrative achievements. To help keep his huge, fractious empire together, Akbar, like Ottoman rulers, was tolerant of all religions. He ended the *jizya* tax. He gave grants of land and money to Hindus and Muslims, provided funds to build a Catholic church, and supported Sikhism. (For more on Akbar’s religious toleration, see Topic 3.3.)

Women in the Ottoman Empire Women also played social and political roles at court. Many wives and concubines of the sultan tried to promote their own children as likely heirs to the throne. This practice led to “harem politics,” a reference to the **harem**, a residence where a powerful man’s wives and concubines lived.

One woman, **Roxelana**, became unusually powerful in the Ottoman Empire. When she was a young girl, Crimean raiders stole Roxelana from her home in Eastern Europe and sold her into slavery in the Ottoman Empire. She was forced to convert to Islam and entered the harem of Suleiman the Magnificent, sultan of the empire. Suleiman was notable for his military and administrative skill. Suleiman married Roxelana, which was highly unusual. She went from being a slave to commissioning ambitious public works projects.

Roxelana’s son succeeded Suleiman. During the son’s reign, viziers complained about a “sultanate of the women.” They believed members of the harem had too much influence on politics. Roxelana’s rise showed that it was possible—though rare—for people at this time to attain a different social class.



Other Social Classes Merchants and artisans formed a small middle class in the empire. Below the middle class were the peasants, who were usually poor—particularly because they had to pay tribute to the government to help support the Ottoman armies. Below the peasants were slaves. They came from many areas as the Ottoman armies penetrated Central and Eastern Europe, capturing prisoners of war in Ukraine and elsewhere. **Barbary pirates**, those who plied the seas near North Africa along the Barbary Coast (named for the Berbers who lived there) captured other European slaves in the Mediterranean and then sold them to the sultan or other high-ranking officials. Some people were **impressed**, or forced into service, in the navy as galley slaves. As many as one million people were impressed between the 16th and 19th centuries.



Source: Titian, *La Sultana Rossa*, c. 1550. John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art. Wikimedia Commons

Roxelana became famous for her power as an Ottoman leader.

Manchu Power and Conflicts in the Qing Dynasty

China's **Qing Dynasty** lasted from 1644 until 1912. Under this dynasty, the **Manchu** people from Manchuria ruled over the majority Han Chinese and other ethnic groups. Like the Mongols some 400 years earlier, the Manchu were ethnically and culturally distinct from the people they ruled. However, they were less tolerant than the Mongol leaders, and they resolved to make their culture dominant in China.

Like the Mongols, the Qing put their own people in the top positions of government. Also like the Mongols, the Qing maintained continuity with some traditional Chinese practices. For example, they maintained the Chinese civil service exams and bureaucracy. They recruited Han Chinese to work under or alongside Manchus. In time, some—but not all—Chinese came to accept the Qing Dynasty as legitimate rulers of China.

Conflicts with the Han The Han ethnicity in China experienced Qing intolerance most severely. Although non-official Han civilians were allowed

to wear Hanfu, or traditional Han clothing, all men were required to wear their hair in **queues**, the braided pigtail style of the Manchu. This policy was a test of loyalty for the Manchu, but it was also a humiliating reminder of the way Qing authority challenged traditional Confucian values. A man who refused to wear his hair in a queue could be executed.

The Qing used Han Chinese defectors to carry out massacres against Han who refused to assimilate to Qing practices. These defectors played a massive role in the Qing conquest of China. Han Chinese General **Li Chengdong**, for example, orchestrated three separate massacres in the city of Jaiding within one month. By the end of those four weeks, there was hardly a person left alive in the city. Later, Han Chinese defector **Liu Liangzuo** massacred the entire population of Jiangyin, killing between 74,000 and 100,000 people.

European Hierarchies

Like states in South and East Asia, European states also had a social hierarchy. In Europe the top level was royalty—members of a royal family. The aristocracy or **nobility** was the next highest level. Nobles were usually wealthy landowners. Nearly every state in Europe had laws that recognized a class of nobles and granted them special privileges. The nobility made up a small minority of the population but owned most of the land. They maintained their power through a system in which lands and titles passed down from one generation to the next through a system of inheritance.

The Nobility Makes Gains In the Netherlands and England, the nobility held power and took an active part in the government. Dutch landowners provided the stable support for local provincial government. In England, large landowners controlled Parliament. However, the landowners had to contend with radical religious sects and the middle class, which were two growing segments of the social order.

The Nobility Faces Losses Nobles struggled for power with royalty, the emerging middle class of merchants and skilled workers, the priestly class, and the common people. A failed uprising in France in the mid-1600s convinced **Louis XIV** that he must keep power from the common people and the nobility. The nobility also faced criticism from writers and thinkers of the time. The English statesman Thomas More wrote this about the nobility: “Living in idleness and luxury without doing society any good no longer satisfies them; they have to do positive evil.”

Power of Royalty over Nobility Gunpowder, cannons, and other technological advances allowed rulers to destroy nobles’ fortresses and seize their lands. Many rulers believed they deserved absolute power. Louis XIV is famous for saying, “I am the state.” However, Frederick of Prussia saw things differently. He declared, “I am the first servant of the state.” (Connect: Trace the changes in social hierarchy from feudal Europe to the 17th century. See Topic 1.6.)

Growing Acceptance of Jews Jews began to have a larger role in many countries starting in the 17th century. Their expulsion from Spain, by Ferdinand and Isabella, was particularly significant because so many Jews lived there. Many resettled in areas around the Mediterranean Sea, in northern Africa or the Middle East. Since the Hebrew word for Spain is *Sepharad*, Jews who trace their heritage back to Spain became known as **Sephardic Jews**. In contrast, Jews from central and eastern Europe became known as **Ashkenazi Jews**. Jewish scholars once used the term Ashkenazi to refer to Germany.

Under the influence of the scientific revolution and the Enlightenment, prejudices against Jews declined somewhat. Jews began to move more freely in Europe. They became particularly important in banking and commerce. The Netherlands was especially tolerant of religious dissent, and the Jewish minority faced less discrimination there than in most of Europe. Many Jews hoped the centuries of discrimination they had confronted were over.

Russian Social Classes

Moscow's social hierarchy continued that of Kievan Rus in the 11th century. The noble landowning class, the **boyars**, topped the social pyramid. Below them were the merchants. Last and most numerous were the peasants, who gradually sank into debt and. They became **serfs**, peasants who received a plot of land and protection from a noble. In return, they were bound to that land and had little personal freedom. If the noble sold their land, control of the serfs went with it. Though not technically slaves, serf led very hard lives.

The boyar class experienced tensions with the rulers similar to the tensions between nobles and rulers in Western Europe. Boyars of Novgorod opposed the expansionist policies of **Ivan IV**, known as “Ivan the Terrible” for murdering his own son, among other crimes. After Ivan's forces defeated Novgorod, Ivan confiscated the lands of his boyar opponents. He forced them and their families to move to Moscow, where he could keep them under surveillance.

Political and Economic Elites in the Americas

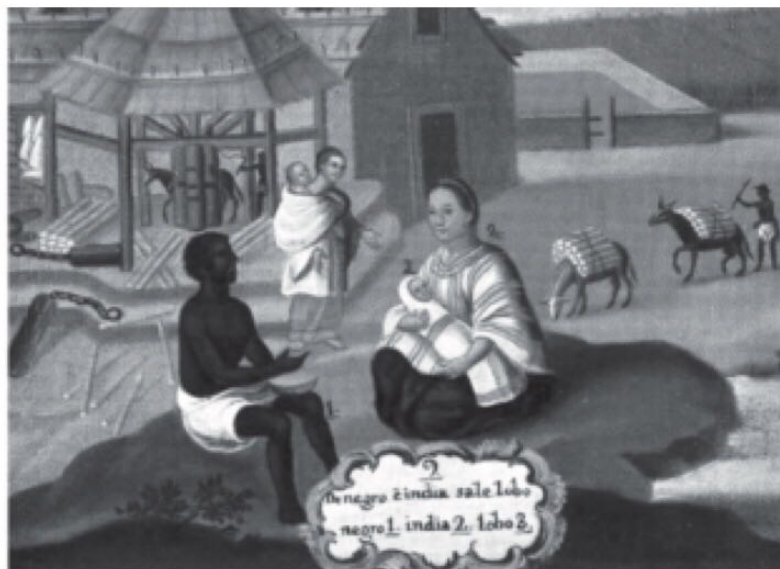
Social structures in the Americas changed drastically during this period because of the arrival of Europeans, the importation of African slave labor, and outbreaks of disease that killed tens of millions. The combination of European settlers, imported Africans, and the conquered indigenous populations led to the development of a new social hierarchy based on race and ancestry. Skin color became a signifier of power and status in many parts of the Americas and, in fact, in all European colonies. Racial and ethnic background defined social status in a formal way in the Spanish and Portuguese empires in the Western Hemisphere for centuries following the Europeans' arrival.

The Casta System in Latin America At the top of the social pyramid in Latin America stood the **peninsulares**, those who were born on the Iberian peninsula. Next down the pyramid were the **criollos**, those of European



ancestry who were born in the Americas. Below these two groups were the **castas**, people of mixed-race ancestry. At the top of this group were **mestizos**, those of mixed European and indigenous ancestry, followed by **mulattoes**, those of mixed European and African ancestry, and **zambos**, those of mixed indigenous and African ancestry. Indigenous peoples and enslaved Africans made up the bottom of the hierarchy.

People were assigned to their levels at baptism and could not move up except by intermarriage. People in the bottom layers of the hierarchy had to pay higher taxes and tributes, even though they could often least afford them.



Source: English Wikipedia

To show the importance of the *casta* system, the Spanish had paintings made delineating the groups within it. This painting shows a *zambo*, a person with one black parent and one indigenous parent.

KEY TERMS BY THEME		
<p>GOVERNMENT: Power and Authority Mehmed II Akbar the Great Roxelana Qing Dynasty Manchu Li Chengdong Liu Liangzuo Louis XIV Ivan IV</p>	<p>SOCIETY: Ottoman Empire timar harem</p> <p>SOCIETY: Russia boyar</p> <p>SOCIETY: Europe nobility serf</p> <p>SOCIETY: Latin America peninsulares criollo castas mestizos mulattos zambos</p>	<p>ECONOMY: Piracy Barbary pirates impressed</p> <p>CULTURE: Religion and Ethnicity queues Sephardic Jew Ashkenazi Jew</p>

Continuity and Change from c. 1450 to c. 1750

*The seams of [the world] were closing, drawn together by
the sailmaker's needle.*

—Alfred Crosby, historian who identified the Columbian Exchange, 1986

Essential Question: How did economic developments from 1450 to 1750 affect social structures over time?

By 1750, most of the world was integrated within a system of economic, political, and cultural connections. Better technology enabled the Eastern and Western hemispheres to connect. Meanwhile, Western European maritime powers created trading empires in the Indian Ocean trading network and in the Americas. Religions and other cultural practices continued to spread as a result of these interactions, but they also were transformed as new or syncretic forms developed. Coercive labor systems continued to exist in this newly connected world. However, new forms developed as new economic systems sought to exploit natural resources and to generate wealth for Western European nations.

Transoceanic Travel and Trade

The most significant change to the global economy in this period was the integration of the Western Hemisphere into the global trading network. This change resulted from Western European states wanting to find a sea route to Asia. They borrowed and developed technology that made ocean travel easier:

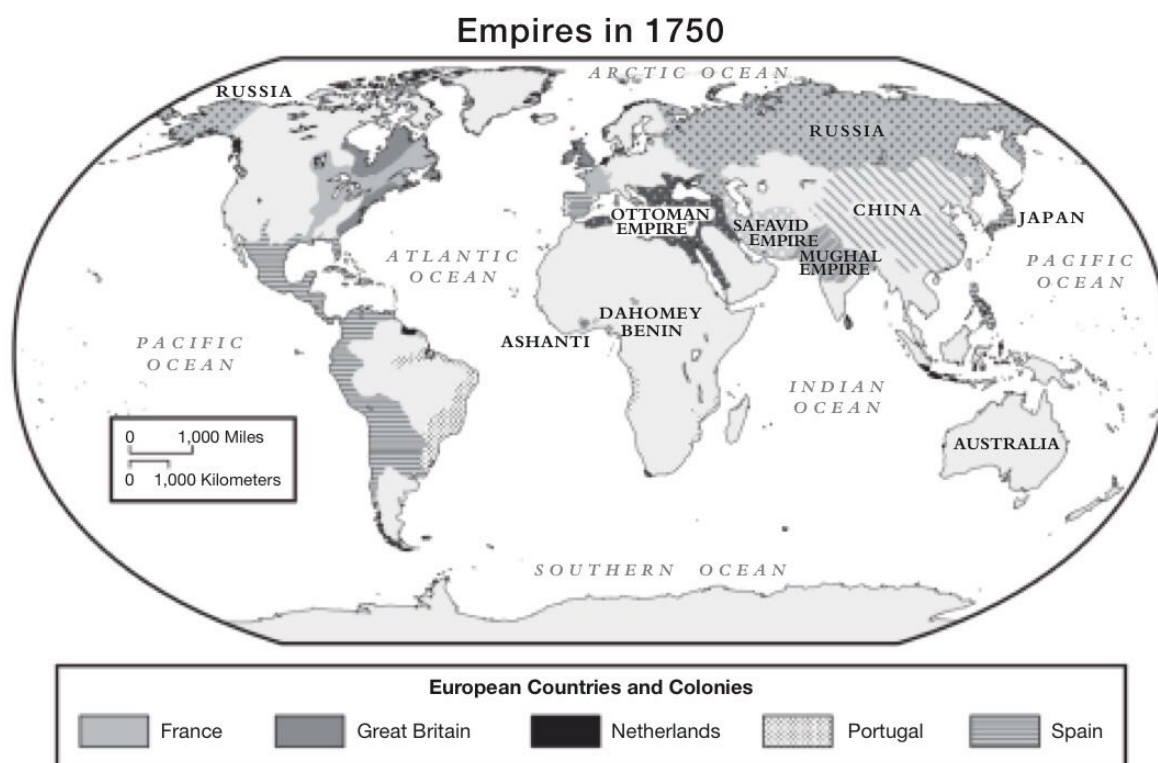
- astronomical charts
- astrolabe
- compass
- magnetic compass
- lateen sail
- carrack
- caravel
- fluyt



The result was the Columbian Exchange: a biological exchange of crops, animals, people, and diseases between the Eastern and Western Hemisphere. The Columbian Exchange had wide-ranging effects on both hemispheres.

The Atlantic System The Columbian Exchange also caused the development of a transoceanic trading network called the Atlantic System. The Atlantic System was made up of the regions of Western Europe, Western Africa, and the Americas and involved the movement of goods and people among those regions. Columbian Exchange forever changed who grew what foods where and how they grew them. It also unleashed deadly diseases on populations that had no immunity to them. In addition, it led to massive migrations, many of them forced, and new social structures.

As people migrated or were forced to migrate within the Atlantic System, cultural changes occurred. For instance, religion spread and often created syncretic belief systems and practices.



Economic Changes

European transoceanic voyages resulted in the integration of the Western Hemisphere within the global trading network. This integration had profound effects on the global economy. Maritime trading empires emerged, led by the Portuguese and followed by the Dutch and the English. As a result, Europeans established trading ports and cities along the coasts of Africa and the Indian Ocean. This brought Europeans into contact—and often into conflict—with existing merchant networks.

One consequence of this contact and conflict was that Europeans came to dominate global trade at the expense of Arab, Indian, and Chinese merchants.



Europeans, then, made considerable profits from transporting the goods from one region to another. (Connect: Identify the differences between the Atlantic System and trade on the Indian Ocean. See Topic 2.3.)

Colonies in the Americas In contrast to the trading empires in the Indian Ocean, Spain created an empire in the Americas. Soon Portugal, England, France, and the Netherlands established colonies there. The discovery of large deposits of silver in Spain's colonies helped further integrate Europeans into the global economy. Asian markets and merchants, especially in China, desired silver. Shipments of silver to Asia from the Americas became a regular feature of the global trade network and helped finance the increasing volume of trade between Asia and Europe. Some experts estimate that the amount of silver in the global economy tripled in the 16th century.

Mercantilism and Capitalism European rulers soon came to see the benefits of encouraging the expansion of trade, as the wealth that could be amassed was considerable. To ensure they participated in wealth accumulation from trade, many European monarchs devised mercantilist economic policies that would provide the ruler with a steady stream of income. While expanded international trade continued to be an important goal of European monarchs, mercantilism eventually gave way to capitalism as the predominant economic system in the new global economy. Investors formed joint-stock companies, also called chartered companies, so they could share the risks and rewards of global trading opportunities.

Effects of the New Global Economy

The new global flow of goods and profits produced some significant benefits. The flow of wealth into Europe helped to expand the middle class and provided the capital that would lead to the Industrial Revolution. However, the huge amounts of gold and silver flowing into Spain and China from the Americas also produced negative economic effects. In particular, the increase in the quantity of money in circulation caused inflation.



Source: Rijksmuseum Amsterdam. Wikimedia Commons

Rembrandt, *The Syndics of the Amsterdam Drapers' Guild*, 1662. This shows a group of Dutch officials evaluating a carpet from Persia.

As a result of the activities of European merchants, regional markets in Europe, Africa, and Asia continued to prosper. Funding for the arts increased as merchants and governments used their rising profits and revenue to sponsor artists and authors. Some rulers used their sponsorship of the arts to produce art and architecture that helped to legitimize their rule. Other art symbolized the growing importance of global trade.

Demand for Labor Intensifies

The new global economy also brought about significant disruptions. The Columbian Exchange and the Atlantic System caused a demographic shift in Africa as the Atlantic slave trade intensified. Slavers captured and sold millions of African men. These African men ended up on American plantations, producing cash crops that included sugar, cotton, and tobacco. As a result, some African communities experienced a gender imbalance. Africa's population declined because of the Atlantic slave trade. Eventually, the population increased as people grew new crops, such as manioc.

Traditional forced labor systems, such as serfdom, continued in areas of Afro-Eurasia. However, other coerced labor systems developed in the Americas as a result of the Columbian Exchange and the Atlantic System, in addition to the chattel slavery of the Atlantic slave trade. Many European settlers first arrived in the Americas as indentured servants, contracted to work for a period of time before they were free to pursue other jobs or occupations. The *encomienda* and *hacienda* systems, as well as the adoption of the *Inca mit'a* system, are examples of other coerced labor systems in the Spanish American colonies.

New Social Structures As Europeans, Africans, and Native Americans coexisted in the new American colonies, the social structures of the Americas changed. New social systems appeared that were based on racial or ethnic identity. This division led to a rigid and hierarchial society, with white Europeans or Americans of European descent possessing the majority of wealth and political power. A new subculture appeared that consisted of people who were of mixed European and African heritage. Societal conflicts eventually led to revolutions.