

Topic 4.6 — Internal and External Challenges to State Power (1450–1750)

Standards Table

Thematic Focus	Learning Objective	Key Concept
Governance (GOV) – A variety of internal and external factors contribute to state formation, expansion, and decline. Governments maintain order through a variety of administrative institutions, policies, and procedures, and governments obtain, retain, and exercise power in different ways and for different purposes.	Unit 4: Learning Objective L – Explain the effects of the development of state power from 1450 to 1750.	KC-4.3.III.iii – State expansion and centralization led to resistance from an array of social, political, and economic groups on a local level. KC-5.3.III.C – Enslaved persons challenged existing authorities in the Americas through organized resistance.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Explain how increasing state centralization led to resistance movements.
- Describe examples of internal resistance to imperial rule.
- Analyze how enslaved people challenged authority in the Americas.
- Evaluate the effects of state expansion on different social groups.

Lesson Overview

Between 1450 and 1750, states across the world expanded their power through centralization, taxation, military force, and administrative reforms. However, as rulers strengthened their control, many local groups resisted. Peasants, nobles, religious minorities, and enslaved people challenged authority in different ways. Resistance ranged from tax revolts and regional rebellions to organized slave uprisings.

State-building created stronger governments, but it also created tensions. The development of powerful centralized states often disrupted local traditions, increased taxation, and imposed new labor systems. These pressures produced internal instability that shaped the political landscape of the early modern world.

Essential Vocabulary

- **Centralization** – The process of increasing control under a central government.
- **Tax revolt** – A rebellion caused by opposition to high taxes.
- **Janissaries** – Elite Ottoman soldiers who sometimes resisted reforms.

- **Maroon communities** – Settlements formed by escaped enslaved people in the Americas.
- **Organized resistance** – Coordinated actions taken to oppose authority.

Background Reading

As states expanded between 1450 and 1750, rulers sought to increase revenue and strengthen armies. In Europe, monarchs such as Louis XIV centralized power by weakening the nobility and increasing taxation. In the Ottoman Empire, rulers attempted reforms that sometimes provoked resistance from powerful military groups like the Janissaries. In Mughal India, regional leaders challenged imperial authority when central power weakened.

Resistance often came from groups affected by taxation and labor demands. Peasant revolts erupted in China and Russia when taxes rose or famine struck. In Japan, Christian converts faced persecution when the Tokugawa shogunate sought to limit foreign influence and maintain order.

In the Americas, enslaved Africans resisted through daily acts of defiance, escape, and organized rebellion. Maroon communities formed in places such as Brazil and the Caribbean. These actions demonstrate that state power was never absolute; it was constantly negotiated and contested.

Primary Sources

Source 1

Tokugawa Edict Expelling Missionaries (1614)

Full text: Internet Medieval Sourcebook

<https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/1614japan.asp>

The Kirishitan (Christians) have come to Japan not only to preach their religion but also to change the government of the country. They destroy shrines and temples, disturb the laws of the realm, and lead the people astray. For many years they have secretly spread their doctrine, misleading the common people and corrupting the hearts of our subjects.

The propagation of this evil doctrine must be strictly forbidden. Those who follow it shall renounce their faith or face punishment. Missionaries must leave the country at once, and no foreign vessels shall bring priests or religious teachers to our shores. If this order is not obeyed, the peace of the realm will be destroyed. Therefore, to preserve the stability of our government and protect our customs, we command the immediate suppression of Christianity and the expulsion of those who promote it.

Guided Analysis Questions

1. Identify ONE reason the Tokugawa government opposed Christianity.
2. Explain how this document reflects efforts to centralize state power.
3. Explain how the edict illustrates resistance to external influences.
4. Analyze the historical situation that led to this policy.

Source 2

Account of a Maroon Community in Jamaica (17th Century)

From: British Colonial Records (excerpted in secondary compilation)

Full text archive: <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/slavery.asp>

Many of the enslaved Africans who fled from plantations took refuge in the mountains, where they formed settlements beyond the reach of colonial authorities. These communities fortified their positions and defended themselves against attempts at capture.

They established their own leaders, cultivated crops, and maintained customs brought from Africa. Some conducted raids on plantations to free others, striking fear into planters who depended upon forced labor.

Despite repeated military expeditions, these Maroon communities proved difficult to suppress. Their resistance demonstrated that enslaved persons were not passive subjects but active challengers to colonial authority.

Guided Analysis Questions

1. Identify ONE method enslaved persons used to resist authority.
2. Explain how Maroon communities challenged colonial power structures.
3. Explain how this example reflects broader patterns of resistance in the Americas.
4. Evaluate the extent to which resistance limited state control.

Types of Resistance to State Power (1450–1750)

Region	Type of Resistance	Example
Japan	Religious suppression	Tokugawa anti-Christian edict
Ottoman Empire	Military resistance	Janissary revolts
Russia	Peasant revolt	Stenka Razin Rebellion
Caribbean	Slave resistance	Maroon communities

Causes of Resistance

Cause	Description	Effect
Increased taxation	Funding armies and wars	Peasant uprisings
Religious control	Suppression of minority faiths	Revolts and persecution
Labor exploitation	Enslavement and forced labor	Organized resistance
Centralization	Loss of local autonomy	Regional rebellions

Change / Continuity / Comparison

Changes:

- Stronger centralized states with expanded bureaucracies.
- Increased taxation and military reforms.
- Organized resistance movements in colonies.

Continuities:

- Local elites continued to wield influence.

- Peasant communities remained vulnerable to taxation.

Comparison:

In Asia, resistance often focused on religious or military reforms. In the Americas, resistance centered on slavery and racial hierarchies.

Key Takeaways

- State centralization strengthened governments but created tensions.
- Taxation and labor demands frequently triggered rebellion.
- Enslaved persons actively resisted colonial authority.
- Religious policies could provoke internal instability.
- State power was constantly challenged and negotiated.

Reflection / Practice Activity

Answer the following in complete sentences:

- A. Identify ONE internal challenge faced by states between 1450 and 1750.
- B. Explain ONE way states responded to resistance.
- C. Explain ONE similarity or difference between resistance in Asia and resistance in the Americas.

Primary Source Citations

Tokugawa Edict Expelling Missionaries (1614). Internet Medieval Sourcebook.

<https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/1614japan.asp>

Maroon Communities Account (17th century). Internet Medieval Sourcebook Slavery Archive.

<https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/slavery.asp>