On July 11, 1791, an elaborate spectacle unfolded in revolutionary Paris. On a triumphal car twenty-five feet high, the remains of the great philosophe Voltaire (1694-1778) were carried around the city. One hundred thousand residents defied the pouring rain to witness the procession, many of them dressed in classical outfits in front, beside or behind the carriage. There were multiple stops en route to the Panthéon, under whose dome Voltaire’s coffin would be left for eight hours, so it could be viewed by all who wanted. One of the intermediate stations was at a new theatre, whose columns were decorated with crowns and garlands. A song was sung there from the opera *Samson*, for which Voltaire had written the libretto, but which had never been performed due to censorship. It included the words: “People, wake up, break your irons /Rise again to your former greatness/Liberty calls on you/You who were born for it.”¹

The cortege also halted at the ruins of the Bastille. As a major symbol of arbitrary rule, this old royal prison had been the target of an angry crowd just two years before. The storming of the Bastille had marked the start of a particularly tumultuous decade in European history: the French Revolution (1789-1799). This revolution was no isolated series of events. Revolutionary turmoil also left its mark on British North America (1775-1783), Saint-Domingue (1791-1804), and Spanish America (1810-1824). This book offers an overview of these four revolutions, followed by a comparative perspective.² Although each uprising (or set of uprisings) had its own causes, traits, and impact, they all created sovereign states that professed hostility to privilege and began to question black slavery. Between the first shots fired in Lexington and Concord in 1775
and the departure of the last Spanish troops from mainland America in 1826, these revolutions changed the Atlantic world beyond recognition.

It had been a deliberate choice that the procession would stop at the Bastille. Not only had Voltaire once been imprisoned in the prison for almost a year, his name was now inextricably bound up with the revolution. As the Constituent Assembly put it: “The glorious revolution has been the fruit of his works.”³ We may wonder whether that was true. More broadly, we can ask what the role of ideas was in the various revolutions. What is clear is that they shared an ideological background: the Enlightenment.

The author of an entry in the *Encyclopédie*, the famous eighteenth-century work that was aimed at incorporating all existing knowledge, painted a contrasting picture of two kinds of thinkers. Some men “are carried away by their passions, without their actions being preceded by reflection: these are men who walk in the shadows.” The representative of the Enlightenment, however, “acts only after reflection; he walks in the night, but he is preceded by a torch.”⁴ The Enlightenment sought to achieve progress and utility through the use of reason. Its most conspicuous protagonists were the *philosophes* —the public intellectuals who were active in a broad range of disciplines, including science, economics, philosophy, theatre, and politics.

By rationally penetrating, ordering, and controlling the world, educated people who embraced Enlightenment thought worked to increase the happiness of mankind through material advancement.⁵ Although it has often been portrayed as a movement largely confined to France and the British Isles, the Enlightenment led to debates all over Europe and the European colonies in Asia and the Americas. There was no single center, but multiple centers around the world.⁶ If not all participants were interested in the same topics or stressed the same points, it would be wrong to conclude that there were multiple Enlightenments, each one embedded in a separate
national tradition. The Enlightenment was too cosmopolitan in nature for that. The production of its written works and the correspondence between its protagonists took place in what contemporaries called the Republic of Letters, a polity transcending borders whose ideas applied to the wider world.

No consensus was ever reached about many topics. The *philosophes* disagreed so often that we should actually conceive of the Enlightenment as a series of problems and debates, not as a stream of conclusions. One such debate was inspired by men’s equality in the state of nature as described by Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679). Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), Denis Diderot (1713-1784), Claude-Adrien Helvétius (1715-1771), and Jean d’Alembert (1717-1783) regarded equality as an inalienable natural right. It was necessary, they thought, to provide freedom and equality with a solid foundation by allowing everyone access to education. Voltaire, on the other hand, argued that equality was perhaps natural, but that in practice there would always be a class who command and a class who obey.⁷

The Enlightenment derived its dynamic in part from the massive reaction it brought about in conservative circles. A true Counter-Enlightenment came about, shaped by thinkers who emphasized belief, piety, and obedience to worldly authorities. They criticized abstract rights and accused the *philosophes* of destroying religion and thereby removing all obstacles for anarchy and lawlessness. National governments sought to keep new ideas at bay, but compared to the past struggle against heretical opinions, it was much harder to judge whether Enlightenment notions, which were more philosophical than theological in nature, undermined the established order.⁸ At the same time, monarchs took their cues from enlightened ideas in their quest of national reform, often achieving libertarian ends by autocratic means. Unintentionally, state-sponsored reform in some parts of Europe was more successful in instilling enlightened values in
the educated part of the population than the works of the *philosophes*. In Austria, Sweden, Denmark, Spain, Portugal, and Germany’s Roman Catholic states, the enlightened minds were almost exclusively tied to the state.

Was the French Assembly right in claiming that their revolution had been the fruit of Voltaire’s work? The question whether Enlightenment thought was actually instrumental in bringing about the revolutionary turmoil was already debated during the age of revolutions itself. The Catholic German theologian and philosopher Jakob Salat (1766-1851) wrote in 1802: “The Enlightenment is the source of revolutions, its opponents shout; yes, sooner or later it necessarily leads to revolution, assert even some of its friends. Other supporters, however, argue that the Enlightenment does not spawn revolution, but is instead the best way to thwart it.” Most contemporary intellectuals, however, saw the events occurring in revolutionary France as the outcome and fulfillment of the *philosophes*’ agenda. Especially Rousseau’s footprints were everywhere.

Prior to the outbreak of a revolution, very few people actually dreamed of a violent overthrow of the existing order. The focus on ideals such as equality that can be associated with the French Revolution should not blind us to the fact that most celebrated Enlightenment thinkers did not challenge the status quo. Two years into the Revolution, one of Rousseau’s admirers even wrote that one could reproach the author of *Social Contract* and other bestsellers for not having spoken of insurrection, “the legal instrument of an oppressed people.” Nor did the *philosophes* place their hope of social reform in the illiterate majority, but instead on the traditional elite. Nonetheless, enlightened ideas shaped the revolutions around the Atlantic basin in the five decades after 1775. Often combined in new ways or watered down and linked to elements from other ideologies, they made it possible to call into question a world based on
tradition, hierarchy, and corporatism. They did not inevitably cause the various revolutions, but they did give the insurgents an ideological reservoir that insurgents could tap as they improvised to set up new forms of government.

The objective of this book is to present the four abovementioned revolutions on their own terms, while emphasizing four aspects:

1. They cannot be understood outside the realm of international politics. Inter-imperial warfare called for reforms, which exposed the foundations of empires and jeopardized their existence by revealing and exacerbating enduring social, political, and ethnic inequities. In addition, individual events that were taking place an ocean away created a favorable climate for the revolutions.¹²

2. None of the revolutions was foreordained. Even if active fault zones were visible, the political earthquakes could have been avoided until the very moment that they hit. Nor were the revolutions guaranteed success once they broke out. Loyalty to the empire was considerable in the American colonies, and it was only in the course of wars that the revolutions triumphed.

3. Divided loyalties meant that these wars often had the overtones of civil wars, whose main protagonists were previously voiceless popular classes fighting for their own reasons, which often did not square with those of the elites.

4. In his classic and still influential *Age of the Democratic Revolution* (2 vols.,
1959-1964), historian R. R. Palmer presented the age of revolutions as the
triumphant march of democracy. But democracy is no appropriate prism through
which to see these uprisings. It was hardly more than a temporary by-product of
some insurrections.

Which social factors made the Atlantic world ripe for revolution? Although eighteenth-
century Europe was undergoing rapid change, agriculture remained the livelihood of the majority.
From time immemorial, clergy and nobility owned most land, which had given them access to
economic resources. Villages had originally had a lord, who let peasants work on his land and
derived his income from the demesne, the section of his lands that tenants could not cultivate
for their own sake and that the lord kept for his use, and from head taxes levied among all
households within the lord’s jurisdiction. But by the eighteenth century, over half of the land was
owned by peasants themselves, most of whom had become smallholders. In much of western
Europe, the lord’s traditional sources of income had been reduced, due in part to peasant
resistance. Many French peasants had, for instance, managed to gain control of their holdings at
fixed rents, but at a price. By raising or reintroducing fees, the landlords made up for lost income
after the middle of the eighteenth century.

A lasting medieval legacy was that landownership not only entailed economic power for
the landlord, but judicial authority over the peasants living on his lands. The nobility’s principal
privileges were different, however, consisting of the right to be judged by one’s peers and
exemption from some, though by no means all, taxes. Privilege was the organizing principle of
the European kingdoms and their overseas colonies. Privilege was typical of all the corporate
bodies that composed society in a manner seen as divinely inspired. These corporations included
guilds, confraternities, the military, ecclesiastical bodies (including universities, monasteries, and the Inquisition), cities, rural communities, and family clans. Such bodies each had their own rights and duties, some of which had been formally recognized while others were based on tradition or tacit agreement. Keeping a firm grip on their privileges, the corporations ultimately obeyed the king, who regulated privilege and guaranteed the proper social hierarchy among the corporations. The social order and hierarchy were therefore closely connected.¹⁵

Clergymen and noblemen were therefore not the only beneficiaries of privilege. What is more, they did not necessarily lead privileged lives. In the eighteenth century, only a small section of the nobility was well-to-do. Numerous noble families had been impoverished and moved into trade and industry to make a living.¹⁶ Among the clergy, it was also a small elite that was well-to-do: the bishops, abbots, and priors who owed their benefices to family wealth. The vast majority of clergymen were village priests who shared the living standards of their flock. Their chief legal privilege, exemption from taxation, was not even universally observed. So-called voluntary contributions to the national treasury, especially in wartime, were often substantial.

The old idea that two social classes bled the third has therefore been dismissed. Historians have shown that urban middling groups—merchants, goldsmiths, drapers, among others—acquired much land in early modern Europe, usually as an investment, but also to gain status. Some lent money to peasants and other landowners, receiving a fixed annual payment in return. Town and country did not always see eye to eye. Peas- ants associated the city with unscrupulous tax collectors and absentee landowners, urban dwellers saw the countryside as the root of the exorbitantly high grain prices. These prices, townspeople believed, had to be regulated and grain sold at a just price, not the prices peasants allegedly demanded. In reality, the
rural population was also weighed down by rising prices.¹⁷

Privilege was also the main organizing principle of the Euroamerican societies that sprang up across the Atlantic Ocean. Unlike in Europe, it had an ethnic component throughout the Americas. Whites assigned servile or otherwise subordinate roles to blacks, mulattoes, Indians, and mestizos. Until the late eighteenth century, the term *español* (“Spanish”) was used officially to refer to a white person in the Spanish colonies.¹⁸ Nor did official ethnic discrimination abate as colonial societies matured. Authorities did not question the connection between blackness and slavery, allowing African slavery to continue to thrive from Boston to Bahia and Buenos Aires; free mulattoes in the Caribbean even experienced an increase in legal discrimination in the 1760s and 1770s.

Apart from the Swiss cantons and the Dutch provinces, kings held sway in the European countries and their empires. They controlled foreign policy and the armed forces, appointed ministers and officials, and regulated trade and industry. Monarchical power began to expand in the sixteenth century, but could only be achieved in close collaboration with local institutions.¹⁹ The ascendance of monarchies, therefore, went hand in hand with the strengthening of local representative bodies, as kings bestowed rights, privileges, and representative institutions where they had not existed before. Indirect rule also marked the way in which European states governed their American colonies. Consent rather than coercion was the preferred instrument of empire. The term “colonialism” obscures the working of the administrative machinery in the overseas provinces. Colonies generally formed their own power base before metropolitan authority was established. Even then, the combination of distance, local interests, and the small size of the bureaucracy made it impossible for the mother countries to impose their will on their colonies. Only by negotiating with colonial elites could metropolitan
authorities hope to achieve policy goals. The inevitable price they paid was to recognize the right of settlers to enjoy some form of self-government.\textsuperscript{20} As long as the mother countries did not tamper with the principle of negotiation, colonial elites would not call into question their loyalty to the imperial center.

\section*{A Quarter Century of Warfare}

Prior to the French Revolution, reform, rather than revolution, was in the air all over Europe. Sweeping domestic and international changes made the reorganization of the European states inevitable. Rapid population growth, a serious food shortage that affected much of southern Europe, competition over colonies, and, perhaps most important, demands of military expenditure to keep up with powerful neighbors, compelled governments to introduce the reforms. French king Louis XIV (1638-1715) had set an example to others, privileging four areas of domestic reform: the police, poor relief, education, and public works. Reforms required not only raising existing taxes but tapping new sources of money. Church and nobility, however, stood in the way, each tenaciously defending its vested interests. In their battles with these estates, monarchs often took their cues from enlightened ideas, achieving libertarian ends by autocratic means. The Enlightenment lent an air of legitimacy to the destruction of old privileges.\textsuperscript{21}

What opened the door to reform in the middle decades of the eighteenth century was international warfare, lasting from 1739 through 1763 and interrupted by only six years of peace (1748-1754). With theaters in Europe, the Americas, and India, European rivalry assumed a global character, inaugurating a contest over colonies that would last into the twentieth century. Riches from other continents had occasionally tempted Europe’s main powers to engage in
During the War of the Austrian Succession (1740-1748), France became anti-British and Britain anti-French. The French seized numerous British ocean-going ships, conquered the Austrian Netherlands (today’s Belgium), placing themselves just across from England, fomented the Jacobite rebellion in Britain, and tried unsuccessfully to invade Britain. The French government also had British Madras in India occupied in 1746, primarily in response to the French loss of the North American fort of Louisbourg on Isle Royale (now Cape Breton Island), close to the cod fisheries off Newfoundland and those in the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

The Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle (Aachen) of 1748 that concluded the War of the Austrian Succession solved nothing. Britain and France swapped their conquests of Louisbourg and Madras, France had to give up the Austrian Netherlands, and generally everything was restored to prewar conditions. The enormous war effort therefore seemed entirely in vain to the Britons—many of whom thought King George II’s chief concern had been to protect his native Hanover, of which he was the elector— but even more to the French, who coined the popular expression
“stupid as the peace.” Although Austria was left a weaker power at war’s end, the price France paid was high, her treasury facing a bill of 10 million livres or the equivalent of almost four years of royal income. In addition, the war saw the emergence of Prussia and Russia as dangerous French rivals to the east. Finally, irregular warfare had taken place between British and French forces (both helped by Indian allies) in North America, whetting Britain’s appetite for expansion, leaving New France in jeopardy, and creating a climate of hate and fear.24

The root cause of the rivalry in North America was that the peace of 1748 failed to solve one long-standing issue: the boundaries between French and British territories. Where was the border between eastern Canada and New England? Who had a legitimate claim on the Ohio Valley? France had previously had the upper hand in the area between Lake Erie and the Allegheny Mountains, cultivating close relations with a great many indigenous nations, but during the latest war, the French had found it difficult and expensive to maintain the practice of gift-giving in exchange for furs. To make matters worse, British encroachments began to occur on “French” lands. In order to pre-empt this and maintain communications between Canada and Louisiana, the French in 1753 started the construction of a string of forts, further alienating local groups such as the Shawnees and the Delawares, which now allied themselves with the British.

The French were not only dealing with British policymakers here. They also faced American colonists, who were eager to move into unexplored lands from Pennsylvania and Virginia. Wealthy planters and speculators formed the Ohio Company, a land speculation company that began building a fort in the upper Ohio Valley. To protect the fort against the French, Virginia’s Lieutenant Governor Robert Dinwiddie, one of the Company speculators, sent an expedition of Virginia volunteers to the upper Ohio Valley in 1754. Commanded by a young
George Washington, the Virginians tasted defeat and retreated. The British cabinet made heavy weather of these hostilities, viewing them as evidence of French aggression. The dispatch of 600 fresh French soldiers to reinforce the garrison in Louisbourg only seemed to offer further proof. In reality, however, the French also acted out of self-preservation.\(^{25}\)

Skirmishes in America did not cause the war that was soon to start in Europe. The seeds for the Seven Years’ War had been planted earlier, in Aix-la-Chapelle.\(^{26}\) The new war was preceded by a spectacular reversal of alliances. In January 1756, Britain abandoned her old Austrian ally and signed an alliance with mighty Prussia, followed by an alliance in May between France and her old Austrian foe. Compared to the last war, this one had more pronounced global dimensions. The war theaters in India, the Caribbean, and North America forced France to fight a war on multiple fronts, benefiting Prussia, which had little to fear from its west. But before that became clear, Frederick the Great had struck with a lightning campaign against Saxony. He exploited his new conquest to the fullest, incorporating Saxon soldiers into his army and using its economic resources to continue the war. And those resources came on top of Prussia’s gigantic military budget and large subsidies from Britain.\(^{27}\) Still, Prussia did not win the war in 1756. In the years ahead, her fortune waxed and waned as both Russia and Austria invaded the country, both occupying the capital city of Berlin.\(^{28}\)

Britain was again mostly concerned about Hanover, the target of the French war machine. The French rationale was to restore lost territories in the Americas by means of military pressure in Europe. That was a wise strategy which ultimately persuaded the British to abandon their course to the Newfoundland fisheries. The French navy, smaller than the British but still respectable, was thereby saved from ruin, since those fisheries were the nursery of French seamen, whom French statesmen were, of course, eager to use in times of war.
Strengthened after 1763, the French navy would intervene in the War of American Independence to Britain’s detriment.实在是海军活动在加勒比海是广泛的，英国和法国进行了出海行动以破坏对方的糖殖民地，甚至到了绝食掠夺敌人的奴隶和粮食的地步，从而伤害到了糖生产。利用其海军优势，英国成功击败了瓜德罗普（1759年）和马提尼克（1762年）等其他两个较小的岛屿。1762年，皇家海军成功占领了西班牙殖民地哈瓦那（古巴）和马尼拉（菲律宾）。西班牙在1762年初即宣布对法国宣战，因为法国国王查理三世签署了新家庭公约与他的法国盟友，结成军事联盟。尽管西班牙的主要战争原因归结为对加拿大的英国胜利将增加其在新世界的实力，但西班牙严重低估了英国的军事实力。

在她的加勒比海胜利之前，英国在北美取得了巨大进展，开始实施西部舰队，从而控制了大部分新不伦瑞克的卡德，使英国成为控制卡德的盟友。最终，英国完全驱逐了法国在加拿大的军队，因为对法国的认同和印度的支持导致了法西斯在北美战场上的失败。1758年，同时英国通过与三十三个联盟的贸易即向原住民提供货物，而这些货物被英国人用以支持北美的战斗。同时，英国人还通过与美国的印第安人合作，以最无情的方式清除了所有的印第安人。1760-61年。

英国和普鲁士在1763年2月的七年战争中幸存了下来，当两个条约结束了敌对状态。普鲁士保留了西里西亚的统治权，但并非萨克森，
Austria lost power, France surrendered all of Canada, the political control she had wielded in India, as well as possession of some minor Caribbean islands (Tobago, Dominica, St. Vincent, and the Grenadines), but regained those captured by Britain during the war. France’s status as a world power remained intact, however, since she retained her main Caribbean colonies as well as the island of Gorée in West Africa, the important center of the Atlantic slave trade that British forces had seized during the war.⁴²

As the recipient of French-held areas, the former Spanish colony of Florida and all other Spanish territories east of the Mississippi River, Great Britain, once a typical seaborne empire, overnight became a territorial empire in America. But the price was high. Britain spent much more than in the previous three major wars: £82 million compared to £32 million in the Nine Years’ War (1688-97), £50 million in the War of the Spanish Succession (1702-13), and £43 million in the War of the Austrian Succession. Like in the earlier three wars, about two-thirds of the war was financed by income and only one-third by debt.⁴³ In other countries, the war exacerbated existing economic woes. Much of Europe’s credit system was built on a shaky base that was exposed as the war progressed. The resulting economic recession left its mark around the continent, forcing numerous banks and industrial firms to close down.⁴⁴ Europe’s main powers were thus compelled to embark on ambitious programs of fiscal and military reform to pay for the previous war and prepare for the next. These reforms would help undermine the stability of the old regimes.