Henry IV, 1st Bourbon King of France
Henry IV of France was the first of the Bourbon kings of France, reigning from 1589 until his death. As a Huguenot, Henry was involved in the Wars of Religion before acceding to the throne; to become king he converted to Catholicism and promulgated the Edict of Nantes in 1599, granting religious liberties to the Protestants and effectively ending the civil war. One of the most popular French kings, both during and after his reign, Henry showed great care for the welfare of his subjects and displayed an unusual religious tolerance for the time. He was murdered by a fanatic catholic, François Ravaillac.

Louis XIII of France
Louis XIII, king of France (1610–43). He succeeded his father, Henry IV, under the regency of his mother, Marie de’ Medici. He married Anne of Austria in 1615. Even after being declared of age in 1614, he was excluded from affairs of state by his domineering mother. In 1617 he caused the assassination of her minister Concino Concini, with the aid of his own favorite, Charles d’Albert, duc de Luynes, and Marie de’ Medici was forced into retirement. He was reconciled to her in 1622 and entrusted (1624) the government to her protégé, Cardinal Richelieu. In 1630, urged by his mother to discharge Richelieu, he instead sent his mother again into exile. Melancholy and retiring by nature, Louis thenceforth gave full support to Richelieu and his successor, Cardinal Mazarin. Richelieu strengthened royal authority and centralized government control.

Louis XIV, The Sun King
Louis XIV reigned as King of France and King of Navarre from 1643 until his death at 77 years old. He inherited the Crown at the age of four, but he did not actually assume personal control of the government until the death of his chief minister, Jules Cardinal Mazarin, in 1661. Louis XIV, known as The Sun King (Le Roi Soleil) and as Louis the Great (Louis le Grand), ruled France for seventy-two years — the longest reign of any French or other major European monarch. Louis attempted to increase the power of France in Europe, fighting four major wars: the War of Devolution, the Franco-Dutch War, the War of the Grand Alliance, and the War of the Spanish Succession.

Louis XV of France
King of France (1715 – 74). An orphan from age three, Louis succeeded to the throne on the death of his great-grandfather Louis XIV (1715), under the regency of Philippe II, duke d’Orléans (1674 – 1723). Louis’s mistresses, particularly the marchioness de Pompadour, held considerable political influence. Louis brought France into the War of the Austrian Succession (1740 – 48) and the Seven Years’ War (1756 – 63), by which France lost to Britain almost all its colonial possessions. The king died hated by his subjects.

Louis XVI, Guillotined 1793
Louis XVI was King of France and Navarre from 1774 until 1791, and then King of the French in 1791-1792. Suspended and arrested during the insurrection of the 10th of August, he was tried by the National Convention, found guilty of treason with the enemy, and guillotined on January 21, 1793.

Napoleon Bonaparte, Emperor of France
Napoléon Bonaparte was general during the French Revolution, the ruler of France as First Consul of the French Republic from 11 November 1799 to 18 May 1804, Emperor of the French under the name Napoléon I from 18 May 1804 to 6 April 1814, and was briefly restored as Emperor from 20 March to 22 June 1815. Over the course of little more than a decade, the armies of France under his command fought almost every European power and acquired control of most of continental Europe by conquest or alliance. The disastrous invasion of Russia in 1812 marked a turning point. Following the Russian campaign and the defeat at Leipzig in October 1813, the Sixth Coalition invaded France, forcing Napoleon to abdicate in April 1814. He was exiled to the island of Elba. Shortly afterward, he staged a comeback known as the Hundred Days (les Cent Jours), but was defeated at Waterloo on 18 June 1815. Napoleon spent the remaining six years of his life on the island of St. Helena in the Atlantic Ocean under British supervision.

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