

The English Civil War and Glorious Revolution



The 17th century marked the rise of the modern states of England and France. While uprisings were commonplace throughout the 17th century in England and France the two ended the century with very different monarchies. The English monarchy had to contend with parliament, which did not sit well with kings who believed in an absolute monarchy through divine right. An **absolute monarchy** is a **form of government in which the monarch (king or queen) exercises ultimate authority as head of the state and is not restricted by a constitution**. In an absolute monarchy, the transfer of power is through heredity and marriage. Eventually the disputes between English kings and parliament were settled with parliament limiting the monarchy's power.

France was another story. Fights between the kings and the aristocracy usually ended with the king having the upper hand. The French monarchy held fast to the idea of absolutism and the divine right of kings. French kings consolidated their power, ruled without calling on the French assembly (Estates-General) and exemplified absolutist rule in the 17th century. Absolutist rule was exemplified by Louis XIV with his claim "*L'état, c'est moi*" (I am the state), summarizing the basic principle of absolute monarchy in which all political power is held by one individual. Louis XIV's power was illustrated in the building of Versailles, his extravagant royal palace, thus setting the stage for later generations to revolt. We will learn more about that next class.

So how did these two powerful nations take such differing paths in politics? The answer lies in their histories!

King James

When Queen Elizabeth died, she left no heir to inherit the throne. So her cousin, James who was already the king of Scotland took the throne in 1603. James came to power at a time when England was deeply in debt and the English Church was divided between conservatives and radicals. James believed strongly in the divine right of kings and wasn't very popular with Parliament, which resented the increasing power of the king.

James had a problem when it came to spending money. In England the king could not raise taxes without permission from Parliament. Eventually James began to tax exports and imports (tariffs) without getting permission from Parliament. Remember kings have extravagant lives that have to be paid for and England had to keep up with its debts. Parliament was not happy with James and their relationship was strained throughout his reign.

Trouble in the church was also brewing. The conservatives wanted to make sure that the Church stayed true to its heritage of rituals like the sacraments and to guard against the English Church becoming more Protestant. Radicals known as "Puritans", who followed Calvinist teachings wanted to purify the church. They wanted to end the rituals of the English Church and get rid of the church officials like bishops and archbishops. Strife between the king, parliament and the church continued with the next king, Charles I.



James I (r.1603-1625)

Charles in Charge

James I died in 1625 and his son Charles I became the king. Charles like his father believed in the divine right of kings. Relations between Charles and parliament worsened and in 1628 Charles dissolved Parliament. For 12 years Charles ruled England as an absolute monarch without Parliament.

Charles might have succeeded as an absolute monarch, but he eventually needed money to fight a rebellion led by the Scots. Charles supported the English Church against the Puritans. Puritans were very popular in the churches in Scotland, so when Charles made it illegal for Puritans to preach the fight was on. Charles needed money and an army fast. So he was forced to call Parliament into session.

Members of Parliament or (MP's) were pretty upset with Charles and made him agree to a long list of demands before they would give him any money. Furthermore,



Charles I (r.1625-1649)

Parliament did not trust Charles so they did not want to give him a larger army, so they proposed that Parliament be in control of the army. Charles would not agree to this and responded by having his troops invade parliament. The English Civil War had begun.

The English Civil War (1642-1660)



Oliver Cromwell

When the war started the king's troops, the Cavaliers, were successful. But the Parliamentary army or the Roundheads led by **Oliver Cromwell**, a prominent Puritan, had an advantage. They controlled London and the navy and with that advantage were able to defeat the Cavaliers. In 1646, Charles surrendered and was executed in a public beheading. The English Republic was born.



The execution of Charles I, January 30, 1649.

This was shaky new ground. For most of its history, a king had ruled England. Now Parliament was in charge, which did not work out so well. Eventually Oliver Cromwell was made Lord Protector, in effect king or more accurately a military dictator.

Cromwell was a Puritan and worked to impose his strict view of Christianity on everyone in England. His goal was the moral reform of England, so he outlawed such things as going to the theater, public recreation on Sundays, festivals on Christmas and other holy days. He wanted people to be praying and observing religious holidays with worship. Cromwell's popularity with the people lessened with his strict reforms, yet the army continued to respect him.

When Cromwell died his son took over. The English citizens didn't really like the Puritan laws and didn't want Cromwell's son to be their dictator, so Parliament voted to restore the monarchy. Charles II, who was already the king in Scotland, became the king of England in 1660.

Glorious Revolution (1688)

Charles II, who was the son of Charles I, ruled from 1660-1685. His reign was relatively peaceful but religious problems continued in England. Puritans had mostly left the Church of England, but some wanted to restore the Catholic religion. Protestants did not want this. Charles II died with no legitimate heir to the throne, so his brother James II became king in 1685.

This was when the trouble started again. James had a daughter with his first wife, but after she died he remarried, this time to a Catholic. Many Protestants in England were upset when James converted to Catholicism, but when his second wife gave birth to a son was when Parliament decided to take action against James. Now there was the threat of a Catholic inheriting the throne. Remember, males are in line for the throne before females.

The English did not want to repeat the horrific events of the civil war and behead another king, so they opted to invite James' older daughter, Mary, and her husband, William, who was a monarch in Holland to invade England. Mary and William of Orange were both Protestant. Mary and William accepted the offer of the throne of England and the **Glorious Revolution** (sometimes called the Bloodless Revolution) was complete.

James II fled to France. Parliament was supreme and to make sure this was known, William and Mary signed the **English Bill of Rights**. Power was transferred to the Parliament and further legislation established a **Constitutional Monarchy** in England. Absolutism failed in England and the king's power continues to be limited to this day in England. The events laid the foundation for the ideas of limited government that were later adopted later in the United States.



William and Mary