

Source:
Bill of Rights in Action
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England's Glorious Revolution

England's Glorious Revolution was complex. It involved a struggle for power between a Catholic king and Protestant Parliament, a fight over religious and civil liberties, differences between emerging political parties, and a foreign invasion.



Asked by English nobles to intervene against King James II, William of Orange led a large fleet and invaded England. (Wikipedia)

In 1534, King Henry VIII broke away from the Roman Catholic faith and created the Protestant Church of England (also called the Anglican Church). Henry established the Anglican faith as the official religion of England and made himself and future English monarchs head of the church. Henry, rather than the Catholic pope, appointed the country's top religious leaders and decided how people would practice Christianity in the kingdom.

Henry had broken from the Catholic Church after the pope refused to grant him a divorce. Henry did not object much to the Catholic faith itself. Therefore, he continued many Catholic beliefs and practices in the Church of England.

Henry's break with the Catholic Church set off a long period of religious turmoil in England. One of Henry's daughters, Mary, remained a Catholic. When she became queen, she tried to force England to return to Catholicism. Mary ordered hundreds of Protestants burned at the stake as heretics, earning her the name "Bloody Mary."

Elizabeth, another of Henry's daughters, took the throne after Mary's death in 1558.

Queen Elizabeth I, a Protestant, restored the Church of England, which then became a powerful force in English society and politics.

By the early 1600s, increasing numbers of English Protestants, known as Puritans, wanted to “purify” or get rid of many lingering elements of Catholic worship in the Church of England. The Puritans wanted a much simpler form of worship and the right to elect ministers for their own congregation. But when Charles I became king in 1625, he tried to force the Puritans to conform to Anglican worship practices.

Charles provoked great hostility from Parliament, dominated by Puritans. In 1642, a civil war began between the supporters of Charles, called Cavaliers, and the Puritan supporters of Parliament.

The Puritans, led by Oliver Cromwell, defeated Charles in 1648 and beheaded him. Fighting continued for a few years. The king’s son, also named Charles, fled to France when Cromwell finally crushed the remaining Cavalier armies.

The Puritan Parliament abolished the monarchy and established a republic called the Commonwealth. As commander-in-chief, Cromwell reluctantly took on the role of Lord Protector of England.

Cromwell and Parliament set up a new official state Puritan Church to replace the Church of England. But Cromwell also permitted Anglicans and Catholics to practice their faiths.

The Puritan Parliament proved ineffective, and in 1658, Cromwell died. Tired of Puritan rule, the English people wanted a king to lead them again. In 1660, Parliament restored the monarchy with the son of the beheaded king ruling as Charles II.

Charles II

After Charles II took the throne, a new Parliament met. The Cavaliers, those who had backed Charles I in the Civil War, controlled both the elected House of Commons and the appointed House of Lords. Parliament quickly acted to restore the Church of England and its Anglican worship as the state religion.

The Cavaliers believed that Catholics and Protestant Dissenters like Congregationalists, Baptists, Presbyterians, Puritans, and Quakers wanted to destroy the Church of England. Therefore, Parliament enacted new harsh criminal laws to punish Protestant Dissenters and Catholics for worshipping openly.

Charles II attempted to heal the divisions of the Civil War by adopting a policy of religious tolerance. In 1672 without the consent of Parliament, he issued a Declaration of Indulgence. This suspended all religious criminal laws, issued licenses to Protestant Dissenters to meet publicly, and allowed Catholics to worship in their homes.

His declaration outraged the Cavalier Parliament. It threatened to withhold its consent for the king's requests for money and forced Charles to withdraw his declaration.

The next year, Parliament passed the Test Act. It prevented the king from appointing Protestant Dissenters and Catholics to any government or military post. A second Test Act soon followed, prohibiting Catholics from holding seats in either house of Parliament. These laws tested the religious beliefs of individuals by requiring them to take the sacrament of Holy Communion in an Anglican church.

In 1678, word of a "Popish Plot" to kill the king and massacre Protestants terrified England. The plot turned out to be a fake, but Protestants began to worry about the next person in line to inherit the throne.

Charles had fathered only illegitimate children. If he died without a legitimate heir, his brother, James, would become king. Parliament attempted to pass a law excluding James from inheriting the crown because he had converted to Catholicism.

During the drawn out debate over excluding James, members of Parliament divided into political parties, Tories and Whigs. These were not highly organized parties designed to campaign for the election of political candidates. (Highly organized modern political parties were first created in the United States in the early 1800s.) Nevertheless, in the late 1600s, the Whigs and Tories were the first parties to rally around sets of principles in a lawmaking body. Their basic principles were:

Tories

- The monarch is the supreme power, answerable only to God, and must not be resisted. But the monarch is also bound by the law.
- The monarchy is based on hereditary succession.
- The Church of England is the established state church. No religious toleration for Catholics or Protestant Dissenters should be permitted.

Whigs

- The monarch shares power with Parliament. Both are answerable to the people and bound by the law.
- The hereditary succession may be overridden for the common good.
- The Church of England retains too many Catholic practices and should be further reformed. Toleration for Protestant Dissenters, but not for Catholics, should be permitted.

The Whigs controlled the elected House of Commons and took the lead in the attempt to exclude James from succeeding his brother as king. The Whigs argued that James would rule as a dictator like France's Catholic King Louis XIV.

The more conservative Tories dominated the House of Lords and objected to

overturning England's tradition of a hereditary monarchy. Although they, too, dreaded a Catholic king, the Tories still blocked the exclusion bills proposed by the Whigs. The exclusion attempt finally ended when Charles, who opposed it, refused to call a new Parliament after 1681.



To this day, historians debate whether English King James II (1633–1701) wanted to just establish religious toleration for Catholics or to turn England into a centralized Catholic state. (Wikimedia Commons)

James II and Toleration

In 1685, Charles II died, and his brother became king, reigning as James II. Surprisingly, English Protestants welcomed their new Catholic king. Many sided with the Tories and believed even a Catholic king was better than another civil war over the monarchy.

James assured his subjects that he would “preserve this government both in church and state as it is now by law established.” Catholics made up only about 1 percent of the English population. But James believed that, if instructed properly, Protestants would voluntarily convert to Catholicism as he himself had done.

Shortly after James took the throne, the Duke of Monmouth, one of Charles II's illegitimate sons, led a rebellion to make himself king. James formed an army and defeated him. Known as the Bloody Assizes, a series of trials followed, and hundreds of rebels were executed.

James violated custom and did not disband his army after the threat passed. Instead, he created a peacetime standing (permanent professional) army organized and trained like that of Louis XIV. James stationed his troops throughout England, frequently quartering them in private homes and inns. This caused resentment and fears that James would someday use this standing army against his subjects.

Meanwhile, James had formed a council of top government advisers who were nearly all Catholics. James attended Catholic mass in the royal palace. He also encouraged English Catholics to worship openly in public meetings even though this was illegal under the criminal laws passed by Parliament.

In addition, James approved the building of Catholic chapels and schools. He allowed the printing of Catholic Bibles and other religious publications. He welcomed Catholic missionaries from France and other European countries.

While all this was going on, James attempted to persuade Parliament to repeal the criminal laws and Test Acts that discriminated against both Catholics and Protestant Dissenters. Parliament refused and called for the rigorous enforcement of these laws. James then dissolved Parliament and ruled without it.

In 1686, James forged a political alliance with dissenting Protestants such as the Quakers led by William Penn. James promised them religious freedom in exchange for supporting his effort to secure the same for his fellow Catholics.

Acting on his own, James suspended enforcement of the criminal laws banning public worship by Catholics and Protestant Dissenters. He also dispensed with the enforcement of the Test Acts when he appointed Catholics and Dissenters to government and military posts.

His actions enraged Parliament. Whigs and some Tories argued that the king could not lawfully suspend or dispense with laws without Parliament's consent. James replied that suspending and dispensing with laws were part of the king's inherited powers. James replaced judges with those friendly to his policies. He won a court decision, taking his side of the controversy.

Next, James set out to pack a new Parliament with Protestant Dissenters and other allies. He sent spies to report on the political views of local officials who usually ran for seats in the House of Commons. If they opposed his policies, he replaced them. He also cracked down on speech, press, and other civil liberties to smother criticism of him and his government. He angered Protestants by ordering them to disarm.

James set up a Commission for Ecclesiastical (religious) Causes to punish Anglican clergy who defied his orders not to preach against Catholicism. He also forced colleges at Oxford to accept Catholic students.

In 1688, seven Church of England bishops sent a petition to James, protesting his

order to read one of his declarations on toleration from their pulpits. James had them put on trial for seditious libel (inciting people to overthrow the government). A jury, however, acquitted the bishops to the cheers of those in the courtroom and throughout the kingdom.

Whigs, Tories, Anglicans, Dissenters, and even some Catholics increasingly grew critical of James. Hearing reports of local disobedience among his subjects and a possible Dutch invasion, James backtracked. Hoping to gain Tory support, he withdrew some of his bitterly opposed acts and summoned a new Parliament. In June 1688, his wife gave birth to a son. This inflamed fears in England of a continuing succession of Catholic kings.

William of Orange

Days after the birth of James' son, a small group of Whig and Tory nobles sent a message to Protestant Holland's Prince William of Orange. He was married to James' Protestant daughter, Mary. The nobles asked William to intervene against James, apparently hoping to force him to stop his pro-Catholic and dictatorial rule.

William was putting together a coalition of Protestant and even Catholic countries against Louis XIV, who wanted to dominate all of Europe. William quickly saw the advantage of adding England to his coalition.

On November 5, 1688, William landed in England with more than 20,000 soldiers carried by a fleet larger than the Spanish Armada that had threatened England 100 years before. William's army consisted of Dutch soldiers, English soldiers, and others who had fled to Holland.

James was shocked to learn that his English subjects cheered when William landed. Many waved swords and sticks with oranges stuck on them to show they were with him. Some of James' soldiers deserted and joined William as he led his invading army to London.

Violent uprisings against James and his government took place throughout England, Wales, Scotland, Ireland, and even colonial America. Mobs attacked Catholic chapels, schools, printing shops, and the houses of James' government officials and tax collectors. Mobs also attacked his Protestant Dissenter allies and some of James' quartered troops.

Fearing the fate of his beheaded father, Charles I, James ordered his army disbanded, cancelled his call for a new Parliament, and escaped to France as William neared London. The disorder continued for several months.

James made one last stand. In the spring of 1689, he landed in Ireland with a fleet of ships and soldiers supplied by Louis XIV. His troops joined an army of Irish Catholics that had besieged Protestant colonists and soldiers in Northern Ireland.

William led an army against James and defeated his Catholic force in the summer of 1690. James then returned to France.

The English Bill of Rights (1689)

The following excerpt from the English Bill of Rights includes the comprehensive political settlement of the Glorious Revolution.

1. That the pretended power of suspending the laws or the execution of the laws by regal [the king's] authority without consent of Parliament is illegal;
2. That the pretended power of dispensing with laws or the execution of laws by regal authority . . . is illegal;
3. That the commission for erecting the late Court of Commissioners for Ecclesiastical Causes, and all other commissions and courts of like nature, are illegal and pernicious [destructive];
4. That levying money [taxes] for or to the use of the Crown by pretense of prerogative [king's authority], without grant of Parliament . . . is illegal;
5. That it is the right of the subjects to petition the king, and all commitments [imprisonment] and prosecutions for such petitioning are illegal;
6. That the raising or keeping a standing army within the kingdom in time of peace, unless it be with the consent of Parliament, is against law;
7. That the subjects which are Protestants may have arms for their defense suitable to their conditions and as allowed by law;
8. That elections of members of Parliament ought to be free;
9. That the freedom of speech and debates or proceedings in Parliament ought not to be impeached or questioned in any court or place out of Parliament;
10. That excessive bail ought not to be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishments inflicted;
11. That jurors ought to be duly impaneled and returned, and jurors which pass upon men in trials for high treason ought to be freeholders [property owners];
12. That all grants and promises of fines and forfeitures of particular persons before conviction are illegal and void;
13. And that for redress of grievances, and for the amending, strengthening and preserving of the laws, Parliaments ought to be held frequently.

The Settlement and English Bill of Rights

A new Parliament, divided between Whigs and Tories, assembled in January 1689. The two parties debated who should be the new king. The Whigs favored William. Most Tories, objecting to Parliament "electing" a king, wanted James' Protestant daughter, Mary, as queen. A few Tories argued that James had only "deserted" not "abdicated" the throne, so he should return under certain conditions.

When William landed in England he said he was not interested in the throne. But in early 1689, he issued an ultimatum: Either Parliament proclaim him king or he would take his army back to Holland and leave England undefended and in chaos.

The Whigs and Tories finally settled on a compromise. William and Mary would technically rule as co-monarchs, but William would take charge of the government. In February 1689, Parliament offered William and Mary the crown.

At their crowning, Parliament presented William and Mary with a Declaration of Rights. This condemned the illegal acts of James, placed limits on royal authority, called for “frequent” Parliaments, and listed specific rights of Parliament and the people. Nevertheless, the monarchy kept most of its traditional powers.

Parliament later amended the Declaration to say that anyone who “shall profess the popish religion [Catholicism] or shall marry a papist, shall be excluded and be forever incapable to inherit, possess, or enjoy the crown and government of this realm. . . .” This requirement still exists today.

Parliament passed into law the amended Declaration with the consent of King William III. This document became the English Bill of Rights.

The Whigs, the main supporters of the Glorious Revolution, gained the confidence of William and passed into law the Toleration Act of 1689. This allowed moderate Protestant Dissenters, but not Catholics, to worship publicly in licensed meeting places. The Test Acts, however, still excluded the Dissenters along with Catholics from holding public office.

William did not strongly enforce the laws that continued to discriminate against Protestant Dissenters and Catholics. Many Dissenters evaded the Test Acts by taking Communion in an Anglican Church once a year just to qualify for public office. Catholics worshipped pretty much as they pleased. William also appointed bishops to the Church of England who favored a more open-minded policy toward toleration. But England still had a long way to go to before achieving true religious freedom.

California History Social Science Standards

10.2.0: Students compare and contrast the Glorious Revolution of England, the American Revolution, and the French Revolution and their enduring effects world wide on the political expectations for self government and individual liberty.

10.2.2 List the principles of the English Bill of Rights (1689....

7.11.0: Students analyze political and economic change in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries (the Age of Exploration, the Enlightenment, and the Age of Reason).

7.11.6 Discuss how the principles in the Magna Carta were embodied in such documents as the English Bill of Rights and the American Declaration of Independence.

8.2.0: Students analyze the political principles underlying the U.S. Constitution and compare the enumerated and implied powers of the federal government.

8.2.1 Discuss the significance of the Magna Carta, the English Bill of Rights,

and the Mayflower Compact.

For Discussion and Writing

1. Which one of the following do you think was the main winner and which was the main loser in the Glorious Revolution? Use evidence from the article to back up your choice.
 - A. Monarchy
 - B. Parliament
 - C. Church of England
 - D. Protestant Dissenters
 - E. Catholics
2. Some historians argue that the Glorious Revolution was not a revolution at all but merely a change of kings brought on by a foreign invasion. Do you agree or disagree with this viewpoint? Why?
3. Which of the English Bill of Rights ended up in the American Bill of Rights more than 100 years later? Which one of these rights do you think is the most important? Why?

What Was James II's Goal?

Some historians believe James only wanted to end religious discrimination against Catholics so they could worship freely and participate fully in English political affairs. Other historians are convinced James wanted to copy the Catholic regime of Louis XIV in France by embarking on a calculated plan to create a centralized Catholic English state with an all-powerful king.

1. Form half the class into two groups that will debate the two sides to this question: **What was James II's goal?** Each debate group should look for evidence in the article to back up its side.
2. The remaining half of the students will serve as judges of the debate. They will ask questions during the debate and vote on the winner. After they vote, each judge will write an essay, explaining his or her answer to the debate question.
3. Debate procedure:
 - a. Each debating group will make an opening statement on the evidence that supports its side of the debate.
 - b. Each debating group will then have a chance to question the other side.
 - c. The judges may ask questions at any point during the debate.
 - d. The judges will discuss the debate question, vote on it, and write their individual essays.