

SEM- V

The Glorious Revolution

The Glorious Revolution, also called “The Revolution of 1688” and “The Bloodless Revolution,” took place from 1688 to 1689 in England. It involved the overthrow of the Catholic King James II, who was replaced by his Protestant daughter Mary and her Dutch husband, William of Orange. Motives for the revolution were complex and included both political and religious concerns. The event ultimately changed how England was governed, giving Parliament more power over the monarchy and planting seeds for the beginnings of a political democracy.

King James II

King James II took the throne in England in 1685, during a time when relations between Catholics and Protestants were tense. There was also considerable friction between the monarchy and the British Parliament. James, who was Catholic, supported the freedom of worship for Catholics and appointed Catholic officers to the army. He also had close ties with France—a relationship that concerned many of the English people.

In 1687, King James II issued a Declaration of Indulgence, which suspended penal laws against Catholics and granted acceptance of some Protestant dissenters. Later that year, the king formally dissolved his Parliament and attempted to create a new Parliament that would support him unconditionally.

James’s daughter Mary, a Protestant, was the rightful heir to the throne until 1688 when James had a son, James Francis Edward Stuart, whom he announced would be raised Catholic.

The birth of James’s son changed the line of succession, and many feared a Catholic dynasty in England was imminent. The Whigs, the main group that opposed Catholic succession, were especially outraged.

The king's elevation of Catholicism, his close relationship with France, his conflict with Parliament and uncertainty over who would succeed James on the English throne led to whispers of a revolt—and ultimately the fall of James II.

William of Orange

In 1688, seven of King James's peers wrote to the Dutch leader, William of Orange, pledging their allegiance to the prince if he invaded England.

William was already in the process of taking military action against England, and the letter served as an additional propaganda motive.

William of Orange assembled an impressive armada for the invasion and landed in Torbay, Devon, in November 1688.

King James, however, had prepared for military attacks and left London to bring his forces to meet the invading army. But several of James's own men, including his family members, deserted him and defected to William's side. In addition to this setback, James's health was deteriorating.

James decided to retreat back to London on November 23. He soon announced that he was willing to agree to a "free" Parliament but was making plans to flee the country due to concerns for his own safety.

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In December 1688, King James made an attempt to escape but was captured. Later that month, he made another attempt and successfully fled to France, where his Catholic cousin Louis XIV held the throne and where James eventually died in exile in 1701.

Bill of Rights

In January 1689, the now-famous Convention Parliament met. After significant pressure from William, Parliament agreed to a joint monarchy, with William as king and James's daughter, Mary, as queen.

The two new rulers accepted more restrictions from Parliament than any previous monarchs, causing an unprecedented shift in the distribution of power throughout the British realm.

The king and queen both signed the Declaration of Rights, which became known as the Bill of Rights. This document acknowledged several constitutional principles, including the right for regular Parliaments, free elections and freedom of speech in Parliament. Additionally, it forbade the monarchy from being Catholic.

Many historians believe the Bill of Rights was the first step toward a constitutional monarchy.

Bloodless Revolution

The Glorious Revolution is sometimes dubbed the Bloodless Revolution, although this description isn't entirely accurate.

While there was little bloodshed and violence in England, the revolution led to significant loss of life in Ireland and Scotland.

Catholic historians typically refer to the Glorious Revolution as the "Revolution of 1688," while Whig historians prefer the phrase "Bloodless Revolution." The term "Glorious Revolution" was first coined by John Hampden in 1689.

Legacy of the Glorious Revolution

Many historians believe the Glorious Revolution was one of the most important events leading to Britain's transformation from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy. After this event, the monarchy in England would never hold absolute power again.

With the Bill of Rights, the regent's power was defined, written down and limited for the first time. Parliament's function and influence changed dramatically in the years following the revolution. The event also had an impact on the 13 colonies in North America. The colonists were temporarily freed of strict, anti-Puritan laws after King James was overthrown.

When news of the revolution reached the Americans, several uprisings followed, including the Boston Revolt, Leisler's Rebellion in New York and the Protestant Revolution in Maryland. Since the Glorious Revolution, Parliament's power in Britain has continued to increase, while the monarchy's influence has waned. There's no doubt this important event helped set the stage for the United Kingdom's present-day political system and government.