CHAPTER 3 | English Exceptionalism I

> In the seventeenth century men killed, tortured, and executed each other
> for political beliefs; they sacked towns and brutalized the countryside.
> They were subjected to conspiracy, plot, and invasion. [By the eighteenth
> century] this had all vanished.
>
> —J.H. Plumb[1]

THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER analyzed the ancien régime and the rise of an absolutist dictatorship in France during the early modern era. English kings tried to imitate their French counterparts but ultimately failed, pushing English political development in a very different direction from France's and indeed the rest of Europe's. The price, however, was very high: during the seventeenth century the British Isles suffered through civil war, religious conflict, military dictatorship, regicide, and a Glorious Revolution. These political upheavals transformed the political infrastructure and power relationships of England's old regime.[2]

This early transformation turned out to be crucial. As Europe embarked on a period of rapid and disorienting change in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—with capitalism transforming societies and new social groups demanding political power and representation—Britain already had crucial political battles behind it and a national political institution in place—Parliament—capable of integrating new groups into the system and responding to new demands and challenges. As we will see, this helped make Britain's political development exceptional during the modern era: gradual and evolutionary as opposed to conflictual and violent.[3]

This chapter will examine the seventeenth-century political upheavals that contributed to British exceptionalism. At the heart of these upheavals lay three interrelated issues. The first concerned power: would England move in an absolutist direction with power increasingly centralized in the Crown, or would a more "balanced" political regime develop where power was shared among different political actors? The second issue concerned money: where would the financial resources necessary to meet state-building and war-making challenges come from? And the third issue concerned religion: how would religious differences within England and the territories of the British Isles be dealt with?

The Background

Before the seventeenth century a parliament existed in England, but it was not a permanent institution of government like the parliaments that exist today; it met irregularly, summoned by the king for advice or to deal with particular problems, like preparation for war.[4] English kings, like their counterparts elsewhere, were wary of Parliament since it could potentially restrict their power; in particular, Parliament had a nasty habit, from the king's perspective, of asking for concessions in return for money. English kings therefore tried to raise money on their own, either by exploiting their personal resources or via other means that did not require parliamentary approval. If, however, expenditures increased, the monarchy's existing resources and tools might no longer suffice. This happened often during the seventeenth century.

England's first Stuart king, James I (1603–1625), found himself in financial difficulty soon after coming to power due to the extravagance of his court and foreign policy misadventures. These financial difficulties led to a tug-of-war with Parliament. In 1610, for example, James was presented with a scheme known as the "Great Contract," which proposed granting the king an annual payment in return for the forfeiture of some of his traditional rights. However, once negotiations over the precise terms of the deal got under way, reaching an agreement on either the amount of money to be granted or the specific rights to be surrendered proved impossible. The deal therefore collapsed, and James dismissed Parliament. Since this did not end James's financial problems or Parliament's insistence on concessions in return for helping solve them, a pattern of summoned and dismissed parliaments continued throughout James's reign.

Such struggles intensified during the reign of James's son and successor, Charles I (1625–1649). One cause of this was Charles himself. An inflexible believer in the divine right of kings, Charles was not interested in compromise or bargaining. The king's personal preferences might not have mattered so much had the need for compromise and bargaining not increased—but it did, due partially to escalating financial pressures. One source of these was the Thirty Years' War. Parliament had grown frustrated with the cost and handling of English involvement in the war and rejected Charles's request for additional funding. This and other matters led Charles to dismiss Parliament in 1626. Now forced to raise money on his own, Charles turned to a number of unpopular measures, including forced loans; when some of his subjects refused to go along with them, Charles had them imprisoned and declared martial law to deal with the discontent and rioting breaking out in various parts of the country. Charles also increasingly made use of the Star Chamber, a royal court of justice, to punish opponents outside of the existing legal system.[5] Such measures, and the shift towards absolutism they represented, led to increasing dissatisfaction, and Charles was forced to call Parliament back into session in 1628. Almost immediately Parliament began debating resolutions to restrict the powers Charles recently employed and eventually proposed a "Petition of Right," calling for freedom from forced loans and taxes, guarantees of due process, and restrictions on the use of martial law. Unwilling to accept these demands, Charles dismissed Parliament in 1629 and began a long period of personal rule, sometimes referred to as the "eleven years' tyranny" since he refused to call Parliament for eleven years.[6] With Parliament no longer available to raise revenue, Charles again resorted to "innovative" measures to raise money, including the particularly unpopular "ship money."

Ship money traditionally referred to funds that the Crown collected from coastal towns to fund naval expenditures necessary to defend them in times of war. In 1634 Charles attempted to expand the use of ship money to inland towns and for the "possibility" of war, rather than because an actual conflict was at hand. (Underlying the king's need for increased funds lay changes in the nature of warfare and military technology which had rendered England's military, particularly its navy, out of date.[7]) Despite real military and financial needs, Charles's request for ship money was widely reviled[8] as an attempt to impose new taxes without parliamentary approval, and refusal to pay was widespread. The failure of ship money and other royal schemes to provide the funds to meet England's military and other obligations made it increasingly difficult for Charles to rule without Parliament; what made

it impossible was that existing financial problems collided with other state-building challenges.

As noted in the previous chapter, it was generally accepted during this time that religious diversity made a country unviable—as the old proverb had it: "one faith, one law, one king."[9] Religion was "a public duty,"[10] and deviations from the state religion were seen as potentially subversive in England as in other parts of Europe. In the years after Henry VIII nationalized the English church and placed it under control of the state, all Englishmen were legally obligated to become members of the Church of England and attend services; Protestantism became central to England's identity, and Catholicism was prohibited.[11] However, during the early seventeenth century many, most importantly the Puritans, came to believe Protestantism was under threat.

As the name implies, Puritanism aimed to "purify" religious, personal, and social life of corrupting influences. In particular, Puritans believed that the Reformation in England had not gone far enough and that the Church of England remained tainted by traditions and practices that smacked of Catholicism. But in a world where religion was not merely a personal preference but a social force and where the King was the head of the state Church, criticism of religious traditions and practices had implicit and sometimes explicit political implications. By the early seventeenth century Puritanism had gained many adherents, particularly among the gentry and merchant and professional classes.[12] In addition to religious beliefs, Puritans developed strong internal networks and associations. Indeed, by the 1630s Puritanism had become a sort of "sub-culture, which began in the cradle of the family hearth, embraced and enclosed men, women and children within its godly vision and conditioned the way they saw the political world."[13] This combination—of shared beliefs, broad social appeal, and robust internal linkages—gave Puritans the resources for organized collective action.[14] And as Charles's reign progressed, growing numbers of Puritans and others came to believe that collective action was necessary.

From early on, Puritans and other Protestants suspected Charles of having Catholic sympathies. In 1625 he married a French Catholic princess and allowed her and her entourage to openly practice their faith, thereby raising fears that restrictions on Catholicism would be loosened. (In fact, Charles had signed a secret marriage treaty with Louis XIII of France promising concessions.) In addition to his marriage, Charles also embraced Arminianism, a movement that aimed to restore some pre-Reformation traditions and rituals to the English Church and strengthen clerical authority—which would, by extension, increase the power of the Church's head, the King, over

religious life. Whatever Charles's personal religious inclinations, his support for Arminianism had a clear *political* rationale: he preferred religious practices that stressed obedience and deference to authority and a Church with strong internal hierarchies at whose apex would be the king. However, by involving the Crown directly in ecclesiastical matters and by calling for reforms that clearly aimed to enhance royal power, Charles increased and fused religious and political dissatisfaction. Puritans, for example, had previously concentrated most of their attention on religious reform. But the actions of Charles and his ally Archbishop Laud convinced them that their religious goals were threatened by the Crown's absolutist aspirations and therefore that political as well as religious changes would be necessary. Charles and Laud, meanwhile, convinced themselves that all those opposed to Arminianism were Puritans and unreasonable radicals and responded accordingly. These beliefs created a self-fulfilling prophecy: within the space of a decade Charles's and Laud's actions "succeeded in creating a new, large and radical Puritan party out of the hard core of the old one plus a mass of new alienated Anglicans."[15]

By the end of the 1630s Charles's financial, religious, and other policies had generated widespread dissatisfaction; bad economic conditions then made the situation even more volatile. Harvests during the 1630s were poor and came after a period of economic prosperity, thus frustrating the expectations of many.[16] What sent the whole situation spiraling out of control, however, was the fusing of Charles's absolutist aspirations with the "unfinished business" of state-building in the British Isles.

As noted in chapter 2, political centralization and territorial unity were achieved earlier in England than in many other European countries[17] and after the War of the Roses (approximately 1455–1485) Henry VII and his successors had re-asserted the Crown's authority vis-à-vis the nobility and the Church. However, the story in other parts of the British Isles was different. Scotland, for example, although united with England under a single Crown (the ruling Stuart dynasty was in fact Scottish) was essentially a sovereign state, retaining its own administration, institutions, laws, and culture. Warfare between the two countries was common, and "both sides engaged in persistent terrorism, marauding at will and reinforcing cultural stereotypes and racial animosities. Four of James's six immediate Scottish predecessors had died as a result of these struggles: two in battle, one on the scaffold, and one heartbroken after a devastating defeat. Indeed, there was so little respect between sovereigns that the decapitated skull of a Scottish king was used as a flowerpot in the English royal conservatory."[18] Hostility between the two peoples could thus be intense. As one early traveler noted that "nothing pleases the Scots more than abuse of the English . . . when the English taught

their children archery they encouraged them to take good aim—so at least a Scot believed—by saying 'There's a Scot! Shoot him!' "[19] Despite all this, Charles decided to barrel ahead and increase his control over Scotland.

Again, it is important to note that although Charles's moves in Scotland and his larger absolutist aspirations were viewed as an unwelcome attempt to change the status quo by most Scots as well as others throughout the British Isles, they were in line with the broader trends of the day. As noted in chapter 2, during the seventeenth century monarchs in many parts of Europe were trying to centralize their power and move towards absolutist rule. In addition, given the centrality of religion at the time and the related conviction that religious diversity rendered a state unviable, it is also not surprising that Charles viewed religious homogeneity as necessary.[20] Moreover, Scotland's religious practices were particularly "problematic" from Charles's perspective not only because they differed from England's, but also because they were difficult to reconcile with absolutism. The Scottish reformation had gone further than its English counterpart, eliminating more of the rituals and practices associated with Catholicism, and had been "achieved against the State," not by it.[21] The Scottish Church, in other words, was not subservient to the Crown as the Anglican Church had become after Henry VIII's break with Rome.

Thus alongside attempts to impose his preferred religious doctrines and practices in England, Charles also demanded that the Scots bring their Church more in line with the English one and thus under greater royal control. The spark here seemed to be Charles's imposition of a new, royally authorized Prayer Book in 1638. The reaction to this was swift: when an attempt was made to read from this Prayer Book in St. Giles Cathedral in Edinburgh, shouting, wailing, and the throwing of foot stools resulted. From there, things got worse. Protests snowballed into a nation-wide revolt, and in 1638 members of the nobility, gentry, and clergy signed a Covenant committing to defend the Scottish church from Charles's impositions. The Covenant movement led to the outbreak of the Bishops' Wars in 1639 (so-called because Charles wanted to replace the Scots' Presbyterian system, which lacked bishops, with the English High Anglican one, in which bishops figured prominently). Lacking a strong military or the financial means to create one, Charles's initial attempts to squash the Scottish revolt failed, and he found himself in the unenviable position of facing military catastrophe and bankruptcy.[22] With his back up against the wall, Charles called Parliament to ask for funds.

Any hopes Charles may have had that Parliament would hand him the money to crush the rebellious Scots evaporated immediately. When Parliament met in April 1640 even moderates insisted that Charles address

long-standing grievances related to the abuse of royal power before consideration would be given to his financial requests. Unwilling to accept Parliament's conditions, Charles dismissed it in May, only three weeks after it came into session, thus leading it to become known as the "Short Parliament." Meanwhile, the situation was deteriorating with discontent growing among soldiers and the broader population and the Scottish Covenanter army making its way to England. Unable to figure out any other way to finance a campaign against the Scots, Charles called Parliament back into session. This Parliament turned out differently than its predecessor.

The Parliament that came into session in November 1640 sat for twenty years, until 1660, and thus came to be known as the "Long Parliament"; its members included men like John Pym and Oliver Cromwell, who would play important roles in subsequent English political development. Although this Parliament was determined to press forward, initially its demands were not revolutionary—there were no calls to do away with the monarchy or enact far-reaching social or economic reforms. Instead, Parliament's goal was to check the Crown's absolutist tendencies and put in place what we would today consider a constitutional monarchy with authority shared between the executive and legislature. Indeed, reflecting its residual respect for the monarchy, the Long Parliament did not initially place full blame for the proceding years' events on Charles himself, faulting instead his "wicked" advisers. Indeed, two key ones, Archbishop Laud and Earl of Strafford, were quickly impeached and subsequently killed. Parliament did, however, quickly pass several acts with profound political implications. The Habeas Corpus Act (1640) abolished the Star Chamber and gave the imprisoned the right to demand a writ of habeas corpus; the Triennial Acts (1641) required that parliament be called at least once every three years;[23] and ship money was forbidden without parliamentary consent. Cumulatively, these acts would dramatically strengthen Parliament, giving it critical agenda setting, financial, and other powers.

The trigger for these changes and the calling of the Long Parliament more generally was Charles's absolutist and state-building aspirations, particularly his attempt to extend his authority over Scotland. Scotland was not, of course, the only territory in Charles's realm that he lacked full control over, and revolts in another of these, Ireland, pushed political upheaval further out of control. Indeed, because the English civil war cannot be untangled from the conflicts in Ireland and Scotland it is sometimes referred to as "The War of the Three Kingdoms."

Irish revolts began in 1641 and had a number of triggers, including the particularly harsh rule of Sir Thomas Wentworth (the most recent English

Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland), poor economic conditions, and probably most importantly, Irish (Catholic) fear of the growing power of the anti-Catholic Long Parliament and Scottish Covenanters. However, as was the case with Scotland, the deeper cause was the nature of Ireland's relationship with England.[24]

After the Tudor re-conquest of Ireland in the early sixteenth century, the English king became the king of Ireland, but English control over Ireland was contentious and incomplete. In order to increase the Crown's authority, a number of measures later used in other British colonies were employed, including martial law and plantations. Catholics in Ireland were discriminated against and their land taken away and given to Protestant colonists loyal to the metropole. Irish Catholics appealed to English kings for religious toleration and other rights, and the Irish upper classes argued for a restoration of their property and the same privileges enjoyed by other upper-class subjects of the English Crown. In the summer of 1641 Charles I's troubles seemed, momentarily, to offer the Irish a golden opportunity. Facing rebellious Scots and a Parliament unwilling to grant him funds to deal with them without concessions, Charles offered the Irish religious toleration, property, and other rights in return for raising an army that he could use against the Scots. However, Charles's attempt to raise a Catholic army confirmed suspicions of his Catholic intentions and untrustworthiness.

Over the course of 1641 tensions between Crown and Parliament increased. In November the latter passed the "Grand Remonstrance" cataloging Charles's perceived "misdeeds," calling for religious reforms along Puritan lines, the expulsion of bishops from Parliament, and a Parliamentary veto over Crown appointments. The Remonstrance had several critical effects. First, some parliamentarians who had previously been critical of Charles viewed it as a step too far and moved into what was becoming a "royalist" camp. Second, Charles's delay in responding to the Remonstrance led Parliament to take the unusual step of distributing it widely in an attempt to whip up popular support. And third, Charles ultimately rejected the Remonstrance and soon after made a move that sent the country careening towards civil war.

Fed up with Parliament, Charles attempted what was essentially a coup in January 1642, marching his soldiers into Parliament and arresting five of his key opponents, including John Pym, who had first proposed the Grand Remonstrance. Parliament had, however, been warned in advance, and the five fled before soldiers arrived. With the coup's failure and the further loss of popularity accompanying it, Charles decided to leave London and set up a new court in York; he also sent his family out of the country with the royal jewels to drum up foreign support. The king's coup attempt and

flight hardened Parliament's stance. In March it passed the militia ordinance, declaring Parliament in control of the country's armed forces, and in June it sent Charles the "Nineteen Propositions" demanding that he relinquish control over defense and foreign policy, enforce restrictions on Roman Catholicism, make royal ministers and new peers dependent on parliamentary support, and allow parliamentary supervision of the education and marriages of royal children. Charles rejected the "Propositions," and by the end of the summer the king and the Parliament were at war.[25]

Parliament's forces were led by Oliver Cromwell. Cromwell was a devout Puritan who believed that God had chosen him for the tasks at hand. He developed the New Model Army, a disciplined, professional fighting force that was remarkably successful. By 1645 more than 10 percent of the adult males in England were in arms; the number is even higher if the British Isles are included.[26] However, as the New Model Army got closer to defeating the royalist forces, divisions about what should replace Charles and his regime grew. By the summer of 1647 the King was a prisoner of the New Model Army, the old regime was disintegrating, splits within the opposition in general and the army in particular were growing, and debates about England's political future were reaching a fever pitch.

Among the most important were the Putney Debates set up by the New Model Army at the end of October 1647. With the king gone and the old regime in tatters, the New Model Army had become a power separate from the Parliament it had been raised to serve. During the debates a group known as the Levellers called for universal suffrage, parliamentary supremacy, and the protection of a variety of "native rights," including freedom of conscience and equality before the law; they called, in other words, for what would have been Europe's first real democracy. As Colonel Rainsborough, the Leveller spokesman, put it: "I think that the poorest he that is in England hath a life to live, as the greatest he; and therefore truly, Sir, I think it is clear, that every man that is to live under a government ought first by his own consent to put himself under that government; and I do think that the poorest man in England is not bound in a strict sense to that government that he hath not had a voice to put himself under."[27] Most in the army viewed such changes as a recipe for "anarchy," but could not agree on an alternative to them. And then, in November, Charles escaped from his prison, plunging the country back into civil war.

With Charles's flight and the renewal of hostilities, calls increased within the army for him to be brought to trial for treachery and misdeeds. Parliament would not agree to this, instead hoping that continued negotiations with Charles could achieve peace and reform without political

revolution. The army, however, was no longer willing to tolerate Charles or accept Parliament's primacy in political matters, viewing it now as a "decayed body" and the army as the real representative of the people.[28] The army thus presented Parliament with a Remonstrance, demanding Charles be brought to trial and that Parliament disband. Political developments in England thereby took a dramatic turn: what had originally begun as a conflict between Crown and Parliament over absolutist versus constitutional government had morphed into a battle between Parliament and the army over whether England should completely destroy the old regime.

The army, however, had the guns, and with political chaos engulfing England this gave it the upper hand. On the morning of December 6, 1648, troops marched into Parliament, commencing what may have been the first military coup in early modern European history. The troops were led by Colonel Pride who, armed with a list of MPs "hostile" to the army, proceeded to "purge" Parliament, leaving only a pliant rump behind. This episode accordingly became known as "Pride's purge" and the resultant parliament as the "Rump Parliament." In January 1649 Parliament put Charles on trial; within ten days he was beheaded. The impact of these events was momentous. As Thomas Carlyle put it, "I reckon it perhaps the most daring action any Body of Men to be met with in History ever, with clear consciousness, deliberately set themselves to do."[29] The Rump officially declared the monarchy and House of Lords abolished and England a republic, now to be known as the Commonwealth. With this latest political transition power now resided the hands of an unelected armed force. As Simon Schama colorfully notes, England had become "a vacuum filled by an uproar";[30] or as a popular ballad of the time put it, the "world [had] turned upside down."[31] It was against this backdrop that Hobbes wrote *Leviathan,* and once one understands the period, his concerns, if not necessarily his solutions to them, are easy to understand.

England was not the only part of the British Isles in an "uproar." The situation in Ireland was particularly grim. During the 1640s the revolt in Ireland had grown, fed by hopes of securing religious toleration and other concessions from Charles and fear of the anti-Catholic New Model Army.[32] When Charles was executed in 1649, the Irish proclaimed his son, Charles II, king in Ireland. One of the first acts undertaken by the new Commonwealth, therefore, was sending Cromwell to Ireland. The campaign by Cromwell and his successors was devastating: the Irish were slaughtered in a gruesome, bloody struggle that was as much a communal as a political conflict. Although estimates vary, hundreds of thousands of Irish ultimately lost their lives.[33] And if that was not enough, the 1652 "Act for the Settlement of Ireland"

imposed at the conflict's end subjugated Ireland further, expropriating so much Irish land that by 1656, four-fifths of it was owned by Protestants.[34] The native, Catholic Irish were basically reduced to a subservient labor force for Protestant landowners.

Conflict also raged in Scotland. Although the Covenanters had opposed Charles I's religious and political moves, the Scots were unhappy about the ending of the Scottish Stuart dynasty and viewed the Commonwealth and New Model Army as major threats to their independence. The Scots therefore decided to back Charles II's claims to the throne in return for promises to respect Scotland's religious and political traditions. Cromwell came back from Ireland to deal with this threat, re-conquering Scotland by 1651 and expelling thousands of Scots to colonies. Although the Scots were not punished as punitively as the Irish, they had clearly been conquered and their long fight to maintain their independence was coming to an end.[35] The cost of the wars in the three kingdoms was very high: recent estimates suggest that England may have lost 3.7 percent of its population (more than in WWI and WWII), Scotland as much as 6 percent, and Ireland perhaps over 40 percent.[36]

Cromwell's victories in Ireland and Scotland may have fed his sense of destiny as well as the faith of many in him. In any case, he became convinced that even the Rump Parliament was corrupt and inefficient, and in April 1653 he and his allies did away with it entirely via another coup. With this, the Commonwealth was replaced by the "Protectorate" and Cromwell became "Lord Protector,"[37] thereby ironically achieving two of Charles's key goals—eliminating Parliament and creating a powerful, modern army—by returning the country back to a dictatorship, although of the military rather than the monarchical-absolutist variety.

Cromwell's Protectorate was an anathema to both Parliamentarians and Royalists and clearly obviated the entire rationale of the civil war, which had been to protect Parliament from royal overreach. While alive, Cromwell was able to suppress opposition, but when he died in 1658 things started to fall apart. The Protectorate was handed over to Cromwell's son Richard, but he lacked his father's power and charisma and was therefore unable to maintain the unity or support of the army; without it, the Protectorate was doomed. By 1659 Richard was gone, and in 1660 Charles II, son of the executed Charles I, was back on the throne. English political development now seemed to have come full circle, transitioning from one monarchical regime to another, with a republic and a military dictatorship in between. To an observer in 1660 it therefore might well have seemed as if two decades of violence, warfare, and political chaos had achieved very little.[38]

But that was not entirely true. Despite the restoration of the monarchy, there was no going back to the status quo ante. During the previous decades a king had been brought to trial and beheaded in the "name of the people," the House of Lords had been abolished, the established Church reformed, the lands of the king and Church confiscated, and rule "by the people" declared; new ideas about liberty, equality, and the nature of governance spread[39]; and England's relationship with Ireland and Scotland transformed (the "three kingdoms" were united under a single government for the first time during the Commonwealth era). And within England the political balance of power in 1660 differed from that in 1640. The Crown reclaimed by Charles II was "a different crown from the one that had tumbled into the basket in 1649. By withstanding attacks from monarch and army, Parliament had made good its claim to be the representative of the people, even if the concept of representation and the definition of the people remained elusive. If it had previously been an event, Parliament was now an institution."[40] The basic goal of the Triennial Act—ensuring regular parliaments— remained in force as did the abolition of key elements of personal rule, like the Star Chamber, and many of the Crown's feudal rights and revenues. Perhaps most importantly, parliamentary control over taxation was strengthened and the king's right to levy prerogative taxes like ship money eliminated. The restoration settlement was thus something of a mish-mash. Parliament was stronger, but the monarchy had been re-established and the balance of power between the two remained unclear. In addition, the political role of religion and the Church remained contentious; and although England's control over Ireland and Scotland had increased, these relationships were unsettled. In other words, many of the tensions that had tormented England during the previous decades—over regime type, religion, and state-building—remained embedded in the restoration order.

Not surprisingly, therefore, the first restoration king, Charles II (1660–1685), quickly found himself involved in some of the same conflicts that had bedeviled his father. Religion, for example, returned quickly as a source of controversy. Many in Parliament were suspicious of Charles II's pro-Catholic foreign policy, support of Catholic France, involvement in the Third Anglo-Dutch war, and issuance of the Royal Declaration of Indulgence, which would have granted significant religious liberty to both Roman Catholics and Protestant dissenters. Parliament was, however, able to force Charles II to back down, refusing to provide funding for involvement in the Anglo-Dutch war and compelling him to withdraw the Declaration of Indulgence

and agree to the Test Act, which required officeholders to swear allegiance to the Church of England and denounce Catholicism.

Parliamentary and societal fears were sharpened not only by Charles II's purported personal religious preferences, but also by his family situation. Charles and his wife, Queen Catherine, had been unable to produce an heir, leaving Charles's Catholic brother James, the Duke of York, next in line for the throne. Given the widespread and vehement anti-Catholicism of the time, a movement to exclude James from the throne emerged. It is from this movement that the terms "Whig" and "Tory" derive, with the former advocating exclusion and the latter opposing it. To some degree, this also represented a socioeconomic divide, with the middle class and merchant groups over-represented among Whigs and the Tories having a more aristocratic air. Although ostensibly about religion, the exclusion conflict was at its heart political: would royal prerogative or Parliament determine the occupant of the throne? During the late 1670s and early 1680s Charles and Parliament tussled over an Exclusion Bill that would have barred James from the throne. So heated was this conflict that a group of Protestant conspirators launched the "Rye House Plot" to murder Charles II and James. The plot failed, but less than two years later Charles was dead anyway, and lacking an heir, his brother James assumed the throne as James II.

Despite this background, when James came to power his position seemed secure. His first parliament was dominated by Tories, and although his Catholicism was an issue, he had no sons and all his daughters were Protestant, so the belief was that the throne would return to Protestant hands. In addition, James initially promised to respect English law and the existing Protestant Church. When a challenge to James's rule broke out soon after his accession in the form of a rebellion by Charles II's eldest but illegitimate son, the Duke of Monmouth, it was rapidly put down. The army remained loyal to the Crown and no major areas or social groups rose up against the king. At least in James's early period of rule, therefore, it seems "that the vast majority of English men and women were willing to accept a Catholic king as long as he was willing to rule within the parameters established by the English constitution in Church and State."[41]

The problem was that James had no intention of so doing. Like his father and brother, James had Catholic and absolutist tendencies and aspired to the type of absolutist rule his cousin, Louis XIV, was perfecting in France (see chapters 2 and 4). James attempted to augment his power in myriad ways. He increased revenues by modernizing the Treasury and also benefited from a "trade boom" that increased customs returns, limiting the need to ask Parliament for funds.[42] In addition, recent research indicates that

during James's reign "English taxes began their 'steep and almost continuous ascent,'"[43] thereby also increasing money available to him. One crucial outlet for these financial resources was the military. James recognized that a great power and a strong state required a powerful army and navy, and he modernized and increased spending on both. James gave key military positions to Catholics, which violated the Test Act, and was clearly an attempt to increase the military's loyalty to him.[44] James used the army for domestic political purposes as well, dispersing it across the country, providing both a visible manifestation of state power and a potent tool for social control.[45] James also extended his hold over other parts of the state apparatus like the courts, applying "litmus tests" to new judicial appointees and removing judges who did not agree with him, and over local government, purging "town corporations, commissions of the peace and country lieutenants."[46] James also increased spending on domestic intelligence gathering and made use of government spies and the post office to keep an eye on the opposition.[47] One contemporaneous ditty captured the reality of this early modern surveillance state: "In former time / Free conversation was no crime / But now the place / has chang'd its face."[48]

As was the case with his father, it is difficult to detangle James's absolutist aspirations from his religious ones. In late 1685 James adjourned Parliament when it resisted his attempts to exempt Catholics from the Test Act. In spring 1687 he then issued a Declaration of Indulgence, which would have greatly expanded religious freedom for Catholics and Protestant Dissenters. Although this seems progressive today, it was viewed as radical and threatening in seventeenth-century England. Alongside the Declaration, James used royal prerogative to place Catholic supporters in key social and political positions. For example, he caused a major kerfuffle by trying to force a Catholic president on Magdalen College, Oxford, a traditional Anglican bastion. These provocative moves aimed to advance the cause of Catholicism and to boost James's political power by planting Catholics in influential positions and trying to build a coalition between Catholics and Protestant dissenters. James also tried to "pack" the Parliament that was due to come back into session in 1688 with his supporters. And to top it all off, in the fall of 1687 rumors began to spread that James's wife, Mary, was pregnant, raising the specter of a Catholic heir to the throne.

Thus by 1688 tension was already high when James re-issued his Declaration of Indulgence and ordered all clergy to read it in their churches. When the Archbishop of Canterbury and six other bishops refused, James had them arrested them for "seditious libel" (essentially rebellion against the Crown) and sent to the Tower of London, causing an uproar. After a trial

the bishops were acquitted, but the damage had been done. "The Trial of the Seven Bishops, the greatest historical drama that ever took place before an authorized English law court, aroused popular feeling to its height."[49] By this point, the worst fears of the exclusionists seemed to have been confirmed. James's desire to change the religious and political status quo and construct the type of Catholic, absolutist regime that his cousin was perfecting across the channel was obvious to all.[50] As historian Steven Pincus perceptively put it, James

> carefully, methodically and above all bureaucratically promoted a series of centralizing policies that were both modern and proven to be successful. James followed a blueprint that had been perfected by Louis XIV in France. James was not merely seeking equal standing for his coreligionists. His total reshaping of English government at every level was much more ambitious than that. . . . [He] built up a modern army, and a modern navy, made all branches of government subservient to royal authority, and extended the power of the government deep into the localities. . . . He went a long way towards transforming the English state into a centralized, efficient, and bureaucratic machine.[51]

By 1688 James had alienated even most of his erstwhile Tory supporters, but they could at least console themselves with the thought that his rule would eventually end and the throne would revert to James's Protestant daughters—and then presumably to the political status quo ante. However, these hopes were dashed in the summer of 1688 when James's wife gave birth to a baby boy. With this birth the country now faced the possibility of a Catholic and potentially absolutist dynasty on the throne in perpetuity, something intolerable to even the monarchy's hitherto most ardent supporters.[52]

Having lost elite and mass support, James was a dead man walking. A coalition of influential figures sent a letter to William of Orange, Stadholder of the Dutch Republic and the husband of James's eldest daughter, Mary, basically inviting him to invade England and rescue the country from James. In November William landed in England, famously proclaiming "the liberties of England and the Protestant religion I will maintain." The fighting force William arrived with was relatively small; he could not have succeeded without popular support. And this he clearly had. Almost as soon as William landed, Protestant officers in the army began defecting and popular uprisings and anti-Catholic rioting spread across the country. Faced with an invasion and evaporating support, James attempted to flee; he was recaptured but then allowed by William to escape to France. "It is undoubtedly true

that William's invasion was what finally toppled James' monarchy. But it would be misleading to conclude that the Glorious Revolution was therefore brought about from above and outside, or that it was, first and foremost, a foreign invasion. William's invasion was itself predicated upon the fact that James' regime had already begun to collapse from within. . . . The Glorious Revolution was thus equally brought about from within and from below."[53] Indeed, a key reason why the country did not descend into civil war as it had in the early 1640s was that by 1688 Tories and Whigs agreed the king had to go.

James's flight provided a convenient fiction for the transition: it was proclaimed that by fleeing the country, he had abdicated, leaving the throne vacant.[54] In January the House of Commons passed the following resolution:

> That King James the Second, having endeavoured to subvert the Constitution of this Kingdom, by breaking the Original Contract between King and People; and, by the Advice of Jesuits, and other wicked Persons, having violated the fundamental Laws; and having withdrawn himself out of the Kingdom; has abdicated the Government; and that the Throne is thereby vacant.[55]

In February, Parliament offered the throne to William and Mary.[56] And with this, British political development began a new era. Although this was not fully clear at the time, the Glorious Revolution solved many of the conflicts that had bedeviled England, Britain, and much of the rest of Europe during the early modern period.

Politically, the Glorious Revolution eliminated the absolutist option and transformed the political infrastructure of the old regime. Throughout the seventeenth century English kings tried to move towards the type of absolutism developing in France and other parts of Europe. But with the transition from James to William and Mary, British absolutism was dealt a fatal blow and Parliament, constitutionalism, and the rule of law were strengthened. Even the coronation oath taken by William and Mary reflected these changed expectations and power relationships, binding "them, in a pointedly contractual phrase, to govern 'according to the statues in Parliament agreed on'— the first time a reference to Parliament and . . . law had figured in this ancient ceremony."[57] More significant was the new monarchs' acceptance of the Bill of Rights in 1689 which committed the Crown to governing in accordance with the rule of law.[58] As historian W.A. Speck put it, with the acceptance of the Bill of Rights, the Crown was now clearly "beneath and not above" the law. In addition the Bill of Rights confirmed Parliament's status not as "an event" but "an institution" and enumerated and enhanced its powers,[59]

perhaps most importantly its control over taxation and the military. The Bill of Rights also enumerated liberal rights held by citizens, thereby changing England from a nation where "liberties were based on tradition to one where they were based in part on positive law."[60] And the Bill of Rights made the transition from James to William a constitutional settlement rather than a coup,[61] presenting government as a sort of contract, where rights and responsibilities were based on law and not the whim of the monarch.
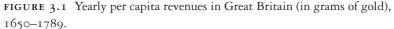
In short, the Bill of Rights and the larger political transition it was part of represented a fundamental break with divine right views of monarchy and old regime norms of governance. This was, to be sure, no transition to democracy. What Britain became after the Glorious Revolution was an aristocratic oligarchy, but one with a constitution institutionalizing some liberal rights and a strong, *national* parliament that provided representation to the elite and could check the Crown. Thus by the end of the seventeenth century England had behind it political conflicts that most other European countries embarked on during the nineteenth and even twentieth centuries—a time, as we will see, when these political conflicts became inextricably tied up with economic and social ones.

In addition to putting crucial political conflicts behind it and entering the modern era with a constitutional political order and a powerful Parliament, the Glorious Revolution also opened up a new era in state-building. Most efforts at state-building during the early modern period failed; those that succeeded often did so under absolutist auspices (see chapter 2)—precisely why, of course, James and his predecessors were so enamored of this political option. But with the Glorious Revolution, Britain's state-building continued on a constitutional and parliamentary path.[62] By the early eighteenth century the British state was extracting more resources, had more effective administrative institutions, and controlled a more powerful military than other European states.[63] (In Michael Mann's terms, it was both infrastructurally and despotically powerful.[64]) In addition, problems related to territorial control or integration entered a new phase after the Glorious Revolution. In 1707 the Act of Union ended Scottish political independence and created the United Kingdom of Great Britain.[65] Ireland, meanwhile, was further reduced to colonial status, ruled over by the military and a Protestant elite, thereby foreshadowing the treatment Britain and the rest of Europe would mete out to other colonies in centuries to come.

The economic consequences of this post–Glorious Revolution state-building were profound. The constitutional and parliamentary system checked the power of the king without allowing the aristocracy to run rampant (as it did, for example, in Poland and to a lesser degree Spain; see chapters 2

and 13), provided a forum where emerging social and economic groups could find a voice, and institutionalized the rule of law and the protection of private property. For these and other reasons this system is often viewed by social scientists as a—or even the—main reason behind England's rise to hegemony during the coming centuries.[66] After 1688 England's constitutional and parliamentary political order oversaw a "financial revolution," creating the Bank of England and a new system of public credit that raised money more cheaply and efficiently than other European countries. And the stability and legitimacy generated by the new constitutional and parliamentary order enabled the British state to dramatically increase taxation to the point where by the early eighteenth century "Britain's population was generating a level of revenue per capita exceeded only by the Dutch Republic."[67] (See Figure 3.1.) These increased revenues, in turn, enabled the development of a vast military apparatus and ambitious foreign policy.[68]

In addition to solving critical political and state-building challenges, the Glorious Revolution also helped end the religious conflict that had

FIGURE 3.1 Yearly per capita revenues in Great Britain (in grams of gold), 1650–1789.

Source: Mark Dinecco, "Fiscal Centralization, Limited Government, and Public Revenues in Europe, 1650–1913," *Journal of Economic History* 69, 1 (2009): 48–103. Dinecco, *Political Transformation and Public Finances, Europe 1650–1913* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011); K. Kivanç Karaman and Şevket Pamuk, *The Journal of Economic History* 70, 3 (September 2010).

plagued England during the seventeenth century and that would continue to plague other parts of Europe in the centuries to come. In 1689 Parliament passed the Toleration Act granting freedom of worship to most Protestant dissenters—but not Catholics. This was a major change from the beginning of the seventeenth century when, as noted above, all English men and women had to be members of the state church and dissent was punishable by law. In 1701 Parliament passed the Act of Settlement banning Roman Catholics, or anyone who married a Roman Catholic,[69] from the throne, eliminating from British political life a long-standing cause of instability. The Act of Settlement also re-confirmed that the occupant of the throne was governed by law, not heredity or divine right. Catholics thus still faced immense discrimination in England, and religious conflict continued in other parts of the British Isles, most obviously in Ireland where the Catholic majority was denied basic rights like the ability to vote or sit in Parliament, own or purchase land, get a university degree, or gain entrance into key professions. Despite these injustices, it is important to note that for the time and in comparison to the rest of Europe, England did at least have the principle of toleration enshrined in law—a condition that "stood in stark contrast" not only to England's past but also "to the enforced religious uniformity of France and most of the German states" and was even different from "the Calvinist domination of Protestantism in the Netherlands or the monopoly of the established Lutheran churches . . . in Scandinavia."[70] Indeed these post–Glorious Revolution changes would provide a foundation upon which future expansions of religious toleration could be built (see chapter 10).[71]

Conclusions

The year 1688 was a critical turning point in British political history. Whether this turning point should be considered a true "revolution" on a par with what occurred in France in 1789 has long been debated by historians.[72] One obvious thing to note is that while the conflicts of the seventeenth century transformed the political institutions of England's old regime, they left its social structure essentially intact. In particular, the English "landed upper class was not in any way displaced" by the upheavals of the seventeenth century—as its French counterparts were after 1789. Indeed, as we will see, without a strong monarch to counterbalance it, this landed upper class became the most powerful in all of Europe with critical implications for Britain's subsequent political development.[73]

However by the end of the seventeenth century Britain was dramatically different politically than it had been at the beginning of the seventeenth century, and it was also dramatically different politically from most of the rest of Europe. And its new political order worked: whereas during the seventeenth century England had been wracked by violence and instability, from the eighteenth century on it was an island of political stability and became commercially and militarily the dominant power in Europe. But the price paid for this had been very high. During the seventeenth century, "men killed, tortured, and executed each other for their political beliefs; they sacked towns and brutalized the countryside. They were subjected to conspiracy, plot and invasion." By 1688 it almost seemed as if "violence in politics was an Englishman's birthright . . . conspiracy and rebellion, treason and plot were part of the history and experience of at least three generations of Englishmen."[74] But by the eighteenth century, Britain had put this legacy behind it, having fought crucial political battles and transformed the political infrastructure of its old regime. Its political development during the modern era therefore turned out to be more peaceful and gradual than in most of the rest of Europe. This early political transformation had other equally important consequences, the most obvious being that it enabled Britain to go out and subjugate a larger area of the globe than any other European country. Another critical, and perhaps ironic, consequence of this early political transformation is that it enabled the social and economic vestiges of its old order to remain in place longer than in most of the rest of Europe (see chapter 10). The contrast with the French case, which jump-started the modern era in Europe, and is in many ways Britain's polar opposite, is instructive. It is to this case that the next chapter turns.