



Filiere: English Studies

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British Culture/ US Culture

Instructor: Dr. Rachid Agliz

Lecture 5: The Stuarts Dynasty

-James, Elizabeth's successor in 1603, was king of both England and Scotland. At that time in history, the union of the two crowns did not actually go as far as James wanted. In fact, the courts, the parliaments and administrations of the two countries continued to operate or to function separately. There were also many differences in culture and religion between England and Scotland.

-King James was a sincere and learned ruler but he was not able to control both Scotland and England well. He was rather entranced by the attractions of England and underestimated the problems of ruling England. The difficulties and the challenges were great and beyond the solution of any ruler at that time. The Tudors had actually created an autocracy in both the church and the state but without the necessary financial means to sustain or to back it up. In order to have a strong monarchy and in order to be financially independent, it was deemed necessary to impose greater taxes on the ruling classes both in town and country. The representatives of the church and the state in the house of commons would not agree or consent to this, particularly when they started to have serious doubts about the policies and methods of the Stuart government and were very suspicious of the advisors who surrounded the king. In 1640, the ruling classes revolted against the king. A new legislative law was passed in 1641 by the parliament. This new law was mainly intended to make it impossible

for the king to rule without parliament. This institution clearly stated that sovereignty should reside not in the king alone but in the king in parliament.

-King James was exposed to many problems during his rule. Most of these problems were religious ones. The king adopted the Anglicanism of Elizabeth's church and in a conference held at Hampton court in 1604 James made it clear that he would make no changes in religion. He condemned the Puritans. They could conform to James's wishes, protest or leave England. Many puritans obeyed the laws as they were but others mounted criticism against the royal policies in the House of Commons and outside. A small number of puritans left England to establish colonies in North America.

-During James's rule, a group of catholic extremists decided to blow up the king and parliament when he opened the new session of parliament in November 1605. One conspirator, Guy Fawkes, placed gunpowder in the cellars beneath the houses of parliament and luckily the plot was found out and Fawkes and the other plotters were arrested and later executed.

-In 1625, Charles the first succeeded his father to the English throne. From 1629 to 1640, Charles the first ruled without a parliament. This period was called "the personal rule" and the "eleven years tyranny". Opposition to the king continued. In 1637, John Hampden forced the king to go to the courts and to challenge his position. Hampden refused to pay a tax called "Ship money".

-King Charles the first was exposed to many problems during his reign. When the parliament accused the monarchy and advanced proposals for reforms within the church, just some members of parliament backed up Charles the first. The political situation in Britain deteriorated and as a result the parliament took custody of the royal family. Charles the first then arrested the leaders of the commons. Throughout the country, there was a taking of sides and in August 1642 the civil war began. The country was divided into two. The economically advanced south and east and the other major commercial and manufacturing cities including London supported the parliament. Apart from this, the poorer north, the west and Wales fought for the king. It was a war which divided the traditional ruling classes of the country. Most of the aristocracy fought for the king, but some supported the parliament.

-Oliver Cromwell was the leader of the army and of the resistance launched against the king Charles the first. He earned the title "lord protector" and became the leader of the only republic in British history. He was a brilliant soldier who quickly responded to different historical events with speed and determination. Cromwell was fully committed to secure the parliamentary victory in Ireland and Scotland. He quickly subdued Ireland with such an immense brutality in 1649 so much so that his name was associated there with curses to the present day.

-The Scottish army was beaten severely by Cromwell and the captured king was brought to trial. Cromwell was now determined than ever that Charles the first should die as he was convinced that if the king's life was spared, plots and war would continue. In January, 1649 Charles the first was executed. It was an important historical moment and event in British

history as the monarch was executed after a formal trial and after being found guilty of crimes against his people.

Restoration in England during the Stuarts Dynasty

-The restoration era lasted from 1660 to 1685. The old order was restored in 1660 but significantly by parliament. It was clear now that the future government would be conducted by a partnership of king and parliament, whether the king liked it or not. The house of lords and bishoprics which had been abolished by the republic were restored. Many puritans were driven out of public life by a series of laws passed between 1661 and 1665. Central and local government was put firmly in the hands of royalists' landowners and merchants. Puritans who would not agree to the Anglican order of the church were called non-conformists and most of them went to Prison.

-Charles the second's main objective was to remain king and in this he succeeded. In fact, he wanted much more than that and he managed to get some of what he wanted. He was a catholic and wisely kept this as a secret until his death. He admired the absolutist monarchy of Louis xiv of France and disliked dependence on parliament. In 1670, he started negotiations with Louis, which culminated in the secret Treaty of Dover. By the terms of this treaty, Charles the second publically declared his adherence to Catholicism, whilst Louis promised to help Charles the second financially and militarily. The two kings also agreed to attack Holland and war was declared on the Dutch in March 1673.

-The Dutch war was brought to an end in 1674, but Charles the second continued to receive large and enormous financial subsidies from King Louis of France. This allowed Charles the second the independence necessary to defeat those who would like to prevent his catholic brother James from being the new British monarch.

-From 1660 until 1700 England witnessed a commercial revolution. The Navigation Act of 1660 had the effect of putting nearly all England's trade as well as that of her colonies into the grasp or hands of English merchants. At that time in history, trade increased dramatically and shipbuilding was in turn stimulated. As more English goods travelled to Europe in English ships, England took control of her own trade within the Baltic. Yet, the most important developments were in colonial trade. England had growing possessions in North America. She had managed to get Jamaica in 1655. Apart from this, there were a whole range of extensive English trading activities and acquisitions in India as well. For example, Catherine of Braganza, brought Bombay as part of her dowry. In addition to this, by the year 1660, the English had established stations on the west African coast and thereby gained access to the profitable or lucrative slave trade. Goods flooded into England from the colonies and were either consumed at home or exported to Europe. Later on, the new colonies gave English industries an exclusive market and this encouraged their development. Colonial trade was, thus, the stimulus for English industry, which paved the way for the industrial revolution of the eighteenth century.

Settlement and Union 1685-1714

The main events that took place in this period were as follows:

- The glorious revolution took place between 1688 and 1689. It witnessed the removal of James the second, a monarch who had completely ignored the sentiments of the ruling class and the people at large.
- Britain and Scotland were formally united in 1707 during the Queen Anne's reign by the terms of the treaty of union which encompassed two main ideas: The Hanoverian succession and the joining of the two parliaments.
- The seventeenth century saw the transformation of English society. James the first wrote a book for his son asserting that monarchs were ordained by God to rule and Charles believed this. By William of Orange and Mary's reign, it was clear that sovereigns ruled by the consent of parliament. The philosopher John Locke could now speak at the end of the seventeenth century about government deriving from, and being responsible to the people. He further outlined a political system in which legislature and executive were separate and a judiciary balanced the two.