

## Whig Politics and Ideology and the Hanover Ascendancy

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Nor have the People any Authority against or over the Legislature; for while the Constitution is Preserved, the original Power of the People in their collective Body can't exert itself, or indeed have a Being, because it is lost and swallowed up intirely in their Representatives. — “Some Reflexions on the Rights of Parliament and People,” London Journal, May 5, 1733

William III was able to sustain a long argument about his place in history that eventually won out over any opposition views. In the process of creating his own persona he also succeeded in creating a general stereotype of the ideal monarch.

His successor was not so fortunate. Although Queen Anne's reign has undergone a degree of revision over the last two decades, the characterization that Whigs gave her after her reign (1702-1714) certainly had an enormous influence over Englishmen's understanding of the history of the eighteenth century.<sup>1</sup> She was remembered as a poor monarch who was manipulated by friends and advisors who would have had her resume arbitrary government to support their interests. Whigs argued that, but for their vigilance, Anne's Tory favorites would have brought in the Pretender at her death. In most important particulars, Anne was not really very different from her predecessor. She, like William, was a military monarch who presided over a nation that was at war through most of her reign.<sup>2</sup> Like William, she viewed the English parties as a threat to the power of the Crown.<sup>3</sup> She was less fortunate than her predecessor in that the growth of religious dissent and political differences over both domestic and international issues “produced a strong polarization, pulling men into the Whig or the Tory camp.”<sup>4</sup> Her reign saw fairly frequent party turnovers in both Parliament and in her cabinet. In fact, until the last six months of her reign, Anne's ministry, like William's, was usually comprised of both Whigs

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1 For an historiographical summary of Anne's reign, see Geoffrey Holmes, *British Politics in the Age of Anne* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1967), 1-9. Among the fairly recent studies of Anne's reign that display her in a more favorable light are (besides Holmes) Robert Walcott, *English Politics in the Early Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), and Edward Gregg, *Queen Anne* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980). Holmes remarks with justice that Anne's historical stature has actually decreased in the last two decades, as Namierites like Walcott focus on the politics that surrounded the Queen, almost to the exclusion of the Queen herself (Holmes, 2). At least earlier Whig writers gave her credit for some degree of political action, even they viewed her behavior as wrong-headed and ill-advised. Later revisionists' work stress either the role and action of parties (as is the case with Holmes and Walcott) or the financial developments that molded the state and politics (Brewer, *The Sinews of Power*). See also, R.O. Bucholz, *The Augustan Court: Queen Anne and the Decline of Court Culture* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1993); James O. Richards, *Party Propaganda under Queen Anne: The General Elections of 1702-1713* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1972); George Macaulay Trevelyan, *England Under Queen Anne*, 3 vols. (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1930-1934).

2 Brewer, *The Sinews of Power*, 110.

3 Kenyon, 317.

4 *Ibid.*, 316.

and Tories who generally framed policies that were “in the interests of the nation rather than those of faction.”<sup>5</sup> It is perhaps unfortunate for the Queen’s reputation and our understanding of her reign that at her death on 1 August, 1714, a Tory majority existed in both houses of Parliament, and her cabinet was dominated by Robert Harley, Earl of Oxford, and James Butler, Duke of Ormonde, both despised by the Whigs, and the arch-Tory Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke.

Anne’s successor, George, the Elector of Hanover, was received peacefully, if not particularly enthusiastically, when he arrived at Greenwich on 30 September, 1714. Crowds cheered him on his arrival in London, but at least one historian has ascribed the cheering crowds to the “very impact of majesty, the awe which the mythology surrounding the sovereign imposed even in the age of the Early Enlightenment.”<sup>6</sup> His arrival was greeted with genuine and heartfelt enthusiasm by at least some of his new subjects. Dissenters welcomed the new monarch, whose reputation for toleration of the various Protestant sects in his German state preceded him. They hoped that the new ruler would end the persecution that they had suffered during the last years of Anne’s reign, and ignore enforcement of the Schism Act, passed by Bolingbroke in the Spring of 1714.<sup>7</sup> Whigs also had good reason to cheer George’s arrival. Although he made it quite clear that he intended to rule rather than to defer his prerogatives to any party and declared that he intended to choose his government based on ability rather than affiliation, his behavior tended to belie his rhetoric. When he sent his list of regents for an interim government to rule until his arrival, fourteen of nineteen were Whigs.<sup>8</sup> While dissenters and Whigs viewed the new monarch’s future, and their own, with great anticipation, most of the nation waited to see what the future would bring.

The Whigs’ enthusiasm for the new king was well founded indeed. Elections for a new Parliament to meet in March returned a huge Whig majority. The new Whig government, emboldened by their extraordinary electoral success, moved to lay articles of impeachment against Oxford and Bolingbroke. Charges against the former were quietly dropped when he declared that he intended to move to the country and retire forever from politics. When Bolingbroke, fearing treason charges, escaped to France, he was attainted by Parliament. He became the Secretary of State to the Pretender at St. Germain. The King dismissed all but a very few Tories, most of them able, experienced and moderate statesmen, from the government, but promised that he would try to find places for them in minor positions at a later date. George was shocked when they angrily left government altogether.<sup>9</sup> The new Whig cabinet quickly set to

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5 Gregg, 135-136.

6 Ragnhild Hatton, *George I, Elector and King* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978), 173.

7 George’s reputation for tolerance, see Cotton Mather, *The Glorious Throne . . .* (Boston, B. Green 1714), 35; Joseph Addison, “Freeholder No. 2,” *The Works of Joseph Addison . . .*, 6 vols., George Washington Greene, ed. (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1880), 3:8-9. The Schism Act and persecution, see Kenyon, 348, and Hatton, 173.

8 Hatton, 120.

9 *Ibid.*, 127.

work filling every patronage position from undersecretary to shire justice of the peace with their fellows. This purge, and the judicial revenge against the Tory leadership of the previous administration, contributed greatly to civil disturbances in England and to the Pretender's decision to challenge the Hanover succession.

From March of 1715, Scots and disaffected English conservatives of all stripes began to rally behind the Pretender against George I. Many Scots felt that James was the legitimate ruler of Scotland, and longed for independence from England. Many Tories, even the most moderate, viewed the wholesale weeding out of their party from both national and local government and the prosecution of their leaders with anxiety, not only for the future of the nation, but for their own political and personal well-being as well. Religious conservatives, the High Churchmen, feared that the growth of religious dissent and the support that Whigs gave to Dissenters would have dire effects on the Church of England. They did not so much gravitate toward the Pretender as retreat from the Elector. Political and religious anxiety and frustration led fairly quickly to anger and violence. On 23 April, the anniversary of Queen Anne's coronation and St. George's Day, crowds marched through the streets of London crying "God Bless the Queen," and "Save the High Church."<sup>10</sup> By 28 May, George's birthday, the popular movement had spread to all parts of the kingdom. Jacobite, or at least anti-Hanover, mobs cut church bell ropes to prevent them being rung in celebration of the monarch's birthday, scattered burning logs from celebratory bonfires (occasionally burning down houses in the process), and threw bricks through windows that George's supporters had illuminated for the occasion.<sup>11</sup> Rioting continued through the summer. The greatest part of the rioters' fury fell on the most visible evidence of Protestant Dissent as mobs all over England tore down or fired the meeting houses of Dissenters in much the same manner that their fathers had attacked buildings suspected of housing the Roman mass.<sup>12</sup>

In response to the disorder, Parliament passed the Riot Act, or, as one Tory wag christened it "the Bill of Riots."<sup>13</sup> The law stated that riotous assemblies of twelve or more people were guilty of a capital felony if they refused to disburse within an hour of being commanded by a magistrate to do so in the king's name.<sup>14</sup> Public disorder increased, especially in London, where gangs of "Jacks" and "loyalists" engaged in gang fights and raided the coffee houses and taverns of their political adversaries, sometimes in groups as large as five hundred.<sup>15</sup> In the midst of

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<sup>10</sup> Nicholas Rogers, *Whigs and Cities: Popular Politics in the Age of Walpole and Pitt* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 25-26.

<sup>11</sup> *The Flying-Post, or the Post-Master*, 21 June, 1715.

<sup>12</sup> For various accounts of mob activities see *The Flying Post* issues from June through September, 1715.

<sup>13</sup> Rogers, 30.

<sup>14</sup> Carl Stephenson and Frederick George Marcham, *Sources of English Constitutional History: A selection of the Documents from the Interregnum to the Present*. 2 vols. (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, Inc., 1972), 2:617-618.

<sup>15</sup> Hatton, 179-180.

popular turbulence in England, John, the Earl of Mar, raised the Stuart standard and summoned the clans in Scotland, and disaffected Highlanders began to rally behind it.

Thus, within a year, George, whose succession had been supported before the fact by a wide range of Englishmen of various political persuasions, reigned over a divided and unstable nation. His government set out to restore order from the turmoil that it had created, to rehabilitate the tarnished image of the king, and to define the place of the Whig party in history. Whig leaders created the tools necessary for the restoration of order in the summer and fall of 1715 when Parliament passed the Riot Act and suspended the Habeas Corpus Act for six months. The Whigs had the support of an active press that was eager to place its services at the disposal of the new king and his party.

Shortly after Anne's death, and even before George's arrival, the Whig presses began to sing his praises in conscious imitation of the style and themes invoked by William of Orange and his public relations machine. Whig editors and publicists took every possible opportunity to link the two monarchs in the minds of their readers. "The illustrious George," one editor intoned, "cannot well be sounded by Britons without bringing to Remembrance the Great Name of William."<sup>16</sup> This would certainly be the case if the press had anything to do with it. Whig papers stressed the unity of the nation that had extended an invitation to the Elector and the new ruler's interest in preserving the liberties, religion, and laws of England.<sup>17</sup> Just as William and his press had denounced James' evil councilors, the Whig press blasted Queen Anne's Tory administration. Apart from left-handed compliments to the late monarch based on her gender, Anne fared better from publicists' barbs than her father had, but her government and her closest advisors and friends received no mercy, as evidenced by this piece published less than two weeks after her death:

Her Majesty certainly [was] one of the best of Women, the Ornament of her Sex, but it does not hence follow that she could not be grosly [sic] abus'd; the best and wisest Princes are sometimes forc'd to see and hear by the Eyes and Ears of their Ministers, and if they betray them by their ill Advice, . . . it in no way reflects on the Honour or Justice of the Prince . . . What Prince (tho' as wise as Solomon) could ever detect the Treason of a Judas Statesman, that plots and contrives his Ruin under the specious Pretence of Loyalty? And this, Alas! Was exactly the case of her Majesty with respect to that Jacobite Treason which has been so long hatching by her pretended Friends to bring in the Pretender, Popery and Slavery.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> *The Patriot*, September 23, 1714.

<sup>17</sup> For a few examples, see *The Patriot*, August 7, 1714; "Letter From Warwickshire," *The Flying-Post, or the Post-Master*, August 13, 1715; "The Humble Address of the Mayor and Burgesses of the Borough of Truro in the County of Cornwall to His Majesty . . .," *The Flying-Post, or the Post-Master*, November 1, 1715; "Humble Address of the Knights, Citizens and Burgesses in Parliament Assembled . . .," November 18, 1715," *The Evening Post*, November 26, 1715; Joseph Addison, "Freeholder, No. 1," 3:6, "Freeholder, No. 2," 3:9, "Freeholder, No. 46," 3:225-228, *passim*, *The Works of Joseph Addison*.

<sup>18</sup> *The Patriot*, August 12, 1714. See also *The Flying-Post; or the Post-Master*, June 4, 1715; "Humble Address of the Knights, Citizens and Burgesses in Parliament Assembled," *The Evening Post*, November 26, 1715.

National unity, a theme that William had used so successfully, ceased to resonate in the face of Whig supremacy in government, the Tory purge, and the popular disorder that followed it. Instead, Whig publicists stressed the disloyalty and treachery of their opponents, equating critics of the administration and its policies with Jacobitism, Romanism and rebellion. At the same time George's Whig supporters felt the need to justify the legitimacy of the Hanover claim to the throne. It is apparent that Whigs believed that some stronger and more traditional claim than a Parliamentary statute was necessary in order to forge a national consensus for Hanover rule. This need became more pressing as an increasing number of Englishmen called, often loudly and violently in the streets, for their king over the water, drank toasts to Queen Anne of glorious memory, and rang church bells in celebration of the Stuart claimant's birthday. Sometimes simple solutions are best when it comes to image making. From the Spring of 1715, publicists began to declare that George, the great grandson of James I, had an hereditary claim to the throne of England that was, by implication, at least as good as that of the Pretender—better, in fact, since the former was Protestant and the latter Catholic. The Whig press also revived and gave credence to the old saw that James Francis Edward Stuart, the Old Pretender, was not the offspring of James II at all. Joseph Addison remarked “no Body ever doubted” George's bloodline, “tho' many believe that you [the Pretender] are not son to King James the Second. Besides all the World acknowledges he [George] is the nearest to our Crown of the Protestant Blood; of which you cannot have a Drop in your Veins, unless you derive it from such Parents as you don't care for owning.”<sup>19</sup> Thus armed, Whig publicists, following very much in the footsteps of William, asserted that George had both an hereditary and providential claim to the throne, and a mandate to defend the liberties and religion of the nation from disorder and treason at home and absolutist Catholic incursion from abroad. The following passage from an address to the ruler illustrates their arguments:

[We] being deeply impressed with the Divine Goodness brightly displayed in the late Revolution, begun and carried out by King William of Glorious Memory, and in bringing in our only Lawful and Rightful Sovereign King George to the peaceable Possession of the Throne of his Royal Ancestors, notwithstanding the many open and secret Practices that have been used of late Years to defeat the succession, cannot sufficiently adore the Providence which so often and so seasonably interposed to save this Nation from Popery and Slavery.<sup>20</sup>

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19 Joseph Addison. “Freeholder No. IX, Friday, January 20, 1716,” in *The Works of Joseph Addison*, 3:44.

20 “A Seasonable Admonition by the Provincial Synod of *Lothian* and *Tweeddale*, to the People in those Bounds, with respect to the Present Rebellion,” *The Flying-Post*, November 15, 1715. For a few other examples, see *Flying-Post* April 26, 1715, “Humble Address . . . from the Mayor, Jurats, Common-Council . . . of the Corporation of *Gravesend* and *Milton* in the County of Kent,” August 16, 1715; “The Humble Address of the Mayor and Burgesses of the Borough of *Truro* in the County of Cornwall . . .,” November 1, 1715; “The Humble Address of the Turkey, Russia, East-Country, Hamburgh, Dutch, Italian, Portugal, West-India, Virginia, and other Traders, &c., of the City of London . . .,” *London Gazette*, October 15, 1715; “Humble Address of the Protestant Dissenting Ministers of Several Denominations, In and About the Cities of London and Westminster, August 18, 1715,” *The Evening Post*, August 18, 1715; “Humble Address of the Mayor, Recorder, Bayliffs, and Burgesses of Your Majesty's Ancient Borough of *Leicester* in the County of *Leicester*, August 26, 1715,” *The Evening Post*, August 30, 1715.

The events of 1715 were concluded swiftly and efficiently. The Duke of Argyle suppressed the rebellion in Scotland and Parliament dispatched troops to guard those areas of England where potential support existed for the Scots rebels. Popular disorder in London ceased when five “Jacks” were hanged in July of 1716 for their riotous behavior.<sup>21</sup>

Although the rebellion and popular unrest never really threatened either the new dynasty or the Whig regime, they had a serious effect on the politics of the realm. From the 1680s to 1715 competition between Whigs and Tories for political supremacy, prestige, and places in government had defined the English political landscape. The events of 1715, however, cast a pall on the Tories, who were henceforth associated with hypocrisy, Jacobitism and treason. George I and his successor were convinced that Tories could never be trusted with political responsibility again, and so looked exclusively to Whigs to steer the course of the government. The Whigs, in their turn, set about to solidify their political victory. They consolidated their position in the country by purging virtually all of the remaining Tory magistrates and J.P.s, and pressured the last “Hanover Tory,” Daniel Finch, the Earl of Nottingham, out of government.

In May of 1716 Whigs ensured their supremacy in government by passing the Septennial Act, which extended the life of the existing Parliament by four years. To gratify Dissenters and reward them for their support, Whigs repealed the Occasional Conformity and Schism Acts in December of 1718. George’s ministry was prepared to go even further to consolidate Whig primacy in government. Ministers recommended the creation of legislation to give control of Cambridge and Oxford universities to the government, to repeal the Septennial Act and thus prolong the current Parliament indefinitely, and to limit the prerogative of the Crown in the creation of new peers. The first two suggestions were never acted upon, and the last was defeated by a Commons that viewed the Peerage Bill as a stumbling block to the honors that they saw as their reward for government service. Robert Walpole, the rising star in the Whig constellation, helped to defeat the Bill when he argued that it would close “the avenue of honour and promotion to which all country gentlemen might aspire, if not for themselves, then for their children and their children’s children.”<sup>22</sup>

In the process of completing their domination of government, Whigs found themselves promoting measures that ran against the grain of the prevailing interpretation of the constitution as outlined in the Declaration of Rights of 1689. The Septennial Act clearly violated the doctrine of frequent Parliaments, and the Peerage Bill represented a rather severe restraint upon an executive branch already so beleaguered “since the Habeas Corpus Act, and the great and numerous Limitations of the Successions Acts,” that some believed that the Crown would be hard pressed to provide a check against the growing power of the Commons.<sup>23</sup> Additionally, the administration needed to maintain a large standing army in order to defend the new regime from

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21 Hatton, 178-180. See also Rogers, 30.

22 J.H. Plumb, *England in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Penguin Books, 1963), 58; also John B. Owen, *The Eighteenth Century, 1714-1825* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1974), 11-12.

23 “Considerations upon the Reports Relating to The Peerage, by a Member of the House of Commons,” *The Plebian* (London: S. Popping, 1719) 6.

domestic disturbances and foreign incursion in spite of the fact that the nation was at peace. A coalition of Whig opposition and country members forced the government to accept a cut in the size of the army in 1718, but the ministry continued to campaign for an enlargement of the armed forces.

Even though Whigs had been successful in their bid to purge the government of any Tories who might oppose them, their authoritarian measures angered the country gentlemen of the backbenches and provided fodder for a new Whig opposition. The country members of Parliament were always distrustful of central government, and treated their seats not as a means to their own aggrandizement, but as a trust that they held for their constituents. They were characterized by the Court Whigs to possess a “restless aversion to all government . . . against which the best Minister is no more secure than the worst.”<sup>24</sup> Although the country backbenchers rarely comprised a formidable threat to the administration, by 1716 a Whig opposition composed of disappointed office seekers had begun to grow in the nurturing atmosphere of the “court” of the Prince of Wales. The primary goal of this “loyal opposition” was simply to bring down the current government in order to raise themselves to power. As a matter of policy they courted Tories, country gentlemen, and anyone else who disapproved of the current administration’s policies. In order to garner Tory support they denounced measures that they had previously supported in George’s early reign, such as the repeal of the Occasional Conformity and Schism Acts. They attacked proposed tax increases, the expansion of the army, and other policies of the administration in order to gain the support of the country independents.<sup>25</sup> This “loyal” opposition that usually surrounded the current Prince of Wales became a feature of the politics of the first three Georges.

In the face of growing criticism from country writers and a nascent Whig opposition movement that gathered around the Prince of Wales, the Government men depended upon their loyal presses, especially the *St. James Journal*, where the publicity campaign was ably led by Thomas Gordon and John Trenchard, to promote their policies and control the political fallout that so often ensued from them.<sup>26</sup> The Court Whig press promoted specific measures primarily by means of arguments based on practicality. It argued that the Septennial Act saved gentlemen from the prohibitive cost of standing for election every three years. Since elections were events that promoted factiousness, and thus occasional civil disorder, they argued that it was for the best if they were held less frequently. The press tried to calm the fears of those who worried that longer Parliaments might more easily be corrupted by reminding them that the king, ever mindful of his subjects’ welfare, still had the power to dismiss a Parliament that threatened the liberties of the people. Administration publicists protested that the Peerage Bill was not meant to keep the present king from enlarging the House of Lords to promote his evil designs, because he was the best of princes, and had none; it was to forestall future monarchs, who might not be as

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24 Lewis B. Namier, *The Structure of Politics at the Accession of George III*. 2 vols. (London: MacMillan & Co., 1929), 1:9.

25 Owen, 12-14.

26 Marie P. McMahon, *The Radical Whigs, John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon: Libertarian Loyalists to the New House of Hanover* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1990), 170, 172-3, *passim*.

benign as the present ruler, from doing as Queen Anne had done under the late Tory administration. A large standing army was necessary to promote peace at home and abroad. The representatives of the people, the House of Commons, raised and supported the army, not the Crown; therefore it would never be placed at the disposal of a tyrannical monarch.<sup>27</sup> The present armed forces were small and England's enemies great, and so a larger army was necessary to "support the Peace and Liberties" of Englishmen. Editors were quick to point out that the loudest critics of a larger army were those "whose Master must be a Vagabond abroad 'til those forces are disbanded."<sup>28</sup>

The administration's supporters in the press argued that whatever Parliament did was, and could only be, for the good of its constituents: the freeholders of England.<sup>29</sup> "'Tis certain," wrote an editor of the *St. James Journal*, "that Parliaments are the constant Security of the Subjects' Rights and Liberties . . . they have never intirely [sic] forgot their Duty and Obligation to the People, their Electors."<sup>30</sup> The honest freeholders of England chose the Parliament after all. Whigs, the party that had always promoted the people's liberty and exhibited "a Spirit of Opposition to all Exorbitant Power in any Part of the Constitution." dominated Parliament.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, whatever policies Parliament promoted must be pursued in the interests of the people.

The claim that the Whigs represented the interest of the county freeholders was itself novel. The Tories had traditionally dominated rural politics, while the Whigs had been understood to represent the towns and cities and the trading interests. When county voters returned a sizeable Tory majority in the election of 1710, as they had in the past, Jonathan Swift claimed, "the Whigs themselves have always confessed, that the bulk of the Landed Men in England was generally of Tories."<sup>32</sup> But in 1715 Whigs won more county seats than they ever had in the past. The increase of Whig victories in county elections convinced Joseph Addison to name his series of tracts that promoted the Whigs and the Hanover king *The Freeholder*. He hoped to persuade readers that the Whigs represented country landowners as much as they did the other interests of the nation.<sup>33</sup> "A Free-holder in our Government," wrote Addison, was "of the Nature of a Citizen of Rome in that famous Commonwealth, who by the Election of a Tribune, had a kind of remote Voice in every Law that was enacted."<sup>34</sup>

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27 *St. James Journal*, May 10, 1722.

28 *St. James Journal*, May 17, 1722, 13-14; May 24, 1722, 19-20.

29 *St. James Journal*, May 3, 1722, 1. "They only are professed of the popular Authority, who are intitled to it from the Property they enjoy: Power is ever naturally and rightfully founded there."

30 *St. James Journal*, August 2, 1722, 80.

31 *The Plebian*, No. 1, 1719, 6.

32 Jonathan Swift, *The Prose Works of Jonathan Swift*, H. Davis, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1939-62), 3:66.

33 Joseph Addison, *The Freeholder*, James Leheny, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 2-8.

34 *Ibid.*, *Freeholder* No. 1, Friday, December 23, 1715, 40.



Members of Parliament found, to their annoyance, that their constituents believed that if the members of the House of Commons existed to serve their constituents, as was so frequently professed in the Whig press, then perhaps the voices of the freeholders should be less remote, and their representatives ought to be more eager to receive their instructions on the issues of the day.<sup>35</sup> Members quickly found the frequent instructions from their constituents to be inconvenient and somewhat alarming, as those instructions often ran counter to the measures that the Whig regime supported. The Septennial Act had freed members from actually feeling any real immediate pressure to gratify their constituents, but it was rather embarrassing to receive numerous and frequent instructions calling for the reduction of the army, more frequent Parliamentary elections, place bills, and other measures that ran counter to the administration's program.<sup>36</sup> Members and the government Whig press began to explain to constituents that representatives were not under any obligation to receive or follow the instructions of their constituents. As a London Journal editor put it, "to send threatening letters, and authoritative orders and commands, to those in whom we have lodg'd the supreme powers of legislation . . . is an unexampled piece of licentiousness, tending to the total dissolution of government."<sup>37</sup> Institutional Whigs created an analogy based on John Locke's premise that the people gave up their natural liberties to their rulers when they created civil government. The Court Whigs gave a new twist to Locke's premise, arguing that the people of the nation had, in time long past, tacitly consented to be governed by a commonwealth that consisted of King, Lords and Commons, and that compact could not be broken unless the government defaulted by abusing the trust of the people.<sup>38</sup> Constituents could petition any branch of the government for redress of grievances and instruct a candidate for the House of Commons, and, of course, they were always "at liberty, when the time is expired, to chuse others" to sit in Parliament, but that was the limit to which they should go.<sup>39</sup> As the London Journal editor noted, "that part of the power of legislation which belongs to the people is no longer in them collectively, but is devolv'd upon, and remains solely in their representatives."<sup>40</sup> Whigs claimed that sovereignty, though derived from the people in ancient times, was vested in the legislature, and not the people, and rested upon the laws of reason and divine will.<sup>41</sup> Once the People delegated "this Power . . . , into the

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35 For a discussion of popular instructions and representatives' responses to the notion in both England and America, see Edmund S. Morgan, *Inventing the People: The Rise of Popular Sovereignty in England and America* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1988), 209-223, *passim*. Additionally, see J.R. Pole, *Political Representation in England and the Origins of the American Republic* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1966), 412, 491, *passim*.

36 Dickinson, *Liberty and Property*, 157.

37 *London Journal*, May 26, 1733, cited in Dickinson, *Liberty and Property*, 158-159.

38 H.T. Dickinson, "Whiggism in the Eighteenth Century," in *The Whig Ascendancy: Colloquies in Hanoverian England*, John Cannon, ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981), 41.

39 *London Journal*, May 26, 1733, cited in Dickinson, *Liberty and Property*, 158.

40 *Ibid.*

41 *Ibid.*, 296, 305-306.

Hands of Parliament, it becomes legally absolute, and the People are by their very Constitution oblig'd to a Passive Obedience."<sup>42</sup> Taking a cue from the Stuarts but applying it to the legislature instead of the king, Whigs claimed that political power "is from God, in opposition to Those who suppos'd it to be a Gift from the People."<sup>43</sup> Simply put, by 1722 the Whigs who controlled both the Crown and Parliament employed very similar general arguments (passive obedience and divine right) to substantiate their sovereign and unchallengeable authority that the Stuart monarchs from James I had used to support absolute monarchy. They reasoned that these means were amply justified to defend the ends of maintaining the Hanovers on the throne, ensuring domestic order and British liberties, and not incidentally securing their own predominance on the political stage.

After the Conspiracy of 1722 (the Atterbury Plot), the administration continued to follow in the footsteps of the Stuarts when it suspended the Habeas Corpus Act for a whole year instead of the traditional six months. This outraged country members and even some moderate Whigs. The government press went to work to put a good face on the unpopular measure, claiming that the state had an obligation to the people of the nation to preserve order and protect them from domestic conspiracy fomented by the enemies of their liberties—Tories, Jacobites, Catholics and Non-jurors. After all, one writer argued, the preservation of the people's safety was the first goal of government—*salus populi suprema lex esto*; "this is a Divine Law, by which all other, merely Human, Laws are to be controlled, qualified, or interpreted."<sup>44</sup> Whigs believed that the public welfare could best be secured through the preservation of public order, and thus, for them, the Roman maxim demanded that government restrain popular unruliness the better to insure the public welfare. To that end Parliament suspended the Habeas Corpus Act and passed a tax of five shillings upon every Catholic in Britain in order to pay the expenses incurred by the government in suppressing the conspiracy.<sup>45</sup> The *St. James Journal*, working tirelessly for the people's welfare and to promote the ministry, proposed that Parliament go further. Although the editor professed an aversion "against Persecution of all kinds," he recommended that the government place all Roman Catholics and Non-jurors into custody because they were all suspect and collectively represented a threat to the security of the nation.<sup>46</sup> "The bare Suspicion of a Man's being concerned in any such pernicious Contrivances," the editor argued, "is

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42 *St. James Journal*, May 3, 1722, 1. The extent to which Commons was a representative body, and who, or what, it represented is taken up at length in J.R. Pole, *Political Representation in England and the Origins of the American Republic* (New York, St. Martin's Press, 1966), 23-26, 388-456. For the impreciseness of Locke's theories of representation, see 17-26. For the relationship between the Whig political ascendancy, the Septennial Act, and the increase in Whig assertions that the people were "tacitly" or "virtually" represented, see 407-414. Edmund Morgan notes that "representatives in England and America have never been legally or constitutionally bound to follow the instructions, advice, or expressed wishes of their constituents." He reviews the Whig arguments against the practice in Edmund Morgan, *Inventing the People*, 217-229.

43 *St. James Journal*, August 16, 1722, 91-92; August 23, 1722, 97-99.

44 *St. James Journal*, August 30, 1722, 103.

45 Owen, 26.

46 *St. James Journal*, August 30, 1722, 104.

sufficient to justify the securing of his Person, whether anything directly or positively can be proved or no.”<sup>47</sup> The editor stated that those guilty of conspiracy should be punished, and should be held until their guilt could be ascertained to prevent them from escaping. The innocent “will never have any Resentments rise in him,” against the authorities, any more than a healthy person should be “displeased with a Physician, who, in a Time of Contagion, was appointed to inquire, whether he was [sick] or no, when the Sick and Well mingled together, and every body was, by that means, in danger of receiving the Infection.”<sup>48</sup> While this political quarantine was a road not taken, its recommendation is indicative of the extent to which some Whigs were prepared to go in order to preserve the people, the king, and their own place in the nation.

The Whigs gradually developed an historical interpretation of the constitution during their dominance over government under the first two Hanoverian rulers. Although it was rather short on philosophy and long on practicality, it contained a fundamental coherence at its root. Whigs preferred to look back no further than the Glorious Revolution for the basis of English government. The revolutionary settlement provided them with a firm foundation to support their assertion that Parliament had a limiting power over the prerogatives of the Crown, and, at the same time, defended them from any admission that sovereignty was derived (except in some dim past) from the people. Although Whigs asserted that their constitution was influenced by the Glorious Revolution, they also claimed that the settlement that resulted from the Revolution was not an innovation, but simply a return to its true and ancient constitutional principles.<sup>49</sup> Whigs believed that the constitution was fundamentally a mixed and balanced government that preserved the peace and protected the rights and property of the freeholders; that is, the landed and moneyed interests of the nation.<sup>50</sup>

Whigs held Aristotle’s view on mixed government. They understood that the English Commonwealth was a republic or combination of the three pure forms of government—monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy—with each exerting a check on the interests of the other. Each branch possessed its own particular privileges, and each performed specific functions. The monarch was the fount of all honors and the source of justice. He retained prerogative powers meant to check the other branches, including a negative on legislation, the right to hear petitions from his subjects and redress their stated grievances, and the right to summon, prorogue and dissolve Parliament. The peerage, sitting in assembly, enjoyed the highest honors in the state:

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>49</sup> “The Declaration of Right was not intended to introduce any new Form of Government, but only to claim and assert the Rights, Liberties and Privileges of the Subject under the Old, which had been notoriously violated and infringed by King *James*, . . . nor [was] any Diminution required of the just Prerogatives of the Crown, but only to reduce them within the Bounds prescribed by the Laws and Constitution of England.” *Daily Gazetteer*, Feb. 10, 1737. See Dickinson, “Whiggism in the Eighteenth Century,” 38. W.A. Speck offers a very good explanation of this Whig interpretation of the constitutional results of the Glorious Revolution in *Reluctant Revolutionaries*, 1-2, along with a brief historiographical review. See also J.R. Pole, *Political Representation*, 438-440; Lois Schwoerer, *Declaration of Rights*, 283.

<sup>50</sup> Dickinson, “Whiggism in the Eighteenth Century,” 33-36, 38.

they could originate legislation, and they constituted the highest court in the realm. The House of Commons represented the English polity, and was thus the proper place for the discussion and correction of any matters that aggrieved the people. It also held the purse-strings as supply bills had to be initiated there. No legislation could become law and no tax could be levied unless it met the approval of all three branches of government during the same session of Parliament. Thus, in theory, the English government was a mixed and balanced tripartite republic.

In practice, however, party government blurred constitutional divisions. By George II's accession, Court Whigs believed that the unification of the government obtained by having sitting members of Parliament in the ministry was beneficial and even necessary to the ends of government—that “harmonious relations between the executive and the legislature could be maintained only if there were close links between the two.”<sup>51</sup>

Although country critics had cried foul at the employment of legislative members in judicial, military and ministry positions since the reign of Charles II, Court Whigs viewed the practice as a “form of constitutional lubricant,” necessary for the promotion of legislation, and the survival of any particular ministry.<sup>52</sup> The government was never able to insure a majority for its policies, no matter how much “influence” it exerted on the legislature, however. Even when Walpole and Newcastle, both consummate manipulators of patronage, guided elections and found places in Parliament for their clients, the best they could do was create a small nucleus of supporters to advocate their policies. Historian John Owen estimates that office holders in the House of Commons before 1750 never amounted to much more than about one quarter of the whole assembly, and even they could not always be depended upon to vote in support of the government.<sup>53</sup> Ministry Whigs primarily viewed “influence” as a vital link between the Crown and Commons, but they understood that the passage of their legislation depended on majorities that could not be obtained without a wide consensus of the members of the House of Commons. The government was thus dependent upon the representatives of the boroughs and the rural freeholders for support of its policies.

Whigs believed that political power followed property. In this particular sense they differed little from Tories. Whigs, however, recognized that landed property was not the only measure of wealth in the nation, and claimed to speak for the merchants, manufacturers and financiers as well as the landholders. These new men were not expected to take as active a role in national politics as those whose wealth was built upon the firm foundation of landed property, but the Whigs recognized that the prosperity they provided contributed to the stability and wealth of the nation.<sup>54</sup> To protect the interests of the propertied classes, Whig governments created laws that made property more secure. Parliament increased the number of capital crimes for offenses that involved property. They passed the Black Act in 1723 against poaching, and other

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<sup>51</sup> Dickinson, *Liberty and Property*, 99.

<sup>52</sup> Owen, 100.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>54</sup> Dickinson, “Whiggism in the Eighteenth Century,” 36.

legislation to protect dogs, horses, fences, grain, cattle, and hedges.<sup>55</sup> In addition to the passage of legislation that protected property, Whigs lowered property taxes and made up the loss of revenues by introducing excise taxes on a wide range of domestically produced consumer goods. Taxes on such basic commodities as coal, soap, salt, candles, beer and cider shifted the burden of taxation from the landowners to the whole population, but the overall effect of the excise policy, as Nathaniel Mist asserted, was to “increase the Expense of the laboring and manufacturing People more, in proportion, than that of others in a higher Rank.”<sup>56</sup> Through these means and others the Whig government leaders forged a steady political consensus that brought in majorities on their most important and least controversial measures.

That is not to say that Whigs ever enjoyed the support of all of the landholding country members. A group of “independent country gentlemen,” one of three classes of men that Sir Lewis Namier called the “predestined Parliament men,” held more or less permanent seats in the House of Commons. These country squires, elected to their seats from their home counties or respectable rural boroughs, had family influence and prestige that practically guaranteed them “the seats that were in that sense hereditary.”<sup>57</sup> They comprised a more or less permanent standing opposition to the government throughout the eighteenth century.<sup>58</sup> Government Whigs categorized them as Tories, but Namier’s characterization of them is more just. They were not gifted with great political acumen, organization, or experience, but were of “an independent character and station in life,” and indifferent to the temptations of office.<sup>59</sup> They believed that they had been elected to reflect the interests and sentiments of their constituents and behaved accordingly. They were nearly impossible to affiliate with any particular party, because these independent country squires lacked both the interest and the time to involve themselves in political matters in London when Parliament was not in session. “Fox-hunting, gardening, planting, or indifference” occupied their time in the country “till the very day before the meeting of Parliament.”<sup>60</sup> Though never much more than one fifth of the total members, and never sufficiently disciplined to oppose the government alone, they were a significant force in English politics, and had a serious impact on the development of political thought throughout the century.

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<sup>55</sup> See Thompson, *Whigs and Hunters*, 21-24, 197-198, *passim*.

<sup>56</sup> *Fog’s Weekly Journal*, January 20, 1733. See also Brewer, *The Sinews of Power*, 203-204; Rogers, *Whigs and Cities*, 48-55.

<sup>57</sup> Lewis Namier, *The Structure of Politics*, 1:7-10.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>60</sup> Lord Chesterfield to Bubb Doddington, September 8, 1741, cited in Namier, *The Structure of Politics*, 1:10. The following from Sir Edward Turner illustrates the frustration that Parliamentary leaders who desired support from the country members experienced. He asked: “Are you still a Country Gentleman and can you make any Enquiry after Taxes? Persons of that Denomination seem to have forgot Public affairs. Few of their Representatives have appeared at the House this Session.” Sir Edward Turner to Sanderson Miller, December 6, 1746. *An Eighteenth-Century Correspondence*, Lilian Dickens and Mary Stanton, eds. (London: John Murray, 1910), 124.

The British government was not, as French commentators like Voltaire, Montesquieu, and Lolme asserted, “a republic disguised as a monarchy,” but neither was it the corrupt despotism that country critics described.<sup>61</sup> What it had in fact become was an oligarchy dominated by various interrelated groups of political players, all of whom held an adherence to a common ideology and all of whom were devoted to the preservation of domestic tranquility, national prosperity, and their own continuation in government. They had learned from bitter experience during George I’s reign that an authoritative and unified government was required if their goals were to be promoted and sustained.

The first premise of Whig government—authority—was assured by the unification of all the branches of government under the influence of Crown and ministry. Whigs were able to monopolize government from the 1720s until at least 1754, primarily because they were able to convince the first two Hanover rulers that they were the only party that was trustworthy and completely loyal to the German House. Implacably anti-Tory, the first two Georges also accepted single party rule as their best security as well as the best means of promoting the interests of Great Britain and their own Continental ambitions. So long as the kings accepted and identified with the Whig interests and were themselves essentially Court Whigs, “single-party government and the existence of ‘a sense of common identity’ were mutually reinforcing and dependent.”<sup>62</sup> The theoretically separate interests of the three branches of government lost their distinction when the king, his ministry, and majorities in both Lords and Commons all shared the same ideology and, to a great extent, the same aims and goals. Historians have argued that the power of the Whig oligarchy rested upon the authority that the executive branch held over the legislature.<sup>63</sup> It is worth noting, however, that most of the politicians who rose to dominance in the age of Carteret, Walpole, Pelham and Pitt built the power base that sent them to Whitehall in the corridors and upon the benches of Westminster. The authority that they wielded was derived from their ability to play all of the branches of government, each with their separate and different strengths and weaknesses, in harmony. It might be more truthful to say that it was not so much the grip of the executive upon the legislature that drove the state as the directorial skills of the Whigs, who dominated the mix at any given time and kept the government in concert. Specific Whig ministries rose and fell, but since the king chose his new cabinet only from among the Whig factions, all of whom shared the same basic conceptions of government, the Whig tune continued.

Attempting to define the philosophical sources of Court Whig ideology can be frustrating. The premises of government by popular compact and the right of popular revolution were all admirable when a change of government was desired. John Locke’s theories on the subject were taken down from the shelf, dusted off, and displayed on those occasions when he could safely be employed to reflect the government’s zeal for liberty. The Whigs who governed the nation

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61 Paul A. Rahe, *Republics Ancient and Modern: Classical Republicanism and the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 527.

62 John Brewer, *Party Ideology*, 4-5.

63 J.H. Plumb, *The Growth of Stability in England, 1675-1725* (London: MacMillan & Co., 1967), 115; and Brewer, *Party Ideology*, 4-5.

generally felt, however, that such notions were far too inflammatory to be allowed as the permanent basis for government. Only a small radical minority of Whigs accepted Locke's premise that an original contract was made by the express and explicit consent of the English people, or that such a contract constituted the foundation of the English government.<sup>64</sup> Court Whigs faced the uncomfortable prospect that post-revolutionary rulers often experience: what one revolution might create, another can destroy. Whigs felt that Lockean concepts like popular consent and the popular right to revolution were at odds with public order and with the effective, authoritative governance required to maintain it. Instead, they argued that once men had agreed to live together in civil society, they relinquished their sovereignty to their rulers, so that the power of government "should be absolute, and have the Sovereign Disposal of the Properties and Persons of all Individuals" who lived under it.<sup>65</sup> But Whigs softened the threat of a government with so much power by arguing that its authority, though "as absolute as that of the grand Turk," could only be employed for the good of the nation because the governors themselves were constrained by the same laws as their subjects.<sup>66</sup>

In general, Whigs asserted that the first goal of government was the preservation of liberty. Ministry Whigs argued that the best means by which to promulgate that goal was through a strong government that could preserve domestic order and maintain a strong national defense. To achieve these ends the government promoted measures that inevitably brought an increased presence of national government into areas of the country that it had touched only lightly before. Excise men and other features of the complex excise apparatus appeared all over the nation, and people who had never previously paid taxes paid the excise on everyday products. After 1715 the army was more visible in rural areas and country towns. The Riot Act replaced local processes that had traditionally been employed by the shire and town elite to pacify popular disturbances. All of these innovations increased the visibility and authority of the national government in localities where previously it had only rarely been sensed.

Instead of employing any science of politics to support the policies of successive Whig ministries, their supporters in the press devoted themselves to making their political detractors as unpopular as possible, as well as bolstering the power and legitimacy of the ruling Whig oligarchy by portraying them as the defenders of the freeholders' liberty and property and the fittest representatives of the people of England. Whig ideology was dominated by party thinking. Court Whigs asserted that there had been, at least since the Reign of Charles II, two parties in England, Whigs and Tories. The Whig party was "well affected to the Memory of King William," and "extremely zealous for his Majesty King George."<sup>67</sup> Whigs labeled their critics Tories and equated them with Jacobitism. Government Whigs sustained this characterization of opposition even after 1745, when so few actual Jacobites remained in England as to make them irrelevant to the politics of the nation. By characterizing their

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<sup>64</sup> Dickinson, "Whiggism in the Eighteenth Century," 37.

<sup>65</sup> Solon, "General View of Civil Liberty, its Extent, and Restraints," *Daily Gazetteer*, May 2, 1737.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> *The Flying-Post or Post-Master*, June 4, 1715.

opposition in this manner, Court Whigs intimated that all of their critics were devoted to the Stuart Pretender and were thus a threat to the liberty, property and religion of the English people. Court Whigs argued that they were the legitimate heirs to the legacy of the Glorious Revolution, the preservers and defenders of the constitution and the Hanoverian dynasty, and that the opponents of Whig government were at least the unwitting dupes of the Pretender and his minions, or, at worst, hypocrites who employed the language of country radicalism and even republicanism to conceal their real intentions of enslaving the English people by restoring the Papist Stuart Pretender. The editor of the ministry sponsored *Daily Gazetteer* enquired thus into the intentions of Caleb D'Anvers of the *Craftsman*:

Is it to Restore the Rump that have been in their Graves three of four score Years; or the pretended Stuarts, that are alive and lusty in the Pope's Bosom, on the other side of the Water? Is it to erect a Commonwealth made up of Tories, Papists, High Church, and Libertines, or to make another annual Holiday by another Restoration, the Blessings of which, may be in part guess'd by the Blessings of the last, with the sweet Improvements of Inquisitions, Fire and Faggot?<sup>68</sup>

This criticism was made all the more telling when infamous Tories and acknowledged Jacobites like Bolingbroke were among the government's most virulent critics. Anti-government editors of papers and journals like *The Craftsman* and *Common Sense* claimed that they, rather than the ministry's presses, were the "true Whigs" and thus represented the interests of the freeholders and people of England against the machinations of politicians who were set upon enslaving both the king and his subjects. As one writer put it, "the Interests of the King and People are inseparable: Whoever is a Friend to either is so consequently to both."<sup>69</sup>

Opposition writers stressed the danger of the absolutism that would, they believed, naturally accrue from the corruption of Parliament by the ministry. They argued that the powers of the king to do good for his people were held in check by his corrupt and self-interested ministers, who employed the royal prerogatives to their own ends rather than for the benefit of the people. These "country" critics offered a prescriptive analysis of Whig government that was couched in the terms of the Age of Coke and the Long Parliament, and also of the Glorious Revolution and Declaration of Rights.<sup>70</sup> What Court Whigs found the most worrisome about this country-dominated opposition rhetoric was that it offered a reasoned, coherent critique of their measures that was well grounded in the English Whig constitutional tradition. It was loyal to the Hanover dynasty, it presumed the power of the legislature to oversee and restrain the executive, and it employed as its basis an interpretation, albeit more libertarian, of the same fundamental precepts of government that the Court Whigs employed. It was, in short, the flip side of the Whig ideological coin. The only real defense that Court Whigs could offer was that their country opponents disguised their actual intentions behind the mask of Whig rhetoric; that "whoever would aspire to Tyranny must cry Liberty, . . . [and] there are not a few, who in wishing for the

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<sup>68</sup> *Daily Gazetteer*, April 20, 1737.

<sup>69</sup> *Common Sense*, August 16, 1740.

<sup>70</sup> See Brewer, *Sinews of Power*, 155-166.



Pretender, fancy that they wish well to Liberty; and believe that whatever thwarts his Interest promotes Slavery; and, that, therefore, they are now in a State of Slavery.”<sup>71</sup> Until the end of the American Revolution, Country opposition rhetoric offered a compelling vehicle for criticism against the Whig oligarchy by those outside of the ministry.

The prominent feature of English government under the first two Hanoverian kings was its domination by Whigs. After 1720 both the government leadership and the opposition came from the same party, so that government Whigs faced a Whig opposition across the aisle of the House of Commons. This nascent opposition coalesced around the Prince of Wales, the future King George II, and, in the same fashion, in the “court” of Prince Frederick after George II ascended the throne in 1727. There were always a few independent backbenchers who consisted primarily of country squires and Tories from the rural fringes of the kingdom whose constituencies had become all but hereditary, but even these gentlemen had largely accepted the premises of Whig government—the Protestant succession vested in the Hanover family, Parliamentary oversight and the supremacy of Commons, the preservation of order, and national prosperity. Although his power as a ruler dwindled under the Whig primacy, the king, at least in theory, held prerogative powers that enabled the executive to act as a check on the legislative branch of government. In practice, however, by the reign of George II most of the prerogative powers had atrophied from disuse. No ruler exercised the right to refuse assent to legislation after 1708.<sup>72</sup> In George III’s reign, Henry Fox informed the king that his veto, “like all his other prerogatives, should only be exercised upon the advice of his responsible servants,” which indicates that the king’s cabinet, rather than the king, himself, held control of the royal negative by that date.<sup>73</sup> Since the king was thus prevented from exercising a negative over new legislation by custom, and from dispensing with laws by the conventions of the Declaration of Rights, he had few actual means at his disposal to redress the grievances of his subjects. In actuality, most of the ruler’s prerogative powers lay with the ministry or the collective executive institution of the Crown rather than with the king. From the point of view of the Whigs, the king’s greatest importance lay in his nominating power to choose his ministers and to grant honors, create peers, nominate bishops and lesser church officials, and grant high military offices. He was the wellspring of patronage from which his supporters eagerly filled their buckets.

Since the argument over the constitution had essentially been won by the Whigs by 1722, there no longer existed two competing ideologies of governance in England. In general, the opposition agreed with the ministry on all essentials, and thus contention over particulars became difficult. Over the years, however, a political language had evolved that was well suited to the criticism of the English system of government. The “Country” language of opposition could be used by critics of government with reasonable safety because it contained within it the spirit of the Declaration of Rights. The political viewpoint, the “country ideology” upon which the

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<sup>71</sup> *Daily Gazetteer*, May 23, 1737.

<sup>72</sup> Maitland, 423.

<sup>73</sup> Richard Pares, *King George and the Politicians: The Ford Lectures Delivered in the University of Oxford, 1951-2* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953), 132. See also Maitland, 423.

language rested, offered an analysis of power and of English political life that was critical of ministerial influence and the effects that it had both on the king above and the legislature below. Country leaders encouraged parliamentary scrutiny of the ministry in order to weed out or restrain potentially corrupt or wicked advisors who might lead the king into error. They recommended limitations on the patronage that the ministry used to enhance its power. In order to restrain the corrupting influence of the executive over the legislature, country critics recommended frequent Parliaments and bills to preclude members of the legislature from appointive places in government. Country Whig critics also decried large standing armies in times of peace, both because the army might be used against the people by a corrupt ministry and because large armies required large numbers of officers (more placemen) to lead them. They feared that the traditional leaders of the nation, the landed gentry, might be superseded by a new breed of politician who derived his power from his office rather than from the land and who understood his duty and interest to lie with the patrons from whom he had derived his power and position.<sup>74</sup> Under such courtiers, government could only exist to serve the interests of those who governed and not the people of the nation. In an age of consolidation and centralization of English government, country ideology offered both a traditional and an acceptable language of opposition. It gave those who opposed the government a means of criticism that resonated in the political consciousness of the English listener wherever they lived under the English Crown.<sup>75</sup>

In essence, then two Whig dialects developed in the political climate of England between the Glorious Revolution of 1688 and the accession of George II. Both were based on the Whig understanding of the English constitution. Both assumed that the best government was a mixed monarchical republic and that the first order of governance could be summed up in the ancient adage “salus populi, suprema lex esto.” The dialect of the court Whigs, those who governed, stressed loyalty meant to foster support of the king and his government. It stressed the primacy of law and order, and, while acknowledging that government existed for the good of the people, it denied that the constitution was based entirely upon popular government. It emphasized that the people were best protected under a benign authoritarian regime that prevented domestic unrest, protected property, and promoted prosperity through a strong national defense. In opposition to the court view, the Country Whig opposition, while also maintaining an unfailing loyalty to the monarch, stressed that the interests of the nation were best served when the people were consulted. It strictly interpreted the provisions of the Declaration of Rights and prescribed a mixed, separate and balanced constitution as a means to remedy corruption and despotism. Country Whigs criticized a succession of ministries for employing the power and influence of the Crown to corrupt the constitution. Country Whigs were especially critical of the appointment of sitting Parliament members to cabinet positions and other administrative posts, and the use of political patronage by Crown ministers to influence Parliamentary policies.

Most colonists far across the Atlantic Ocean in His Majesty’s possessions in North America received both of these views of government, and interpreted both to fit their own

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<sup>74</sup> Brewer, *Sinews of Power*, 116.

<sup>75</sup> Several works that discuss “Country Ideology” and English politics include Robbins, *The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthman*; Brewer, *The Sinews of Power*, and *Party Ideology*; H.T. Dickinson, *Liberty and Property*.

circumstances. Colonists were, after all, Britons, and thus shared all of the basic assumptions about government with their English cousins. Where they differed was that they did not share the more recent history of England. American colonists had a history and political viewpoint of their own, or rather a set of histories and viewpoints, at once shared to a degree because of their symbiotic relationship with the mother country, and different because of the peculiarities of their different little commonwealths. The Glorious Revolution provided both an historical and ideological link between England and her American provinces; it was perhaps the most important shared event, in terms of molding the political culture of American Britons of the eighteenth century.