

The Pretender's Folly: Jacobitism and the Hanoverian Succession

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Though the Jacobite rebellions lasted only sixty years, they left an indelible mark on English political and cultural society. The secretive nature of the Jacobite, together with bad luck and inconsistent foreign support, deprived the Jacobites of ultimate victory. Nevertheless, the Jacobite threat forced Parliament to pass important legislation in order to prevent a Jacobite restoration. Since these laws established the foundation of the British state, the Jacobites were responsible for the shaping, modernization, and centralization of Great Britain after the Glorious Revolution. The Jacobites' main ideological principles, namely divine right and passive obedience, helped to define the Whig and Tory divide while their associations with the Tory party led to the Whig ascendance within the English government following the Hanoverian Succession of 1715. Thus, Jacobite ideals significantly influenced the development of English conservatism, which sought to promote traditional institutions and a hierarchical society built on divine right. Furthermore, their movement involved a broader social component as common dissenters seeking to express discontentment with the royal monarchy adopted their rhetoric and symbols. However, their impact on English culture was more ephemeral as government censorship and repression dampened the effect of their propaganda and literature.

Following the death of Prince William, Princess Anne's only living heir in 1700, the English Parliament passed the Act of Settlement in order to prevent the throne from reverting back to the Pretender. The Act of Settlement 1701 established that the Electress Sophia of Hanover, a granddaughter of James I of England, or her Protestant descendants would succeed to the throne after Anne. The Act also explicitly excluded Catholics from acceding to the throne, including over 50 nobles who had previously been higher up in the line of succession. The Act of Settlement faced little public opposition, with only one MP in the House of Commons speaking against it.¹ This strongly contradicts the arguments of Jacobite scholars who contend that the Jacobites dominated the Tories. The lack of opposition in this crucial vote suggests that the majority of the Tories at this point were pro-Hanoverian or at least had resigned themselves to the inevitability of a Protestant succession. However, a subsequent bill the following year that would have made denial or obstruction of the Hanoverian Succession high treason met heavy opposition and passed by only one vote.² This may have been a concerted Jacobite effort to prevent the authorities from utilizing the law against them. The sectarian division between Whigs and Tories allowed the Jacobite Members of Parliament to play a decisive role in certain votes. The continued implementation of the Act of Settlement to this very day reflects the influence that the Jacobite threat had on the English monarchy, particularly in shaping monarchical requirements.

Unlike the Act of Settlement, the Act of Union faced much greater public opposition as the Scottish populace

was very much displeased with continued intervention in its politics by its southern neighbor. In fact, Jacobite sympathizers claimed that public disapproval of the Union was so intense that James III would be welcomed back with open arms if he merely landed in Scotland. These overly optimistic reports encouraged James III to participate in the ill-fated expedition of 1708 to Edinburgh with a French fleet in the hopes of sparking a popular uprising. Regardless, the total failure of this incursion would contribute to future Jacobite hesitancy with regards to armed campaigns and would shift their efforts towards diplomacy rather than militancy. Nevertheless, it reflects the prominent influence that the Jacobite movement had on English legislation and foreign diplomacy during this period, particularly the lengths that Parliament was willing to go to in order to prevent another Stuart restoration.

The threat of Jacobitism and a possible Stuart restoration to the throne of Scotland ensured that the English Parliament would utilize all of its power and resources to unite the two countries and protect the Hanoverian Succession. It is certainly ironic that Jacobitism helped to strengthen the regime it sought to overthrow in that the Act of Settlement that established the Hanoverian Succession along with the Act of Union was passed specifically to counter the Pretender and his supporters. Since the Stuarts had originally been rulers of Scotland before acquiring the English throne, the English Parliament was just as keen to close this security gap by preventing the Jacobites from gaining a possible foothold in Scotland as it was to end its economic rivalry with Scotland.

While Daniel Defoe's political writings reveal the divided nature of English society at the time of the Hanoverian Succession, the activities of the Jacobites also caused a new shift in political theories concerning the monarchy. The passage of the Act of Settlement provided a legislative precedent through which Parliament could control the monarchical selection process. Whereas the Glorious Revolution had primarily been a coup backed by members of Parliament, the Hanoverian Succession secured Parliamentary control over the line of succession to the throne. Furthermore, as argued by some of its supporters such as John Toland, the Succession also vindicated principles of the Glorious Revolution such as limited monarchy.³ Thus, the Jacobite presence in English politics helped to shape the political nature of the Hanoverian Succession as a consolidation of constitutional principles that had been first implemented during the Glorious Revolution with the Bill of Rights.

Whereas Defoe's writings were partly satirical, Whig writers took a much more hardline approach to Jacobitism during the early eighteenth century. Much of their criticisms continued the anti-papist and anti-Catholic sentiments propagated by their late seventeenth-century predecessors. Some authors such as the writer of *Hannibal at the Gates* blamed the Jacobites for all of the political turmoil that was afflicting England. For example, the anonymous author of this work claimed that the Jacobites had been manipulating the Non-jurors against the Protestant majority and called on all loyal subjects to resist Jacobite propaganda since the restoration of the Pretender would only bring about great slaughter and destruction.⁴ While certain Jacobites suggested that they utilize other domestic dissidents for their political gain, particularly in a letter to the Earl of Perth, there was never a serious attempt to establish a unified rebel movement.⁵ Nevertheless, the royal government generally equated Non-jurors with Jacobites as shown in a 1715 Royal Proclamation issued just prior to the First Rising.⁶

Much of the popular anti-Jacobite literature during this period equated Jacobitism with French absolutism, popery, slavery, and arbitrary government. For example, the author of *The Jacobite Hopes Frustrated* argued that a Stuart restoration would be equivocal with a French invasion and implied that it would be as catastrophic to English society as the Norman Conquest.⁷ The passage of time tended to make these straw man arguments even more extreme as later authors such as the writer of *The Jacobite Plot* equated Jacobitism with slavery and blamed the Dissenter problem in the Anglican Communion on the Jacobites.⁸ These outrageous beliefs are taken to their extreme by Benjamin Hoadly in *The Jacobite Hopes Revived* wherein he theorizes that the Jacobites would push for an absolute monarchy and the dissolution of Parliament.⁹

The Succession proved that Parliament retained the right to select monarchs and that the new Hanoverian king had to respect the Church as well as civil liberties if he wanted

to remain king and not be deposed like the Stuarts. Just as certain MPs had chosen William based on his claim to the throne as the nephew of James II and his daughter's wife in addition to his reputation as a Protestant champion, so the Hanoverians were chosen due to their staunch anti-Catholicism and image as defenders of Protestantism on the continent. Therefore, the Succession marked the death knell for the supremacy of divine right within English politics as it cemented the Whig concept of elected monarchy. However, George I was quick to deny the Whig interpretation that he had been given the kingdom by proclaiming that he was king by hereditary right by virtue of his maternal great grandfather, James I, whose House had lost their right to rule in the Glorious Revolution.¹⁰

This religious consolidation went hand in hand with the diplomatic ramifications of the Hanoverian Succession. During the latter half of the seventeenth century, English Protestants had been particularly vexed by the country's alliance with France, a Catholic power, against its Protestant neighbors such as the Dutch Republic during the Anglo-Dutch and Franco-Dutch Wars. One of the reasons for Parliament's acceptance of the Hanoverian Succession was to prevent such religiously inconsistent alliances from ever occurring again as the Kingdom of Hanover had a significant role in the Protestant alliances on the continent. Parliament hoped that George would act as a bulwark against the threat of France, which was considered to be the primary enemy by the British due to religious and historical reasons.

Though Defoe believed that the Hanoverian Succession might weaken the British state, it actually had the opposite effect of centralizing the government and boosting its military power. The Jacobite and Tory calls for a decentralized British state with clear regional divisions influenced the new Hanoverian kings to push for greater centralization so as to consolidate their rule. The threat posed by the Jacobites allowed George I to quickly push through a number of acts, such as the Riot Act and Security of the Sovereign Act, designed to curtail the ability of his opponents to congregate and contest his rule. Furthermore, the Jacobites and Tories had also supported minimalizing the army in favor of strengthening the navy so as to keep taxes low. The fact that the Kingdom of Hanover was a continental power boosted their popularity in the eyes of the Whig party, which emphasized maintaining a strong continental army in order to bring the fight to France and Spain. Great Britain's roles in the War of the Quadruple Alliance, Austrian Succession, and the Seven Years' War all confirm the renewed interest in continental affairs brought about by the threat of Jacobite invasion and the Hanoverian Succession. Thus, the choice of the Hanoverian Succession was very much a reaction to the Jacobite and Tory principles concerning diplomacy, state structure, and warfare.

During the period of Queen Anne's reign, Jacobite hopes for a peaceful restoration had never looked better.

However, Jacobite attempts to broker a peaceful recognition of James Francis Stuart, the old Pretender, helped to split the Tory party. While a portion of the membership defended the Hanoverian Succession, another faction led by the Viscount Bolingbroke attempted to secure the throne for the Old Pretender. These divisions weakened the party at a critical point while the refusal of several Tory leaders to serve the new Hanoverian king, George I, led to the Tory's fall from favor within the government.¹¹ Jacobite activities within the Tory party also led to an electoral defeat for the Tories in 1715 as Bolingbroke's actions appeared to confirm long-standing Whig accusations of crypto-Jacobitism within the Tory party. The Tory majority in the House of Commons was lost and transformed into a Whig majority of 130.¹²

In spite of the conflict over the Hanoverian Succession, Tim Harris argues that Jacobitism became more popular towards the end of Anne's reign due to public dissent concerning England's participation in the War of the Spanish Succession. Harris claims that this war weariness combined with the chronological distance from the events of the 1680s caused the English to become more sympathetic to a Stuart restoration as a solution to the nation's problem.¹³ George I's preference for Whigs, along with his continental holdings, provoked general unrest and fears of government warmongering, high taxes, and future involvement in continental wars. The Jacobite nature of these protests in which James III was exalted while George I was cursed led the new Hanoverian king to further distrust the Tories in favor of the Whigs.¹⁴

Jacobite historiography has been rather stigmatized due to the romanticism frequently attached to the Jacobite movement. Most of these associations are very similar to the portrayals of the Confederacy in the US as the ultimate "lost cause." Unfortunately, this is simply the nature of most conspiratorial movements in that much of the historical documentation has been destroyed or encrypted, thus hindering research while promoting speculation or rumor. As a result, this has led to numerous theories in its study depending on how willing one is to trust the source material. Like any other rebellious movement, the Jacobites tended to exaggerate their success, particularly in correspondences with foreign diplomats.

Despite the popular imagination that Jacobitism was a reactionary and doomed ideology, it lay at the crux of eighteenth-century English politics. The Jacobite presence had forced the English Parliament to pass the Act of Settlement 1701 in order to deny Catholics the throne in favor of the Protestant House of Hanover. When the Scottish Parliament declared its right to name its own king, the English Parliament passed the Act of Union, thus transforming Scotland and England's relationship from a personal monarchical union into an actual political union. Unification was believed to be so unpopular that it actually led James Francis Stuart, the Old Pretender, to attempt an invasion of Scotland that was only aborted when the

French naval commander refused to land in Edinburgh due to the presence of an English fleet. Despite these political reassurances, the threat of a Jacobite restoration continued to surface during Queen Anne's reign as she had no legitimate heirs despite a large number of pregnancies. In 1713, rumors abounded of a Jacobite coup as Queen Anne lay heavily sick in bed, but the Queen quickly quashed this misperception when she recovered and immediately reiterated her decision to maintain the Hanoverian Succession.¹⁵

The primary appeal of Jacobitism was dynastic in nature in that it drew most of its support from legitimist monarchists. As Jacobitism was born in the age of imperial rivalry, it was able to benefit from the competition among the European powers as it drew support from Catholic nations such as Spain and France. However, both foreign support fluctuated as foreign diplomats tended to be skeptical of Jacobite claims of popular support and feared that the Stuarts might continue British expansionist policies if they were ever restored.¹⁶ In addition to domestic repression, the Jacobites' activities during the Hanoverian Succession were also hindered by the Pretender's lack of experience as he was only twenty-six at the time.

Up until the Hanoverian Succession, the ministry had been dominated by the Tories, particularly during Anne's later reign, as their leaders were able to coerce James Francis Stuart to order his supporters in Parliament to support the Tory cause by promising him the throne.¹⁷ The bitter conflict between Tories and Whigs within Parliament allowed Jacobite MPs to be the deciding votes in key legislation such as the 1713 Treaty of Utrecht, which helped to end the War of the Spanish Succession. In spite of the Jacobite sympathies of Tory leaders such as the Viscount Bolingbroke and the Duke of Ormonde as well as other statesmen such as the Duke of Marlborough, John Churchill, there was never a serious, determined effort to revoke the Act of Settlement.

The inability of the Jacobites to oppose the legislation that led to and confirmed the Hanoverian Succession undermines the argument made by scholars such as Cruikshanks that they dominated the Tory party. Nevertheless, their activities helped to bring about the Hanoverian Succession and the ensuing Whig ascendance as Parliament sought to consolidate the gains of the Glorious Revolution. As an underground movement, Jacobitism engendered a disproportionate amount of political paranoia centered on fears of popery and French invasion. Their politics helped to demarcate the Whig-Tory divide, but it was also their associations with the Tory party that caused the downfall of the Tories and pushed British politics in a Whig direction. Thus, the Jacobites had a significant impact on the development of British identity and politics in the eighteenth century as the perceived foreign and traditionalist nature of the movement caused the domination of Whig ideals of constitutional monarchy and free trade.

In spite of government claims that Jacobite agents were around every corner, there were only three official agents that James Francis Stuart could rely on.¹⁸ Thus, the Jacobite movement was too disparate and lacked a core cadre that was crucial in the success of other rebellious or revolutionary movement. Bennet argues that the Jacobites were merely pawns of English diplomats who were attempting to utilize the movement for their own personal gains. Ironically, the Jacobite movement sundered its hopes of victory as it divided the Tory party at a crucial point during the monarchical transition between Anne and George I. The defection of key Tory leaders such as the Viscount Bolingbroke generated disunity within party ranks and allowed the Whigs to establish a virtual single-party government in the aftermath.¹⁹ The threat of a Jacobite rising in 1715 seemed particularly likely due to the mass riots and general discontent that followed the Hanoverian Succession. This forced the Whigs to consolidate their hold on local governments and the militias, which essentially forced the Jacobites to shift their focus from England to Scotland. Thus, the Jacobites' significance is that they provided George I and the Whigs with a weapon and excuse to purge Tories out of public offices, increase the size of the army, and suspend habeas corpus.²⁰ The nature of the Jacobite threat is best evidenced by a Royal Proclamation in 1714 that called for the reward of one

hundred thousand pounds, a massive fortune for anyone, for the capture or death of the Old Pretender.²¹

In addition, the Jacobites' associations with foreign Catholic nations forced the new Hanoverian monarchs to pursue a much more proactive and aggressive foreign policy in order to outmaneuver the group. Their ties with England's historical enemies such as France and Spain allowed the state to pass legislation that promoted centralization while suppressing dissent. Ironically, Jacobite efforts to effect a Stuart restoration actually reinforced the power of the new Hanoverian monarchs and provided them with a scapegoat that they consistently used in order to rally public support. Furthermore, the British government's experience with Jacobitism allowed it to better confront later revolutionary movements, such as Jacobinism and socialism, that swept through Europe. While the Jacobites ended all active efforts to retake the throne after the death of Bonnie Prince Charlie, the survival of the succession to this very day as represented by Franz, Duke of Bavaria, reflects the inherent instability and potentially controversial nature of monarchy. After all, Franz may not have an interest in publicly proclaiming his right to the throne of the United Kingdom, but there is nothing preventing more ambitious successors from doing so.

NOTES

¹ Julian Hoppit, *A Land of Liberty? England 1689–1727* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 38.

² Parliament. House of Commons, *A list of the Honourable House of Commons, that Voted for, and against the Clause for the Hanover Succession in the Year 1702*. London, Printed in the Year M,DCC,X. (1710). *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*. Gale. University of Florida. 14 Mar. 2011 <http://find.galegroup.com/ip.hscl.ufl.edu/ecco/infomark.do?&contentSet=ECCOArticles&type=multipage&tabID=T001&prodId=ECCO&docId=CW3306064558&source=gale&userGroupName=gain40375&version=1.0&docLevel=FASCIMILE>.

³ J.A.I. Champion, "Political Thinking between Restoration and Hanoverian Succession," (2003): 16. Accessed March 13, 2011. http://digirep.rhul.ac.uk/file/41abb2f7-d7ec-50af-4e42-56780480af44/1/Political_thinking_between_Restoration_and_Hanoverian_Succession_J_Champion.pdf.

⁴ *Hannibal at the gates or, the progress of Jacobitism with the present danger of the Pretender*. London, 1712.

⁵ *Letter to the Earl of Perth*. 1701.

⁶ George I, *By the King, a proclamation, for suppressing rebellions, and rebellious tumults*. London, 1715.

⁷ *The Jacobites hopes frustrated or the history of the calamities attending a French conquest*. London, 1690.

⁸ *The Jacobite plot: or, the Church of England in no danger*. London, 1710.

⁹ Benjamin Hoadly, *The Jacobite's hopes reviv'd by our late tumults and addresses*. London, 1712.

¹⁰ Ragnhild Hatton, *George I* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 119.

¹¹ Frank O'Gorman, *The Long Eighteenth Century: British Political and Social History 1688–1832*. (New York: Arnold, 1997), 65.

¹² *Ibid.*, 66.

¹³ Tim Harris, *Politics under the Later Stuarts: Party Conflict in a Divided Society 1660–1715* (New York: Longman Publishing, 1993), 219.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 222.

¹⁵ G.V. Bennett, "English Jacobitism, 1710-1715; Myth and Reality," *Royal Historical Society* 32 (1982): 137. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3679020>

¹⁶ A.I. Macinnes, "Jacobitism," *History Today* 34, no.10 (October 1984): 22.

¹⁷ Bennett, 143.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 141.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 146.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 150.

²¹ George I, *By the Lords Justices, a proclamation, ordering the payment of one hundred thousand pounds to any person who shall seize and secure the Pretender, in case he shall land, or attempt to land in any of His Majesties dominions*. London, 1714.