

England Strengthens its Imperial Colonies

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

In the face of growing challenges in North America and at home, English royalty began to fashion a stronger empire in North America during the second half of the 17th century.

Starting in 1651, the English monarch and powerful leaders pursued a series of economic and political initiatives designed to make the most of overseas possessions and to tie them more closely to the mother country. These initiatives did not always produce the intended results. In some ways, measures such as the Navigation Acts and political turmoil in England brought colonists and the residents of England closer together. In other respects, they sowed the seeds of future divisions.

This tutorial examines the English leadership's attempts to strengthen imperial administration and the colonial response.

1. Economic Centralization: The Navigation Acts

Creating wealth for Britain remained the king's primary goal for his North American colonies. During the second half of the 17th century, Great Britain gained better control of trade with its American colonies through a series of measures known as the **Navigation Acts**.



TERM TO KNOW

Navigation Acts

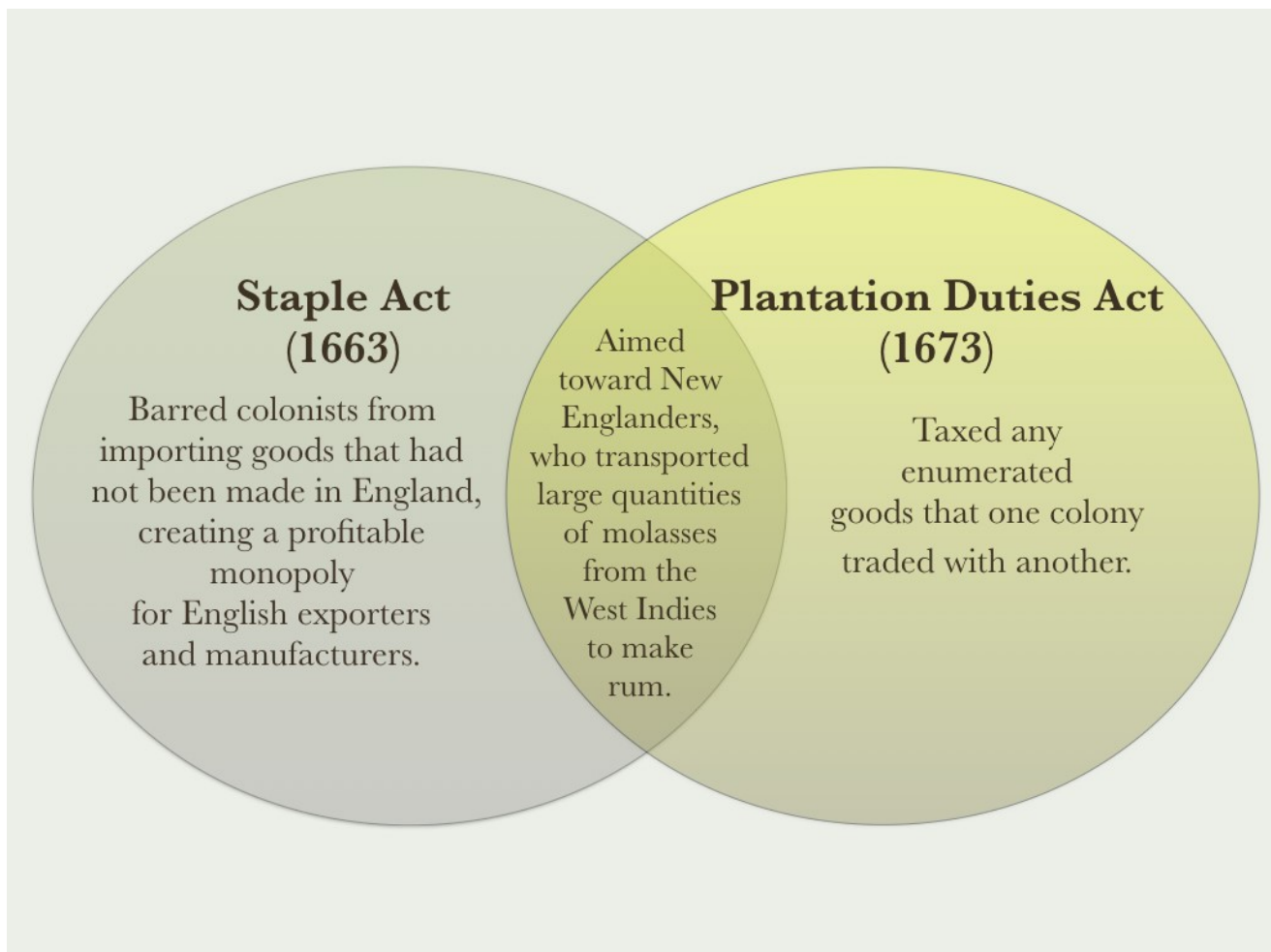
A series of laws passed during the second half of the 17th century that enabled the English leadership to exert greater control over trade with their American colonies.

In 1651, two years after the English Civil War, Oliver Cromwell initiated the process of economic centralization by enacting a Navigation Ordinance. This ordinance required that only English ships could carry goods between England and the colonies. The captain and three fourths of the crew had to be English. Most importantly, the ordinance listed a series of **enumerated goods**: commodities produced in the colonies that could only be transported to ports controlled by England. Among the most valued of these goods were tobacco, sugar, cotton, and indigo (a blue dye valuable for textile production). The ordinance granted English merchants a monopoly in the import of those goods from the colonies and in their eventual export to other nations.



Enumerated Goods

A list of commodities produced in the colonies (tobacco, sugar, cotton, and indigo were most notable among them) that, under the terms of the Navigation Acts, could only be transported to ports controlled by England.



After ascending to the throne in 1660, Charles II approved a number of navigation acts that reinforced and expanded the effects of the original Navigation Ordinance. Among the most notable were the Staple Act (1663) and the Plantation Duties Act (1673).

Charles II organized the Board of Trade to oversee the implementation of the Navigation Acts. First established in 1675, the Board of Trade was an administrative body intended to create stronger regulatory ties between the colonial governments in North America and the English Crown.

The duties of the Board included:

- oversight and strengthening of customs laws;
- establishing vice-admiralty courts, which enabled royal officials to prosecute smugglers and other violators of the Navigation Acts without a jury; and
- empowering officials to investigate potential smugglers by enabling them to issue **writs of assistance**.



Writs of Assistance

Warrants that enabled English customs officials to board and search colonial vessels suspected of containing smuggled goods.

Together, the Navigation Acts created an imperial economic system in which American colonial production flowed through English channels. This system created important benefits for the colonies. Colonial producers and merchants often enjoyed stable prices for their goods. Producers and merchants enjoyed the protection of the English Navy when shipping their goods across the Atlantic Ocean. Finally, these same producers and merchants were treated as English citizens when conducting commerce in the Atlantic World, which further tied them to England.

American colonists discovered that English laws affected more and more of their daily business, as they conducted commerce and purchased goods within the Atlantic World under the Navigation Acts. For example, colonial merchants had to establish relationships with English customs officials. Major colonial ports, such as Boston and Philadelphia, soon featured a variety of imperial officials who administered colonial affairs.

2. Political Centralization

Charles II died in 1685. **James II** (the former Duke of York who oversaw the Royal African Company) ascended the throne and attempted to gain greater influence over colonial politics with limited success.

In 1686, James II set out to centralize the administration of the Northern colonies by creating an enormous new colony called the **Dominion of New England**. The Dominion included all of the New England colonies (Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Plymouth, Connecticut, New Haven, and Rhode Island). In 1688, the Dominion was enlarged by the addition of New York and New Jersey. James II placed **Sir Edmund Andros**, a former colonial governor of New York, in charge.



Dominion of New England

An attempt to centralize colonial administration by combining the Northern colonies into a single governing structure under the oversight of Sir Edmund Andros.

Andros was loyal to James II and his family. He had little sympathy for English colonists and was not required to listen to any of the colonial assemblies. Andros appointed his own officials in place of elected ones, imposed taxes without approval from colonial representatives, and called into question many colonial land grants that did not acknowledge the king or himself. Perhaps most importantly, he was committed to enforcing the Navigation Acts, which many colonists had ignored. This enforcement threatened to disrupt colonial merchants whose businesses relied on smuggling.

Concerns about the authoritarian nature of the king's efforts to centralize colonial administration were part of the growing concern about the English monarchy. James II attempted to model his rule on the reign of his cousin, King Louis XIV of France. This meant centralizing political strength around the throne to give the



James II (shown here in a painting ca. 1690) worked to centralize the English Government under the monarchy. The Catholic King of France Louis XIV provided a template for James II's policies.

monarchy absolute power. James II also worked to modernize the army and the navy, and he maintained a standing army in times of peace. This greatly alarmed the English people, who believed that such a force would be used to crush their liberty.

James II practiced a strict and intolerant form of Roman Catholicism, like his cousin Louis XIV. He had a Catholic wife, and when they had a son, the potential for a Catholic heir to the English throne became a threat to English Protestants. As James's strength grew, his opponents feared he would turn England into a Catholic monarchy with absolute power over the English people.

3. The Glorious Revolution (1688–1689)

In England, opponents of James II's efforts to create a centralized Catholic state were known as **Whigs**. They included a number of English aristocrats and leaders of the Anglican Church, who insisted upon the supremacy of Parliament in national affairs. Parliament, the legislative body of England's government, is comprised of the House of Commons and the House of Lords. The Whigs invited a Dutch aristocrat, **William of Orange** (who was the husband of James II's Protestant daughter **Mary**), to assume the English throne on their behalf and overthrow James II. See the image below.



TERM TO KNOW

Whigs

Opponents of James II during the Glorious Revolution; opposed the centralization of the English monarchy at the expense of Parliament.

William of Orange

- Dutch Aristocrat
- Invited by Whigs to overthrow James II



James II

- Catholic king of England

Mary

- Protestant daughter of James II
- Wife of William of Orange



PEOPLE TO KNOW

Charles II

Son of King Charles I, who was beheaded during the English Civil War in 1649. Charles II took the throne in 1660 after a brief period of Parliamentary rule known as the English interregnum.

Edmund Andros

Colonial governor of New York who was placed in charge of the Dominion of New England by James II. Loyal to James II, Andros had little sympathy for English colonists and was committed to enforcing the Navigation Acts.

James II

The second son of Charles I, who ascended the English throne in 1685 on the death of his brother, Charles II. A Catholic and a proponent of an absolute monarchy, he was deposed shortly thereafter in the Glorious Revolution.

William and Mary

William of Orange (later King William III) and his wife, Mary, ascended the English throne in 1689 in the Glorious Revolution.

William arrived in England in November 1688 with an army of over 21,000 men, the majority of whom were Dutch. English aristocrats and the Anglican Church rallied to his cause, and James II was forced to flee to France. The **Glorious Revolution** was completed when William of Orange (now William III) and his wife Mary became monarchs in 1689. The Glorious Revolution might be better understood as a coup that was spearheaded by English Protestant aristocrats.



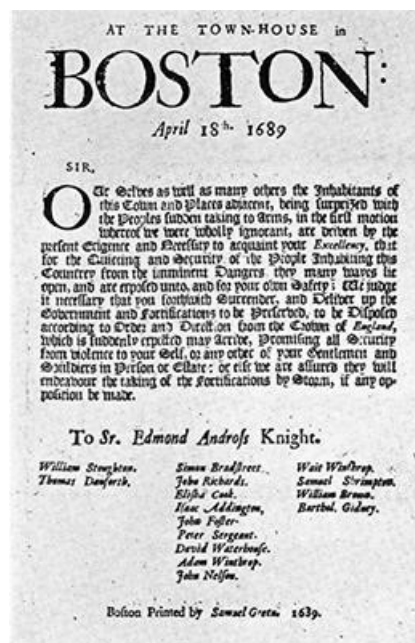
TERM TO KNOW

Glorious Revolution

The overthrowing of James II and the installment of William of Orange and his wife Mary as king and queen of England in 1689.

News that James II had been overthrown soon reached the colonies. After hearing the news in 1689, Bostonians overthrew the government of the Dominion of New England. In the process, they jailed Sir Edmund Andros and other leaders of the regime. The removal of Andros from power illustrated New England's animosity toward Andros's disregard for the colonial assemblies and his vigorous enforcement of the Navigation Acts.

The Glorious Revolution showed how colonial politics mirrored those in England. The Revolution also provided a shared experience for Englishmen and colonists alike. Subsequent generations would refer to the events of 1688 and 1689 as a heroic defense of English liberty against would-be tyrants.



This broadside, signed by several citizens, demanded the surrender of Sir Edmund (spelled here “Edmond”) Andros, the leader handpicked by James II for the Dominion of New England.

4. English Liberty, Toleration, and Colonial Governance

The Glorious Revolution led to the establishment of an English nation that limited the power of the king and provided protections for English citizens. English colonists in North America assumed that such protections extended to them. For a time at least, this appeared to be the case.

In October 1689, the same year that William and Mary took the throne, Parliament issued a **Bill of Rights** that established a constitutional monarchy in England. It stipulated Parliament's independence from the monarchy by listing certain sole parliamentary powers such as control over taxation. It also established certain individual rights for English citizens, most notably trial by jury and habeas corpus (the requirement that authorities bring an imprisoned person before a court to demonstrate the cause of the imprisonment).



TERM TO KNOW

English Bill of Rights (1689)

Written by Parliament following the Glorious Revolution, it established a constitutional monarchy and demarcated parliamentary powers and individual rights for English citizens.

Parliament also issued a Toleration Act, which allowed for greater religious diversity throughout the Empire, including North America. The Church of England (Anglican Church) remained the official state religious establishment, but the Toleration Act extended more freedom to Protestant denominations that did not conform to its views. Thus, by the end of the 17th century, all of England's North American colonies (including Massachusetts Bay) were required to tolerate all Protestant denominations. Several colonies, including Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Delaware, and New Jersey, took such toleration a step further and refused to recognize an official religious establishment.



DID YOU KNOW

Such toleration was not extended to Catholics, who were still routinely excluded from political power in England and in English North America.

Imperial administration also espoused an element of toleration in matters of commerce. During the administration of Prime Minister Robert Walpole (1721–1742), England exercised lax control over colonial trade despite the Navigation Acts. Historians have described this lack of strict enforcement of the Navigation Acts as **salutary neglect**. The Navigation Acts remained law, but customs officials did not aggressively prosecute smuggling in the colonies. In addition, nothing prevented colonists from building their own fleet of ships to engage in such trade.



TERM TO KNOW

Salutary Neglect

Lax oversight of colonial trade and governance in English North America during the first half of the 18th century.



DID YOU KNOW

During the 18th century, New England traders routinely smuggled raw sugar, rum, and molasses from the French and Dutch West Indies.

Salutary neglect extended to colonial governance as well. The administration of colonial North America in the wake of the Glorious Revolution created a two-tiered system, one in which certain aspects of colonial governance were perceived as separate from imperial administration.

Each colony had a governor appointed by the Crown. These governors usually had authority over the military. The Crown also retained the authority to veto colonial legislation, but many governors paid little attention to colonial affairs. Thus, colonial assemblies exerted greater control in local politics, specifically over matters of

government expenditures and taxation. For instance, colonial assemblies often agreed to pay the salary of a royal governor or his administrators in exchange for concessions on government appointments and other issues. Some colonies also printed paper money despite opposition from royal governors.

By the 18th century, the ability to vote in the colonies was determined by property qualifications rather than by church membership. This expanded basic political participation in colonial affairs among landholders and property owners. Colonists who owned property could secure a voice in the colonial assemblies, which retained control over everyday lawmaking within the colonies. Such work contributed to a perception that colonial governance was separate from imperial administration. It also enabled leaders of colonial assemblies to act as political leaders for the colonies.



SUMMARY

The English Government's attempts to strengthen imperial administration during the late 17th and early 18th centuries did not always produce the desired results. In fact, these attempts often revealed how English and colonial politics mirrored each other. James II's attempts to centralize the royal administration in England and abroad prompted similar reactions in England and North America. As harmonious relations within England depended on a degree of toleration between rival political factions, so too did relations between England and its colonies depend upon a degree of toleration between English authorities and colonists.

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TERMS TO KNOW

Dominion of New England

An attempt to centralize colonial administration by combining the northern colonies into a single governing structure under the oversight of Sir Edmund Andros.

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Enumerated Goods

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Glorious Revolution

The overthrowing of James II and the installment of William of Orange and his wife Mary as king and queen of England in 1689.

Navigation Acts

A series of laws passed during the second half of the seventeenth century that enabled England to exert greater control over trade with its American colonies.

Salutary Neglect

Lax oversight of colonial trade and governance in English North America during the first half of the eighteenth century.

Whigs

Opponents to James II during the Glorious Revolution; opposed the centralization of the English monarchy at the expense of Parliament.

Writs of Assistance

Warrants that enabled English customs officials to board and search colonial vessels suspected of containing smuggled goods.

**PEOPLE TO KNOW****Charles II**

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William and Mary

William of Orange (later King William III) and his wife, Mary, ascended the English throne in 1689 in the Glorious Revolution.

**DATES TO KNOW****1642–1649**

The English Civil War pits the supporters of the monarchy against those of Parliament.

1649

King Charles I is beheaded, and England temporarily becomes a republic under Oliver Cromwell.

1651

The Navigation Ordinance is enacted by Oliver Cromwell to regulate trade with the colonies.

1660

The English Restoration brings King Charles II to the throne.

1663

The Staple Act bars colonists from importing goods that had not been made in England.

1673

The Plantation Duties Act taxes any enumerated goods that one colony traded with another.

1675

The Board of Trade is established by King Charles II to better enforce trade laws.

1686

King James II creates the Dominion of New England.

1688–1689

The Glorious Revolution involves the overthrowing of James II and the installment of William of Orange and his wife Mary as king and queen of England.

1689

Parliament issues the English Bill of Rights, and the colonies enter a period of salutary neglect extending into the 18th century.