The Significance of Society in the 18th Century: Conversations about Governance

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Summary

The American Revolution was an episode in a transatlantic outcry against the corruption of the British balance of power and liberty institutionalized in the Glorious Revolution of 1688–1689. English speakers during the 18th century reflected on this constitutional crisis within a larger conversation about the problem of human governance. Although many people excluded from Parliament supported political reform, if not revolution, they also sought remedies for the perversion of political power and influence in new forms of social power and influence. This article looks at the convergence of political and social discussions in a common discourse about the nature of power and the ways in which human beings influenced each other. The first section outlines the meanings of power and influence in British politics. The second section uses the novelist Sarah Fielding’s Remarks on Clarissa (1759) to delineate revolutionary notions about social power and influence. The third section turns to the speeches and writings of Edmund Burke in the run–up to the American Revolution to look at how English speakers deployed notions of social power to advocate for political reform.

Keywords: Power, influence, authority, society, politics, commerce, imagination, sentiment, judgement

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A portrait of 18th century England, from its princes to its paupers, from its metropolis to its smallest hamlet. The topics covered include - diet, housing, prisons, rural festivals, bordellos, plays, paintings, and work and wages. In this boldly drawn portrait of eighteenth-century England, Roy Porter defines a nation from its princes to its paupers, from its metropolis to its smallest hamlet. Read for my dissertation. A useful book to get the gist of the English eighteenth century, especially if you have an interest in the poor, trade, and society (of course). Wish it was more clearly divided into topics because the chapters are long and their titles are fairly ambiguous. This meant I wasn’t sure what I was about to read and if it was going to be useful or not. From the Hanoverian succession to the mid-18th century the texture and quality of life in Britain changed considerably but by no means evenly. Change was far more pronounced in the towns than in the countryside and among the prosperous than among the poor. Change and continuity. Historians have differed sharply over the impact these commercial and cultural innovations had on British society as a whole. Some have argued that only a minority of men and women were touched by them and that the countryside, which contained the majority of the population, continued on in its traditional ways and values. This is certainly true of parts of Britain. At first sight, eighteenth-century Russian society and its social structure seem to be a thoroughly studied field, with numerous books and articles on government policies and on certain social classes – nobility, clergy, townspeople, functionaries, peasants, and the Cossacks. These were the classes recognized by the Russian state, which in the eighteenth century made every effort to transform them into European-style judicial estates and to construct a social framework based on legislation created specifically for this purpose. An administrative reform by Peter the Great changed the situation somewhat, but even in the late nineteenth century, it remained the case that. 9 Andreas Kappeler, “Perepisi naseleniia v Rossii i Avstro-Vengrii kak imperskie proekty,” Ab Imperio …