

book. More than the absence of black and Latino perspectives, however, it's the lack of attention to working-class and poor whites that hampers his attempt to wade through a mire of diversity issues. Still, Benjamin's case against Whito-pias is clear: By tying power and privilege to racial identity, he suggests, they impoverish our understanding of one another and undercut collective commitment to a social contract. Fearsome institutions—though not populated with fearsome people.

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## HISTORY

### Britain's Big Year

Reviewed by Martin Walker

STEVE PINCUS HAS PRODUCED the most important new work of English history in many years. His revolutionary and persuasive analysis of the Glorious Revolution of 1688 overthrows the traditional Whig interpretation of steady progress toward representative and elected government through Parliament that Lord Macaulay proposed in the mid-1800s. Along with Macaulay's parallel narratives of the defeat of absolute monarchy, the flourishing of free institutions, and the triumph of commerce, this version has since become one of the founding myths of modern Britain—and also of the United States, whose Founding Fathers of 1776 saw themselves as defending the liberties secured in 1688.

Macaulay argued that the replacement of King James II, a Catholic who sought to be an absolute ruler, by his Protestant daughter Mary and her husband, William of Orange, the leader of the Dutch Republic, was a classic exercise in English good sense and moderation. He saw the Glorious Revolution as a

**1688:**  
The First Modern  
Revolution.

By Steve Pincus.  
Yale Univ. Press.  
647 pp. \$40

calm, almost bloodless event, led by the traditional aristocracy and gentry asserting the authority of Parliament. Pincus, a Yale historian, shows that it was far bloodier than the myth allows, with riots and armed skirmishes breaking out across the country. One minor incident in Reading saw 60 royal troops killed, far more than the number of protesters who died in the famous Champs de Mars massacre in 1791, during the French Revolution.

Supported by the traditional ruling classes though the 1688 revolution may have been, it clearly involved so many of the common people that it came strikingly close to national democracy in action. Pincus cites local records of association, voluntary statements of loyalty, to show that more than 450,000 people publicly affirmed their loyalty to

King William after

James sought to retake his throne with French and Irish troops in 1689 and an assassination plot against

William was uncovered in 1696. James's hopes of support from British

loyalists proved highly and fatally exaggerated.

In the national mythology, 1688 marks a quintessentially English event, despite the arrival of a Dutch prince and his crushing victory in 1690 on the banks of Ireland's River Boyne over James's Franco-Irish army. Pincus demonstrates that the Glorious Revolution was intimately bound up with the grander politics of Europe, and that King James's attempt to copy the Catholic and absolute monarchy of France's King Louis XIV represented a triple threat to British interests. First, James's monarchy was Catholic, whereas Britain was largely Protestant. Second, it was pro-French, whereas Britain was largely pro-Dutch, for commercial reasons as much as for religious ones. Third, it was an autocracy, whereas Britain had been advancing down the path of limited monarchy

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under law since the days of Magna Carta, and had, within living memory, fought a civil war and executed King Charles I to resist royal absolutism.

This analysis leads to Pincus's key insight, that the Glorious Revolution represented a battle between two competing projects of modernization. King James had sought to modernize the country along French lines, establishing a large standing army and professional tax-raising bureaucracy, and bringing crucial institutions into line, by, for instance, appointing militant Catholics to run Oxford and Cambridge colleges. The consequences of a successful counterrevolution by James, warned the English cleric James Gardiner, "would have been a French government." The Bishop of Gloucester preached that "twill be crime enough to be an Englishman."

But James faced the competing Whig and commercial project of modernization, whose great instruments were Parliament and the Bank of England, the latter of which was able to finance the national debt incurred by the new foreign policy of resisting French dominance across Europe. The Whig project was decentralized, whereas James had sought to consolidate power in his own person; it was participatory, whereas James had sought an exclusive power; it was urban and mercantile, whereas James and his Tory supporters had believed that all wealth came from the land; it was about limiting and challenging and balancing power, whether it was based in London or Paris or Rome, rather than submitting to it.

The Britain that resulted (which, after the Act of Union of 1707, included Scotland) transformed its political system, political economy, church and state systems, and foreign policy. Absolute monarchy and Catholicism had been defeated by Protestantism, Parliament, and commerce. Britain had become not simply a different state but a different country, and so deeply rooted were these changes that the cardinal principle of resisting any other power that sought to

dominate Europe has remained the bedrock of British policy for three centuries.

Why didn't this bold perception ever take hold? Pincus provides his own challenging answer: "A central point of this narrative has been that the hyper-specialization of history has not only made historical writing accessible to ever narrower audiences but that the breakdown of historical processes into social, religious, intellectual, political, constitutional, military, and diplomatic history has made it impossible to specify broad revolutionary shifts and identify their causes." Pincus proves himself wrong: This is an all-embracing narrative history in the grand tradition.

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## Tame Rebellion

Reviewed by Michael Anderson

HAS ANY DECADE OF THE American Century been written about more yet understood less than the Fifties? In both the popular and the scholarly minds, it exists as caricature, one held in

contrast with an equally cartoonish conception of the Sixties: either a prison preceding liberation, or Eden before the Apocalypse. "When conservatives look back to the 1950s," Alan Petigny writes, "they see an era of sexual reticence, a time when conservative Christianity was on the march, a halcyon era of order and tradition untarnished by the turmoil that would come. Conversely, liberals often vilify this time for its hypocrisy and repression." More sensibly, scholars have recognized that one decade flowed into its successor, that the Fifties paved the way for the Sixties. Although Petigny would have it otherwise, *The Permissive Society* demonstrates the truth of the middle way.

**THE PERMISSIVE SOCIETY:**  
America,  
1941-1965.

By Alan Petigny.  
Cambridge Univ. Press.  
292 pp. \$24.99