HIST 3316: Correspondence

Course Sample
Welcome to
HIST 3316
History of England Since 1603

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Lesson 1 - The Stuarts: The Early Stuart Dynasty

The Follies of James I

In complicated modern bureaucratic systems of government, the role of personality is not irrelevant but is muted by the very complexity of government machinery. Eccentricities on the part of a modern prime minister, chancellor, or president do not always have decisive force in the outcomes of government policy. In the direct-rule monarchy aspired to by the early Stuarts, the role of personality appeared to have more dramatic impact. Even so, in Stuart England it would be false to say the monarchical system had no means to compensate for a quirky sovereign if that sovereign (or those around him) could channel his quirks in politically non-destructive ways. James I signalry tried to do this. His household and royal court proved no more capable or willing to curb him. Thus, in a system in which much of the authority and activity of the government literally rested in the person of the king, James’ personality, his personal behavior, and the behavior of those around him did have an important (and negative) impact on the effectiveness of his rule. Moreover, the animosities, disappointments, and troubles spawned by James’ eccentricities created a difficult legacy for his son and successor, Charles I.

Our discussion here will be two-fold. On the one hand, we will take a look at the actual behavior and scandalous issues that dogged James and his court. We will also briefly survey the reaction among the propertied classes to James and his reputation. This second perspective will be important for some key reasons, as follow. (1) Though Elizabeth certainly had enemies, she only rarely found herself alienated from entire blocs of the Parliamentary classes. James did, and did so fairly early in his reign. (2) the alienation James induced directly affected his relations with Parliament and therefore his ability to fund his government. (3) while much of what angered people about James was political, critical issues were not political at all but extremely personal. On these issues (court favorites, family, spending), James was either not willing or not able to negotiate change or concession and therefore did nothing to ease the frustrations he caused.

First we should remember at least a few examples of the sorts of behavior that really bothered people about James. James himself was a notable eccentric. He was slovenly and unclean even by the standards of his day. It was said he feared cleaning himself. He rarely went about without armor protection around his chest and abdomen, despite the ridiculous bulging it caused under his clothes. When he spoke, he was frequently awkward, had trouble getting all his words out, and could even drool. He had a penchant for heavy drinking and an even greater penchant for spending money. He ran up a bigger debt in peacetime in the first few years of his reign than Elizabeth had done in over a decade of war with Spain. Despite the personal foibles, James was not hesitant to enunciate his own theory of the divine right of kings. He described himself as a direct lieutenant of God. It was difficult for people who actually met James to reconcile his personal image with that of the divine-right monarch he described himself to be.
Assignment One

This assignment marks the first time you will produce work for grading by me, meaning that we are now going to begin learning to communicate. Doing so takes time and a little trial and error. I promise to have Assignment 1 graded and back to you as soon as I can. You will then have an idea of the way I grade. You will also see that subsequent assignments are manageable, and you will have specific ideas about how to do them.

I also want to remind you that each individual assignment is only 4 percent of your total grade. You must complete all the assignments in order to take the exams and pass the course. However, if you happen to struggle, any one assignment grade by itself cannot harm you. Only a long-term pattern of low assignment grades can do so. Remember, as you progress through this course, I am available, primarily by e-mail, to answer your questions and concerns.

Complete this assignment and attach it here as a .rtf, .doc, or .docx file. Your document should have 1-inch margins and use 12-point Times New Roman font.

**Part I: Short Answer Question (30 points total)**

Answer all four questions.

1. List at least three reasons for the English population fluctuations between 1600 and 1650.
2. List at least three qualities that set the peerage and the gentry apart from the rest of English society.
3. Describe at least four characteristics of the English army in the seventeenth century.
4. Describe at least four beliefs James I held about kingship and his powers.

**Part II: Discussion-Essay Questions (70 points total)**

Answer any two. Each answer should be between 300 and 500 words.

1. What major developments in early Stuart-era society had the greatest impact on English life?
2. What were the limits on the power of early Stuart kings? In which areas were these kings most likely to exert power successfully?
3. Compare and contrast the reigns of James I and Charles I.
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