

PRIMARY SOURCE *from the* English Bill of Rights

After the Glorious Revolution in 1688 in which James II was overthrown, England's absolute monarchy became a constitutional monarchy where laws limited royal power. In 1689, Parliament drafted a Bill of Rights, stating the rights of Parliament and of individuals. As you read a portion of the English Bill of Rights, think about what England's monarchs could not do.

The English Bill of Rights, 1689

Whereas the said late King James II having abdicated the government, and the throne being thereby vacant, his Highness the prince of Orange (whom it hath pleased Almighty God to make the glorious instrument of delivering this kingdom from popery and arbitrary power) did (by the advice of the lords spiritual and temporal, and diverse principal persons of the Commons) caused letters to be written to the lords spiritual and temporal, being Protestants . . . to meet and sit at Westminster upon the two and twentieth day of January, in this year 1689, in order to such an establishment as that their religion, laws, and liberties might not again be in danger of being subverted; upon which letters elections have been accordingly made.

And thereupon the said lords spiritual and temporal and Commons, pursuant to their respective letters and elections, being now assembled in a full and free representation of this nation, taking into their most serious consideration the best means for attaining the ends aforesaid, do in the first place (as their ancestors in like case have usually done), for the vindication and assertion of their ancient rights and liberties, declare:

1. That the pretended power of suspending laws, or the execution of laws, by regal authority, without consent of parliament is illegal.
2. That the pretended power of dispensing with the laws, or the execution of law by regal authority, as it hath been assumed and exercised of late, is illegal.
3. That the commission for erecting the late court of commissioners for ecclesiastical [religious] causes, and all other commissions and courts of like nature, are illegal and pernicious [destructive].
4. That levying money for or to the use of the crown by pretense of prerogative, without grant

- of parliament, for longer time or in other manner than the same is or shall be granted, is illegal.
5. That it is the right of the subjects to petition the king, and all commitments and prosecutions for such petitioning are illegal.
6. That the raising or keeping a standing army within the kingdom in time of peace, unless it be with consent of parliament, is against law.
7. That the subjects which are Protestants may have arms for their defense suitable to their conditions, and as allowed by law.
8. That election of members of parliament ought to be free.
9. That the freedom of speech, and debates or proceedings in parliament, ought not to be impeached or questioned in any court or place out of parliament.
10. That excessive bail ought not to be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishments inflicted. . . .
13. And that for redress of all grievance and for the amending, strengthening, and preserving of the laws, parliament ought to be held frequently. And they do claim, demand, and insist upon all and singular the premises, as their undoubted rights and liberties. . . .

from E. P. Cheyney, Readings in English History (New York: Ginn and Company, 1922), 545-547. Reprinted in Peter N. Stearns, ed., Documents in World History, Vol. II (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1988), 13-14.

Research Option

Perceiving Relationships Read the United States Constitution's Bill of Rights. Then make a Venn diagram in which you compare and contrast the American Bill of Rights and the English Bill of Rights.