

**Usurper or Peacekeeper?**  
**Redefining Oliver Cromwell**

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## Abstract

The reign of Oliver Cromwell as Lord Protector is often portrayed as the reign of a revolutionary. A reexamination of Cromwell's actions and political stance presents a different perspective from the traditional historical perspective. As a prominent leader of the New Model Army that allowed Charles I to be executed Oliver Cromwell is painted as a usurper, however his behavior is not of a rebel leader, but a peacekeeper striving to prevent a complete crisis. Oliver Cromwell actively sought to maintain both legitimacy and peace in English rule through his role as Lord Protector of the English Commonwealth.

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## Introduction

A nation in crisis with an uncaring king. A country at war with itself. A unity threatened. This is the world that lays in front of Oliver Cromwell. Charles I had ruled England since 1625, but by 1641 the Irish people were in full rebellion. A serving Parliamentary member under Charles raised a levy to meet this threat to the kingdom. A former member of parliament answered the call to arms. This man's name was Oliver Cromwell. He would be leading a Calvary unit within the following year. The Irish were determined, but Cromwell's tactical superiority and leadership skills lead to a complete victory. His men loved him, and his fellow officers commended him. All was well as the victorious army returned home, or so it seemed. Instead of adulation and praise Cromwell's men received an order of disbarment, without pay. Seven months of service cast aside without a second thought. A forced return to their decrepit lives without a single penny to show for it. This course was simply unacceptable. Cromwell took immediate action in attempting to dissuade the king from his decree, but to no avail. The army reorganized itself under the new banner of the New Model Army. Continued efforts were made by Cromwell to seek recompense for his soldiers. No answer came. Driven to desperation, dissidents seized the king by force. Cromwell immediately interceded to prevent harm to Charles and attempt a final plea for both the sake of his men and the country. No resolution was to be had. With Cromwell sneered by the man responsible for the pain of his men he lead in combat what choice was left to him?<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica, John S. Morrill, and Maurice Ashley, s.v. "Oliver Cromwell" accessed September 20, 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Oliver-Cromwell>.

Charles I was executed January 30<sup>th</sup>, 1649 under the mournful eye of Cromwell.<sup>2</sup> The English monarch was shattered. With the king deceased and the heir apparent in hiding, the continuation of the current system of government was impossible. New leadership had to be installed. The military leaders of the New Model Army gathered to discuss the most appropriate way forward. After much debate the leadership decided to fill the vacancy in the kingship with a new line of succession. The honor of leading the country forward would be granted to the man whose wisdom and strategic foresight had swiftly brought down both the Irish rebellion and maintained the stability and structure of the New Model Army, Oliver Cromwell. With the honor of stepping into the esteemed role of King of England and leading the nation to a new age Oliver Cromwell proudly proclaimed “No”.<sup>3</sup> He would not accept the ultimate power of the crown and the establishment of his bloodline as royal. Instead he created the new title of Lord Protector whose duty was to maintain the stability of the realm and uphold the integrity of the British crown.

The creation of the role of Lord Protector was both innovative and radical. With unsolidified boundaries of power and lack of parliamentary checks the establishment and operation of this new office could be seen through multiple perspectives. Constant challenges were raised in the face of this new form of governance throughout the years of Cromwell’s reign and in the year proceeding it. The passage of time has not dampened this debate. The literature of many historians classifies Cromwell as a regicidal dictator; even Winston Churchill proclaimed Cromwell as a military dictator.<sup>4</sup> These sources unfairly treat the man who prevented civil

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<sup>2</sup> Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* (Edinburgh: R&R Clark LTD, 1972), 49-51.

<sup>3</sup> Morrill and Ashley, “Oliver Cromwell”.

<sup>4</sup> Winston Churchill, *A History of English-Speaking Peoples* (Dodd, Mead & Company, 1956), 314.

revolution from overtaking peace and order in England. Oliver Cromwell as Lord Protector prevented the fall of British legitimacy and peace without usurping the British crown in the hopes of a future progressive restoration of the monarchy. The examination of various historians' works as compared to the words and actions of Oliver Cromwell will show a discrepancy between Oliver Cromwell's character and how he has come to be perceived.



Oliver Cromwell

Cooper, Samuel. *Oliver Cromwell*. 1656. Primary Collection, National Portrait Gallery, London.

## Historiography

The man who declined the opportunity to obtain ultimate power. This is a fact that can define a man's entire character and yet is largely ignored by many historians writing on the history of Stuart England and Oliver Cromwell. The Stuart period refers to the continuing reign of the Stuart dynasty from 1603 to 1714 and includes the interruption to this dynastic line after the death of Charles I and the continuance of rule by Oliver Cromwell. Literature is rich with examples of Cromwell's legacy, however most peer-reviewed sources read as scathing rebukes of Cromwell's actions. J. P. Kenyon is one such author who in his 1974 book *Stuart England* reports Cromwell as "dangerously inept".<sup>5</sup> Kenyon's examination of Cromwell in his role as Lord Protector presents an image of incompetence. Drawing from the correspondence of parliamentary members, Kenyon could only surmise that Cromwell's actions constituted that of a usurper and rebel. He was a man with the opportunity of take command of a disgruntled army to use against a weakened member of the crown in an attempt to seize power. Kenyon claims that only fear of his former military comrades prevented Cromwell from seizing the power of the crown.<sup>6</sup> Allegedly, the prevention of the reformation of monarchy cast the commons into a frenzy of political extremism that severely damaged that future prosperity of England. For Kenyon only the removal of Cromwell from power could allow proper governance to be restored with the restoration of previous line of succession for the English crown.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> J.P. Kenyon, *Stuart England* (New York: St. Martians Press, 1974), 174.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 178.

<sup>7</sup> Kenyon, *Stuart England*, 150-178.

The passing of decades since Kenyon's publication has not stopped historians from criticizing Oliver Cromwell. As recently as 2009 Blair Worden wrote his article "Oliver Cromwell and the Protectorate" in which a stunning show of sharp verbosity is displayed.<sup>8</sup> Throughout the text Worden repeatedly berates the character of Cromwell insisting upon the notion that he was an incompetent leader and poor substitute for the royal dynasty. Worden draws heavily upon the letters of Henry Cromwell, Oliver Cromwell's second son, to hone his argument. Henry Cromwell was not very involved in his father's reign and held distaste for politics.<sup>9</sup> Henry's correspondences to Oliver reflect this as so far as the only continual theme of the letters relates to the amount of personal allowance he was to receive.<sup>10</sup> To use the detached son as an indictment of the father's reign does not seem a fair measure of personal achievement. Painting Oliver Cromwell as incompetent through the gaze of the estranged son should not be how history remembers Oliver Cromwell.

Not all historians immediately seek to discredit Cromwell. Among the most accredited historians of the Stuart era is Christopher Hill who seeks to enlighten readers of the realities of history through the perspectives of the general populace. With 14 books published on 17<sup>th</sup> century England including several specifically on Oliver Cromwell, Hill is often regarded as the expert on Cromwellian rule. His expertise can be witnessed in his most famous of publications *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* in which a complete history is transcribed of the turbulent and innovative period of time that was the establishment

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<sup>8</sup> Blaire Worden, "Oliver Cromwell and the Protectorate", *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 20, (May 2009): 57-83.

<sup>9</sup> Oliver Cromwell, *Oliver Cromwell's Letters and Speeches: with elucidations* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1850), 125.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.



and reign of Oliver Cromwell.<sup>11</sup> This encompassing field of study is matched by the breadth of his citations which dwarfs most other authors among his peerage. Amongst his focuses are the rising social tensions of the English people, the transformation of the New Model Army, and operation of law under Cromwellian rule. Hill's perspective sets aside interpretation of character in favor of capturing the tremulous scene that was the Stuart period. Despite being published over 40 years ago in 1972, Hill's magnum opus still remains the premiere source for historical study of Oliver Cromwell and the English revolutionary period.

Many historians have written on the Stuart period and Oliver Cromwell each contributing their own interpretation on the proper historical significance of Cromwellian rule. Approbation or blame can be cast differently by the various methods of interpreting the sources. For most historians, the villain in this story of turbulence is Oliver Cromwell in his successful rebellion to usurp the throne. For Kenyon, Cromwell was dangerous and inept. For Worden, Cromwell was incompetent. For Hill, Cromwell was a product of circumstance. After examination of the works of these authors and the correspondence and speeches of Oliver Cromwell another explanation comes forward. The actions of Cromwell were not designed to be that of a usurper of incompetence, but instead a bulwark of stability attempting to maintain legitimacy and peace. A new perspective brought forth by this paper will cast new light on the actions of Oliver Cromwell that have not been properly serviced by other historians.

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<sup>11</sup> Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down*, 1-20.

### Beginnings of Cromwell in Face of National Unrest

England in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century was a nation of unrest. Frequent war had made the populace weary of the leadership. War taxes and conscription had taken their toll as fractures began to form throughout society. Extremist clubs, such as the Levelers with their primary goal of leveling all of society, began to gain sway as membership increased.<sup>12</sup> The constant expenditure of capital by the king had led to the worst economic hardship for the peasantry in generations. Starving, desperate, and angry the peasantry repeatedly resisted in their own ways. King Charles I responded to the rising rabble from below with only disinterest. For the members of parliament the social tensions bubbling from below could only be dealt with by swift and decisive military action. In the interests of suppressing any hint of rebellion, the members of parliament, with the support of Charles I, ordered the creation of a new military army under the leadership of a stern religious man name Sir Thomas Fairfax. Among his selective officers was a former member of parliament whose solidified Puritan beliefs were similar to his own. This man's name was Oliver Cromwell and he was appointed by Fairfax to the position of Lieutenant General of the Horse in the New Model Army.<sup>13</sup>

The New Model Army was not a traditional military unit of the time. Most armies would be populated by local levies hosted by various counties under the leadership of nobility, however the weakness of this system is that the men could not be taken far from home. The New Model Army was established on a different style of commission. The men that formed this new army from the officers all the way to the foot soldier were mostly volunteers unlike any English

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<sup>12</sup> Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down*, 11.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 11- 18.

sanctioned army before them.<sup>14</sup> These men were shaped by the economic and social tensions of the period into men desperate for relief. The formation of a volunteer force seemed to be an ideal choice for personal advancement and escape from their previously unsatisfactory lives for the soldiers and ideal for parliament who could deploy this force in any location domestic or otherwise that needed suppressing. The New Model Army was deployed immediately in the English Civil war, and then the 1645 uprising of clubman who were in opposition to both royalty and parliamentarians, and then lastly in the Second English Civil war.<sup>15</sup>

The New Model Army followed orders swiftly defeating each and every enemy with great efficiency. In particular Cromwell was commended several times for his military stratagem and exemplary discipline within his unit. Discipline and loyalty proved essential to this new army as the men enlisted within this army could be described as nothing more than common men in uniform with views closer to the enemy than the gentry.<sup>16</sup> The ideologies of many of the men proved to be much closer to the rebels than the members of parliament they were contracted to, but loyalty remained as the dream of a better life lay ahead of them. As Oliver Cromwell himself put it “Authorities and powers are the ordinance of God”.<sup>17</sup> God’s laws were to protect the state’s authority as the state was meant to protect God’s laws. For Cromwell all of history was preordained with the elite blessed by God. It was only natural for the king to maintain power in accordance to the will of the divine. Only betrayal could sever this divine proclamation.

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<sup>14</sup> Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down*, 46.

<sup>15</sup> Morrill and Ashley, “Oliver Cromwell”.

<sup>16</sup> Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down*, 20.

<sup>17</sup> Oliver Cromwell, “Letter to Colonel Robert Hammond, November 25, 1648”. Oliver Cromwell's Letters and Speeches: with elucidations (London: Chapman and Hall, 1850), 107.

### The Crown in Jeopardy

Oliver Cromwell felt betrayed by his ordained king. The New Model Army raised by parliament was now ordered to stand down without pay by Charles I. Cromwell had to contest his personal held belief that the king was blessed against the fact that he had broken his word and stolen the livelihood of Cromwell's men. The effect of forced disarmament is drastic and immediate. The voluntary forces of the New Model Army with barely suppressed radical viewpoints suddenly exploded. Army organization suddenly broke out into a form of democracy with each unit proposing ideas for the proper next course of action.<sup>18</sup> Radicals came forth from every unit suggesting they become the very revolutionary force that had been assembled to fight. Cromwell, who by February 1645 had become second-in-command of the New Model Army, stood against these radical ideas instead attempting to restore the status of the army. Peaceful negotiations were attempted between Cromwell and Charles I with the simplest of terms. Cromwell asked for the reinstatement of the New Model Army and the proper compensations be provided for the men under his banner. Letters and communications were continuously sent for the better part of the next year all with the same result. The king would not recant his order or provide any amenity to the army now asking for their deserved recompense. Cromwell did all he could to maintain the status quo for the kingdom of England, but with an army of disgruntled soldiers spurred by the social unrest that brewed throughout all of England, time was quickly running out for a resolution.<sup>19</sup>

Cromwell's ideals were questioned in 1648 by his subordinate Colonel Robert Hammond in a letter concerning his pursuit of a peaceful resolution despite commanding an army. In

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<sup>18</sup> Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down*, 50.

<sup>19</sup> Morrill and Ashley, "Oliver Cromwell".

response Cromwell said, “I do not think therefore the authorities (Parliament and Charles I) may do anything and yet such obedience be due. All agree that there are such cases in which it is lawful to resist”.<sup>20</sup> These words give credence to the concern of Hammond and indeed many of the soldiers of Cromwell’s army, but concerns still afflicted Cromwell as he still sought a different path. Immediately following his concession Cromwell questions “The query is whether ours be such a case? This ingenuously is the true question”.<sup>21</sup> The use of force to usurp the crown of England was an act of desperation left for only the direst of circumstance. In Cromwell’s mind the predetermined path of life created by God could only be usurped by God himself. To attempt to defy God’s plan was simply unacceptable for Cromwell, however questions of the exact nature of God’s plan for England began to rise. Cromwell asked of Hammond “whether this army be not a lawful power, called by God to oppose and fight the King upon stated grounds?”<sup>22</sup> Even after continuous rejection by the king to fulfill his duty Cromwell still believed that the king’s actions could fall within the mystery that was the lord’s plan. Cromwell ultimately rejected the notion that violence should be used to disrupt the public order when the possibility of peaceful negotiations remained. In the meantime he would have to maintain order within the New Model Army to prevent acts of excessive violence or full on rebellion.<sup>23</sup>

If agitators, such as the levelers, controlled the New Model Army a system more like a military dictatorship would have emerged encouraging such acts. The combination of high social unrest and the unofficial standing of the New Model Army made for a breeding ground of

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<sup>20</sup> Oliver Cromwell, “Letter to Colonel Robert Hammond, November 25, 1648”, 107.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 108.

<sup>23</sup> Barbara Silberdick Feinberg , “The Political Thought of Oliver Cromwell: Revolutionary or Conservative?” *Social Research* 35, no. 3 (Autumn 1968): 445-465.

radicals within the army. Cromwell warned of this faction by stating “There was a third party (within the New Model Army) little dreamed of, that was endeavoring to have no other power but the sword”.<sup>24</sup> Cromwell denounced the actions of such radicals and took primary responsibility for ejecting several leveler supported members of leadership in the New Model Army. He believed in the pursuit of justice by respectable and modest means. The uncouth actions of these radicals would undermine his quest for peace. His beliefs were shown in his denunciation of the leveler society as he verbally attacked them. “[They are] a despicable and contemptible generation of men, persons differing little from beasts”.<sup>25</sup> Cromwell pursued the path of peace without demeaning the values he held, but soon the decisive moment for the future of England would be thrust upon him.<sup>26</sup>

On June 3<sup>rd</sup> 1647 whilst the majority of the New Model Army was convening for an army council, Charles I was taken prisoner by George Joyce in the name of the New Model Army. Cries for execution immediately began to ring from many regiments of the army. Faced with a sudden crisis Cromwell immediately departed for Hampton Court where the king was being held. Fear of further division within his ranks hurried his travels as he went for a last ditch effort to convince the king to honor his debts. The meeting proved a waste as even in captivity Charles I refused to acknowledge Cromwell’s offer. It was clear that the king would not offer any concession.<sup>27</sup> With diplomacy a complete failure Cromwell had no choice but to stand aside and allow the members of his army radicalized from years of being ignored to decide the king’s fate.

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<sup>24</sup> Oliver Cromwell, 507.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down*, 53-54, 98.

<sup>27</sup> Silberdick, “The Political Thought of Oliver Cromwell: Revolutionary or Conservative?”, 9-10.

After a brief trial held by the Rump House of Commons, which housed only favorable members after being forcibly purged, Charles I was executed on January 30, 1649.<sup>28</sup>

### Hiatus of British Monarchy

The death of Charles I left Britain without proper leadership. The previously decreed successor Charles II had fled for mainland Europe. Social unrest within England grew to unprecedented levels. Clubs such as the Levelers and the Diggers offered up political reforms to match their extremist philosophies. Minority religious groups like the Baptists, Quakers, and Muggletonians took new flight in the social upheaval. No custom, religion, or practice went without being scrutinized with new fervor. Hill describes the state of England with similar ferocity “There was a great overturning, questioning, revaluing, of everything in England”.<sup>29</sup> Indeed nothing present from the old administration was safe. The entire state of the country was at risk of being radically altered. For Cromwell this fact was greatly distressing. Being born into the middle gentry gave Cromwell a satisfactory life and an appreciation for the British identity. He strongly believed that the history, culture, nationality and divine providence of England gave the Englishman superior social and political status.<sup>30</sup> To completely shatter that system would only serve to completely destroy what he had come to believe of the superiority of the British identity. He knew that without leadership the entire kingdom of England and the identity of the Englishman could be at risk. Someone would have to step into the role of the king to stabilize the country and manage the radical changes that threatened peace and security.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Morrill and Ashley, “Oliver Cromwell”.

<sup>29</sup> Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down*, 12.

<sup>30</sup> Silberdick, “The Political Thought of Oliver Cromwell: Revolutionary or Conservative?”, 452.

<sup>31</sup> Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down*, 11-14, 20, 278-279.

The army council of the New Model Army came to a quick resolution. The future of the state of England should be kept in the hands of those who understood the plight the army had gone through and would keep their best interests in mind. Leader of the New Model Army and previous Member of Parliament, Oliver Cromwell was deemed the best choice. Cromwell could not deny his involvement in the events surrounding the forced vacancy of the British throne. He agreed to take a leadership role in government to dissuade the downfall of British rule. Despite his shaken faith in the rule of Charles I, Cromwell still believed in the determined path of royalty was set by God. To usurp the throne for himself would be to betray the trust he had in God's plan. In lieu of a pre-destined king, Cromwell arrived at the best solution he could think of to maintain public order while maintaining the image of England. He would absorb all of the British Isles into a grand republic called the English Commonwealth on May 19, 1649.<sup>32</sup> The Commonwealth would be headed by a chairman of the council state with the title of Lord Protector, the first of which would be Cromwell. The administrative duties of the chairman would not be immediately enacted as Cromwell was called upon as the Commonwealth's Lord Protector to lead his men in campaigns against both a faction of loyalists in Scotland and a munity of extremist puritans under the leveler's banner.<sup>33</sup> After ensuring stability for the new republic, Cromwell returned to his seat of chairman in an effort to maintain the ideal that is Britain.

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<sup>32</sup> Morrill and Ashley, "Oliver Cromwell".

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.



### The Commonwealth as a Stopgap

The establishment of the Commonwealth was a revolutionary act unprecedented in British history. The creation of a republic that encompassed all of the British Isles would drastically affect the citizens of Britain as the state moved in an unknown direction. The creation of a new form of governance that replaced British monarchy casts an image of revolutionaries upon Cromwell and his New Model Army. On the surface the replacement of one form of government with another by means of military power may give that impression, however a closer examination of the focus and operation of the Commonwealth reveals the truth to be much more intricate. The commonwealth was established to be merely a stopgap for the British monarchy until proper divine rule could be rightfully restored in a peaceful and just manner.

The first indicator that the Commonwealth was not meant as a permanent government structure was the attitude portrayed by Cromwell. He shunned the establishment of new institutions under the republic and prevented the destruction of old institutions of the monarchy. Various members of parliament following the creation of the republic took the opportunity to try and change property rights and other common laws to benefit what they believed to be the new social order.<sup>34</sup> Cromwell firmly rejected all challenges to the old common laws. On frequent occasions he dismissed members of parliament who attempted to pass such ordinances. Cromwell was steadfast in his stance that the Commonwealth will accept the existing social structure. A revolution entails the forceful removal of not only the governing body, but also the institutions that upheld the previous administration. Cromwell's initiative to not target these institutions, but actually defend them from alteration by the new administration would only

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<sup>34</sup> Silberdick, "The Political Thought of Oliver Cromwell: Revolutionary or Conservative?", 9.

ensure the continuation of the monarchy's influence in the new republic. Only the establishment of a new source of influence by means of the creation of new institutions would combat the presence of monarchy. In this regard Cromwell once again stepped in.<sup>35</sup>

The beginnings of the Commonwealth came with it the enacting of over 80 ordinances from 1649 until summoning the First Protectorate Parliament on September 3, 1654.<sup>36</sup> The first of these ordinances provided the necessary structure for the basic operation of the republic such as the official commission of select officials to oversee proper government supervision. The next set of ordinances were concessions made to appease the people and dissuade further unrest. Appeasing the people reduced the risk of rebellion in the Commonwealth that could have undone all attempts made to further the English cause. Examples of these concessions include the reform of the education system, the reduced use of capital punishment, and the fulfillment of military debts. The last of the ordinances were ordered by Cromwell to satisfy his Puritan beliefs and he personally believed would benefit the English state regardless of leadership. The most controversial of these decisions was the readmission of the Jewish population into England in 1653.<sup>37</sup> Despite the large number of personally commanded ordinances, Cromwell did not exert his power to further strengthen himself or the Protectorate to an extreme decree nor did he target supporters of the monarchy. With executive power Cromwell would only have needed to suggest the elimination of the old guard in order to purge the republic completely of the old

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<sup>35</sup> Silberdick, "The Political Thought of Oliver Cromwell: Revolutionary or Conservative?", 7-9.

<sup>36</sup> Morrill and Ashley, "Oliver Cromwell".

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

administration, and yet he allowed influential men to retain their positions to secure the future of the British state.<sup>38</sup>

The beginnings of the Commonwealth were fraught with decisions that ran contrary to the mindset of a usurper. This pattern would continue throughout the reign of Oliver Cromwell as Lord Protector. Eight years after the establishment of the Commonwealth the second Parliament in accordance to the Humble Petition and Advice sought to create a new royal dynasty for Oliver Cromwell and his decedents.<sup>39</sup> The elevation of the Cromwell name into that of a monarchical dynastic family would allow not only Oliver Cromwell to ascend to the throne, but create a new line of succession that would make his six sons and three daughters royalty. The offer could tempt anyone with the promise of eternal power and prominence, but for Cromwell it was impossible. He still believed in the ordained royal line of the English throne and knew he would not be the one to occupy the throne. Cromwell refused to ratify the Humble Petition and Advice until it was amended to exclude all mentions of the creation of a new royal dynasty. Instead the Humble Petition and Advice would be modified to only provide changes to the operations of the Protectorate granting some of the powers normally exercised by a king to several other officials within the Protectorate.<sup>40</sup> The new Humble Petition and Advice would be ratified not to entrench the protectorate, but to modify it to better serve the people until its utility was no longer required. Cromwell would choose to instead remain in the position of Lord

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<sup>38</sup> Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down*, 278-279.

<sup>39</sup> The Humble Petition and Advice was a codified constitution presented to Oliver Cromwell on February 23, 1657. The intention of the petition was to offer Cromwell a hereditary monarchy for the British crown along with minor changes to the Protectorate.

<sup>40</sup> Worden, "Oliver Cromwell and the Protectorate", 78.

Protector continuing to maintain peace and stability without establishing any semblance of proper succession.<sup>41</sup>

Cromwell's refusal to establish his name into a new monarchical dynastic family also removed the traditional system of title inheritance. With a traditional monarchy the elder son will inherit the estate of the father including his treasury, prestige, and titles. In the British Commonwealth no such system had been instituted. The only method of ensuring proper succession would have been political action by the Lord Protector to publicly announce and establish his selected heir as the continuation of his reign. No such action was taken by Cromwell. The republic was meant only as a temporary measure against the mounting violence and instability that came from the breakdown of the monarchy. To establish an heir would be to suggest that the Protectorate was a permanent fixture in England. Cromwell reflects this viewpoint in the way he separates his political life from his personal one. Letters to his various children reflect his fatherly ways in wishing them well and reflecting upon memories as well as imparting some personal advice on how to live a happier life. In Cromwell's correspondence to his brother he refers to his eldest son, Richard who would be traditionally responsible for the Cromwell estate. Oliver is critical of his son's laziness, but never suggests that he enter into a political position or aspire to a higher post.<sup>42</sup> Kenyon phrases this as "Cromwell's failure to make any proper disposition for his successor practically ensured the restoration of the monarchy".<sup>43</sup> Kenyon obviously views this lack of a heir as a failure, but from the perspective of treating the

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<sup>41</sup> Worden, "Oliver Cromwell and the Protectorate", 78-79.

<sup>42</sup> Oliver Cromwell, "For my beloved Brother, Richard Mayor, Esquire, at Hursley, November 13, 1649", 234-235.

<sup>43</sup> Kenyon, *Stuart England*, 178.

Commonwealth as a transitional phase between monarchical governments Kenyon has only supported the point that Cromwell wished for the eventual return of the monarchy. It would be unfair to suggest that Cromwell wished to restore the monarchy with his passing, but nevertheless this happenstance would occur in the years after his death.<sup>44</sup>

### Conclusion

Oliver Cromwell and the Commonwealth of England served the English people since its inception in 1649 throughout most of the following decade. Although Cromwell's life could not be described as sanguine, the year 1658 proved to be an unmitigated disaster. At the start of August of that year Oliver's daughter Elizabeth suddenly fell ill and passed on the 6<sup>th</sup>. The news devastated Cromwell who had always been close to his family. The emotional impact of the death of his daughter who had shared his wife's name soon would manifest itself physically. The physicians proclaimed it to be a combination of malaria and "stone", which was the colloquial term for a urinary or kidney infection. Hastened by the death of his daughter, Oliver Cromwell perished due to sepsis on September 3, 1658. The ceremony was befitting a man of stature as he was laid down next to his daughter at Westminster Abbey.<sup>45</sup>

The Commonwealth with no established procedure for succession floundered for a short period before capitulating to Charles II who restored the British monarchy. The tumultuous age of the republic was over. The restoration of the monarchy maintained public order with great ease as many of the institutions and much of the power structure was maintained. Cromwell's protectorate merged seamlessly into the new monarchy, but his legacy did not. Shortly after

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<sup>44</sup> Morrill and Ashley, "Oliver Cromwell".

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

becoming king Charles II ordered Cromwell's body uninterred, hanged, decapitated, his body burned, and his head mounted on the top of Westminster Hall throughout the entirety of his reign. In the end Cromwell would be remembered by the slander of Charles II as a usurper of the British throne even though he adamantly declined the position.<sup>46</sup>

Most historical works about the Stuart period and Oliver Cromwell reflect the same perception Charles II had following his ascension to power. They portray Oliver Cromwell as a usurper to the throne and a black spot on English history. The organization of the New Model Army, the ousting of the king, and the establishment of a new government would seem to support this assertion, however the deeper analysis performed here reveals a different story. A man seeking compensation for his betrayed soldiery, allowing an execution of an unjust king after years of failed negotiations, and maintaining peace and stability in lieu of a proper monarchy. This is the life of the man named Oliver Cromwell. After much research I personally believe that Oliver Cromwell was a just man who sought to maintain the country that he loved. History may have cast him as differently, but history is never truly fixed. History is continuously written by the hands of the new generation of historians. The way we perceive the past can evolve past the precedents set by previous historians. You can choose how to view the events surrounding Stuart England and Cromwell. This leaves us with the last question, how will you view Oliver Cromwell, as a usurper or a peacemaker?

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<sup>46</sup> Morrill and Ashley, "Oliver Cromwell".

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