

A2 Depth Study and Historical Controversies.
Challenging Authority: Protest, Reform and Response in Britain 1760-1830

This option examines the relationship between Governments and protest movements in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Central to the early part of the period is the challenge to the Crown from the self-publicist and rakish John Wilkes, around whom ordinary Englishmen gathered to challenge the authority of the King and his Ministers. Wilkes was followed by the reformer Christopher Wyvill who established the principle of petitioning Parliament.

Thereafter, the course focuses principally on the effects of the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars on British politics. Many English Radicals saw the French Revolution as an example of the establishment of libertarian principles which Britain should follow. Others saw it as a dangerous threat to order in Britain, something to be resisted. Even after the end of the War in 1815 its effects continued to be felt and Radicalism continued to be an issue in Britain. The uneasy relationship between the Tory Government of Lord Liverpool and Radical pressure groups seeking reform or revolution forms the main focus of study.

Key questions and content

1. John Wilkes and the Wilkite Movement

Wilkes' challenge to Bute's Ministry through his newspaper North Briton in 1763, Government attempts to silence/arrest Wilkes, the Middlesex Elections of 1768. Growth of Wilkite movement (Wilkes and Liberty). Wilkes' significance in terms of constitutional, legal and political reform.

2. Christopher Wyvill and the Association Movement

Petitioning of Parliament from 1779-1783, links between Wyvill's Association Movement and the Rockingham Whig Party. Legislation in 1782 to reduce corruption in Parliament, failure of attempts to reform Parliament.

3. Impact of the French Revolution on Britain

Dispute of ideas between Edmund Burke and Tom Paine. Effects in terms of strengthening Pitt's Tory Ministry, the growth of Radical organisations aiming for reform in England. Parallel growth of Loyalist and Evangelical groups pledged to support government and aim for humanitarian reform. Government response to Radicalism – legislation, propaganda etc.

4. Post-War Radicalism 1815-22

Revival of Radical activity after the war. Attempts to overthrow Government. Lord Liverpool's response.

5. Liberal Toryism 1822-27

Return of economic prosperity after 1822. Extent of liberalism in Tory policy, and relative decline of radical activity. Work of Peel, Huskisson and Robinson in developing economic growth free trade etc.

6. Tory decline 1827-30

Return of adverse economic conditions, death of Lord Liverpool, threat from Daniel O'Connell's Catholic Association in Ireland, Catholic Emancipation Act 1829, split in Tory Party, increasing demands for Parliamentary Reform.

Associated Controversies

These issues will be studied from an historiographical perspective, i.e. it will be necessary to understand how the issues divide historians, and what are the main lines of thinking between them.

1. How much of a threat did extra-parliamentary reform protests and conspiracies pose to the authorities in the years 1815-30?
2. Did the impact of the industrial revolution in the years 1780-1830 damage the lives and limit the opportunities of the labouring classes in Britain?

Reading

J.W. Derry – Politics in the age of Fox, Pitt and Liverpool

I.R. Christie – Wars and Revolutions, Britain 1760-1815

I.R. Christie – Wilkes, Wyvill and Reform

G. Rude – Wilkes and Liberty

E. Royle and J. Walvin – English Radicals and Reformers 1760-1848

C. Emsley – Britain and the French Revolution

D.G. Wright – Popular Radicalism – The Working Class experience 1780-1880

E. Royle – Revolutionary Britannia

J. Mori – Britain in the age of the French Revolution

H. Martin – Britain 1815-1914

E.P. Thompson – The Making of the English Working Class

Course Outline

Autumn Term Week	Area of Study	Reading	Assessment
1	- 18 th century Britain, political background 1688-1760. - Ministerial instability 1760-1770	Departmental handouts	Timeline test
2	John Wilkes 1760's - North Briton affair - 3 court cases - Middlesex elections	Departmental handouts	
3	John Wilkes 1770's - Reporting debates - Links to American colonists	Departmental handouts D.G. Wright 27-30	Essay What were Wilkes' achievements as a reformer?
4	Wyvill and the Association Movement, 1779-1783 - Yorkshire Association - Petitioning Parliament - Links to Rockingham Whigs - Economical Reform 1782	Departmental handout	
5	Overall significance of the Wilkes and Wyvill movements.	Christie 222-231 Rude 191-198 Royle and Walvin 13-31	Essay How fair is it to dismiss the Wilkes and Wyvill reform movements as insignificant?
6	Effect of French Revolution on political ideas in England	Emsley 9-20	Worksheet 6 structured questions on the Emsley text
7	Radical pressure groups of the 1780's and 1790's - Aims and Activities	Archer 62-67 Derry 71-106 Royle 13-35 Emsley 21-65	Document exercise
8	Response of Pitt's government to Radicalism - Legislation - Loyalism - Evangelicalism	As above	Essay How serious was the Radical threat to Pitt's government in the 1790's, and how effectively did Pitt deal with it?
9	Party alignment and changes of government 1802-1812	Departmental handout O'Gorman	Timeline test
10	Post-war distress and government legislation: - Corn Laws - Income Tax repeal - Demobilisation, unemployment, agricultural problems	Departmental handout Martin	Essay Why did the end of the war in 1815 make life difficult for many Englishmen?
11 + 12	Radical organisations and outbreaks of radical activity 1812-1820	Royle 35-60 Derry 174-187	Essay How serious was the threat of Radicalism to the government of lord Liverpool and how effectively did he deal with it?

