

The role of riots in the eighteenth century



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During the 18th century, riots were a frequent occurrence all throughout England. Several of these riots occurred for different reasons, some that often occurred as a result of how things were like in this time period for much of the English people. As a result of these so called riots, it had a profound effect on the economy in the 18th century, and would wind up changing the way the economy was during the course of these riots. Rising food prices, various protests and actions taken are all causes as to why so many riots occurred in the 18th century, and how it would play a big role in regulating the economy at the time.

All throughout the 18th century, the economy had suffered greatly from various different reasons. For one thing, food shortages were a major contributor to numerous riots in England during the 1700s. In Edward Palmer Thompson's book *The Moral of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century*, he states that a majority of the riots were known as rebellions of the belly. This means that a majority of rioting in the eighteenth century was a result of people in England that were upset and angry over food prices being too high. To further add on to this point, in the online journal entitled *Food Riots In North-West England 1790-1801* by Alan Booth, the author illustrates how much of this part of England experienced food shortages during the 18th century. In the journal, it states how all food riots between 1795 and 1801 was a result of wheat and oat crops. The author writes this because during the time period in north-western England, food shortages were noticeable, especially when it came down to producing oats and wheat crops. This helps backup the point of how rising food shortages were eminent in certain parts of England, which would attribute to numerous riots that helped regulate the

economy. The author continues to generate more by showing how when the wheat crops had failed, prices of the wheat increased dramatically, with the peak prices of wheat at the highest point in March 1796. When food became a commodity amongst English consumers And it was becoming more and more scarce, it didn't help the people more that the wages of food prices soared drastically, making it hard for people to purchase food. With food shortages and prices increasing, it finally lead to a series of riots that occurred as retaliation against food shortages. The author of the journal shows that most riots occurred during times of price increases in north-western england, also showing how several townships in the country recorded large riots in 1795 and 1796, all as a result of prices in food rising. This relates back to the main question of how riots changed the economy in the eighteetth century because when the time came and food shortages were eminent in the country of England and food prices soared through the roof, the people of England took it into their own hands to make their voices head by rioting and showing their displeasure with the food prices rising as a result of shortage of food. The prices of food had a profound effect on the English community. For example, the cost of grain increased significantly in the North-west part of England, with the price of grain doubling. The author writes how in the township of Wigan, the price of oats doubled from 3 shillings to a whopping 8 shillings during this time period of the eighteenth century, which was all a result of shortages of food. All throughout the north-west regions of England, different areas were getting hit hard with rising food prices, including Stockport and Chester. In Stockport, the prices of potatoes had almost doubled while in Chester, the prices of barley jumped up almost triple in size, selling for 8 shillings from the original cost of 3 shillings. As a result of all of

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this, riots were seen all around England, including the North-West region. With frequent food prices increasing, several mobs were formed, as seen in the same journal, when the author writes how a mob attacked several different grain houses by smashing the windows into rubble and also how other mobs destroyed local corn mills. All of these ties back with the central argument because it illustrates how rising food prices had a profound effect on those living in these townships during the eighteenth century. It also shows thoroughly how people took matters into their own hands and began attacking others due to frustration and anger in the English community. Another example as to how food shortages had an imminent effect on England can be found in John Lea's web page called Crime and Protest in Eighteenth Century England. The author includes a brief but concise section on the bread riots in the eighteenth century, stating how bread riots were caused as a result of rising prices. The author adds on to this by stating that the rising food prices for bread was a hard impact on the poorer class, and that farmers would sell bread to the people when food was becoming more and more scarce and when food prices for bread would be at much higher prices, giving more money to the farmers. As a result of this, the author writes that riots had occurred as a form of having their voices heard. This relates back to the central question because it connects with how riots played an important part to the eighteenth century economy. All of these points on rising food prices relates back to the central argument of how riots had a role in regulating the economy because of what impact high food prices had on a majority of people in England. As seen in north-western England and other parts of England, it was a time of struggle that ended up in riots occurring all throughout the country. With high food prices in mind, <https://assignbuster.com/the-role-of-riots-in-the-eighteenth-century/>

similar protests and the formation of several different mobs in England would only add to the mix of how rioting in England played a role in regulating the economy.

The eighteenth century was a time when things were going all wrong in the country of England. As mentioned previously, numerous types of foods were being raised in prices, which sparked several different riots as a result of it. Although rising food prices was a big contributor to riots, several other protests had been made that eventually lead to more and more riots spewing over the country of England. In John E. Archer's book *Social Unrest and Popular Protest in England 1780-1840*, the author talks about different kinds of protests that had occurred in England, such as agricultural protests, industrial protests, political protests and policing protests. Prior to talking about each different type of protest, the author states that notable historians have mentioned that as a result of different protests, it lead to a working class forming in England. Right off the bat, the author illustrates how as a result of several protests it leads to a change in the economy. Further into the reading, the author continues to include information on several protests previously mentioned. One important protest that stands out is the agricultural protests, and the reason this is, is because of how much detail the author goes into explaining how these types of protests had a profound effect during the eighteenth century. The author talks about how farmers had a big role with agricultural protest, as the price of wages was being reduce drastically in several parts of England. The author adds on by saying that East Anglia was one of the highest wage regions in England and by the early nineteenth century, it was the lowest amongst all other wage regions,

and this was a result because of no other alternative employment options at the time so prices were reduced drastically. This proved to become more and more of a situation because the labourers that worked on the farmland were no longer needed. As a result of this, multiple protests were made, which often lead to fences being destroyed, threatening letters being released and more riots ensuing. All of this illustrates how agricultural protest was a process during the eighteenth century that took its toll on several labour workers that were earning money through farming. All of this ties back with how rioting regulated the economy because with more and more poor people showing frustration with either food shortages or different protests, it would make the economy go from one standpoint to another. During this time of agricultural and other protests, it sparked more outraged people in England. As previously stated, mobs were becoming more frequent within England. In Robert B. Shoemaker's journal entitled *The London Mob in the Early Eighteenth Century*, the author illustrates how several people rioted by forming groups and destroying buildings and shouted out threats to others. Rioting in England was caused from several different reasons such as private and public affairs, with a majority of these riots being a result of political and economical reasons. The author continues to write in the journal by stating that a majority of these rioters were of the middle or lower class sections in the English community. As a result of all the riots that were being held in the town of London, an act was created call The Riot Act of 1715, which was used to try and reduce the amounts of riots going on at the time. All of this relates back to the central question as to how riots had a role to play in the eighteenth century. All of these points connect to the central question because they all show the way different parts of England was at the time and

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how food prices being risen had a profound effect on the English people, sparking numerous riots in the country of England. Although riots had an imminent affect on changing the way the economy was, more and more actions were being taken to ensure that the economy would recover from all of this. With rising food prices, several protests being made and even mobs being formed, more people in the middle and lower class were growing more irate with all of the turmoil happening in this time period. Eventually, some actions were taken to try and help out a majority of people in England during the eighteenth century.

Riots indeed had a significant effect on how it would regulate the economy in the eighteenth century. With food shortages occurring and multiple protests and mobs emerging, it was only a matter of time before several different actions were taken to try and ease this time of struggle. Firstly, when the food shortages occurred in England during the eighteenth century, much of the lower and middle class were affected. This point can be linked towards what Edward Palmer Thompson states in his book *The Making of the English Working Class*, which he states that several protests are results of rich people battling against poorer people. This point shows just how a majority of the struggle in the economy was a result of middle and lower class people protesting and rioting against those more well of then the rest. This point also illustrates how the majority of the English population would take matters into their own hands when several problems were seen such as the food prices being raised and multiple riots occurring. When people in England saw prices were too high for food, they would fix the prices to make them much lower prior to the rise in food. In Andrew Charlesworth's and Adrian Randall's

journal called *Morals, Markets and the English Crowd* in 1766, they state that in a marketplace in a place called Cirencester, people grabbed a vast majority of food such as corn, cheese and other foods and had a big sale in the marketplace. This shows how the people of England took matters into their own hands and were selling foods at a lot cheaper prices. In other parts of England, a majority of the food was selling for less than half price, which was benefitting the middle and lower class people. All of these points connect back as to how the economy would become regulated because the people of England were purchasing food for much cheaper prices instead of buying them for prices that were very high. Another point to add to how actions were taken is through the process of welfare being created. The Speenhamland system was used as a welfare system for the middle and lower class people, which was used to gain foods such as bread and was gained through how much bread was priced at the time and the amount of children were in a family. This type of relief was a result of the rise in bread prices during the eighteenth century.

During the 18th century, riots were a frequent occurrence all throughout England and would often cause problems all throughout the country. With a rise in food prices that destroyed the middle and lower class and various protests that affected a majority of people, actions were needed to turn the economy around in hopes of reducing the amount of turmoil seen in the eighteenth century. With riots being a common occurrence and mobs being formed as a result of this, England would eventually turn things around after a disastrous eighteenth century, with hopes of stabilizing the economy once again.