

Was oliver cromwell a hero or villain history essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The aim of this essay is to answer the long-awaited question about one of the most controversial personalities in England's history. Was Oliver Cromwell a hero or a villain? Its answer is really hard to clarify even for some scholars who have had dissimilar opinions about it and have been arguing about him for centuries. Cromwell has become seen as a devil incarnate, dueled fanatic, hero and man of God (1999, BBC News). For some historians such as Thomas Carlyle and Samuel Rawson Gardiner, Oliver Cromwell was a hero of liberty while to some others such as David Hume and Christopher Hill he was a regicidal dictator. But, the controversial vision about this figure is still present in our decade. In 2002, the BBC carried out a poll in Britain in which he was elected as one of the Top 10 Britons of all time. But, who is right? What is a reasonable evaluation of Cromwell today? This essay will provide relevant information about Cromwell's background, his personal life and his relationship with England's history. All those important points considered in order to obtain a reasonable vision about this controversial figure.

Oliver Cromwell was born on the 25th of April 1599, in Huntingdon near Cambridge. His family was constituted by his mother Elizabeth Steward and his father Robert who descended from Catherine Cromwell, one of Tudor statesman Thomas Cromwell's sister. Thomas Cromwell thus was Oliver's great-great-great-uncle. At Oliver Cromwell's birth, the social status of his family was quite low having in account that it belonged the gentry class. So, the inheritance of Robert was restricted to a house at Huntingdon and a small land. Oliver Cromwell went to school at Huntingdon Grammar, which is now the Cromwell Museum, and later studied at Sidney Sussex College,

Cambridge that he left in June 1617 without taking a degree. That happened immediately after the death of his father. After that moment in his life, Cromwell lived in London the next few years. He was more likely to return to Huntingdon because of his widow mother and his seven unmarried sisters; so, he was needed at home to help the family. Being returned to his small state, he farmed a land where his reputation made him well known as a champion of the poor. In spite of the impoverished conditions in which Cromwell was, many circumstances took place to interact with some powerful and influential people belonged to the court. The reason was he frequently entertained royalty and court officials in his grandfather's house located outside Huntingdon. Besides that, he got contact with merchants and Puritan figures in London thanks his father in law, Sir James Bouchier. The hard situations in Cromwell's life provoked him periods of deep depression and spiritual torment. The existence of a letter written in 1626 to an Arminian minister called Henry Downhall evidences in his discourse an important influence from radical Puritanism. Also, between 1620's and 1630's Cromwell went through a period in which he lived a personal crisis and a mental breakdown. At that point, he underwent a powerful religious conversion that triggered a feeling of being certain about himself as an instrument of God and waiting for a mission. In 1630, Cromwell was called before the Privy Council. The reason was he was caught up after being found in a fight among the gentry of Huntingdon over a new charter for the town. The following year, he sold some properties in Huntingdon and moved to St Ives, probably as a result of his dispute. This decision meant go down in the society's scale belonging to a very different position to the one he had had previously. This fact, affected him spiritually and emotionally in some

measure. Later in 1638, Cromwell wrote a letter to his cousin which denotes a deep change in a spiritual level. He related how being “ the chief of sinners” he became one of the members of “ the congregation of the firstborn”. This is the basement of his beliefs about the Reformation, his perception of England as a place of sins and the Catholic doctrine needed to be removed from the church. Around 1636, Cromwell’s destiny led another path. His income seemed to rise caused by inherited properties from his uncle and mother’s side; so, he retrieved his social range. On the other hand, the political context was that England had ruled for eleven years by Charles I, who pursued policies in religion and finance. Cromwell, as many other gentlemen, had been against those policies. In the meantime, he became a member of the parliament representing Huntingdon, in the first stage known as the short parliament because it lasted for only three weeks. A second parliament, known as the long parliament, was called some time later in which Cromwell represented Cambridge. The second parliament had a strong belief respect to give limits to the king’s power and the Anglican Church. So this time, his membership was not unnoticed, because when he spoke he did it supporting extreme measures or being critical of the king. Another main action was to advocate increased parliamentary powers. During the first stage of the parliament, was linked to the House of Lords (a godly aristocrat group), and the House of Commons. Many issues could not be resolved between the long parliament and Charles I; this provoked the English Civil war. At that point, Cromwell was assigned a small army of man. As he demonstrated to have an excellent set of military skills he was named Lieutenant General of Horse for the Army of the Eastern Association, and recruited a cavalry troop in Cambridgeshire. He was able to develop an

effective army, ability that permitted him commander regiments from other countries; those were brought together as one force known as the Eastern Association. Cromwell faced a number of battles that gave him experience and victories; those actions made him governor of Ely and made a colonel in the Eastern Association. This was the beginning of a long succeeded career that has established him as one of the most important figures in the England's and world's history.

Nobody was more dedicated to the bible and its political implications than Cromwell. This man, considered a hero, was the major statesman of the XVII century and a military genius without any formal training. Even though, he never was defeated in the battle field and he succeeded in replace the king having the control under the title of Lord Protector. During that period of time, kings believed they were as a God; so, they had the power to control their servants' conscience. The Reformation came to change people's thought about it by the right of having a free conscience. As the king, Charles I was not an exception; he wanted to submit every citizen under the Catholicism and prevent power to the Parliament. He was accused of high treason and was considered guilty by the Parliament. Without Cromwell's leadership, his commitment with the biblical justice, the king had not been prosecuted. That event was the beginning of the modern freedom (William P. Farley). After become Lord Protector, he extended the religious tolerance and a mercy unknown before. The letters written by him demonstrated a man of great piety, a strong knowledge about the bible and a profound faith. He wrote to his daughter in law " I hope your main interest is look for God: cry out for him, in that way he will be evident in his Son". His words denoted

a very close relationship with God. Otherwise, Samuel Rawson says “ never appeared in England again a church supported by the real absolutism, a monarch laid on the divine right...”. Other man that supports this idea is Benjamin Hart, who says that America debts its political and religious freedom to Cromwell and the Puritans. Cromwell’s ideals are the basement of the religious freedom, the capitalism essentials, and the scientific revolution. He was an excellent representing of Puritan’s ideals (William P. Farley). This area was not the only one developed by Cromwell. He had abilities to command people and had a fast reflection especially in short distances. Being in the politics field, he was able to develop the patience and toughness. But above all, he had a strong will which was born in his conviction of obtain the gasped objectives. It was told that in his treatment with soldiers he used the same rigor that the one used with officials. Cromwell was a crude and direct man, but also temperamental and nervous. Several times the fortune was in his favor, but things could have been different if he had not had cold blood to act. Even though he was a man that cried with facility and was depressing since he was a young man, he was able to adjust himself to each new situation. All of this, supported by his energetic character made of him a man who rejected intermediate solutions. During his last few years of government, Cromwell defeated Dutchmen warranting England’s dominion over the sea and defeated the Spanish fleet moving the Catholic’s threat away England. Cromwell’s government was based on the religious tolerance, but that under the state’s control. Even when he disagreed democracy, he was in favor of social conservator order. As he considered respect for the private possessions, he abolished the monarchy and established a republic called Commonwealth. The parliament

<https://assignbuster.com/was-oliver-cromwell-a-hero-or-villain-history-essay/>

proclaimed the republic and he exercised the power without any title. At that stage, some Irishmen and Scotsmen revolted, because they wanted a Monarchy. At any rate, Cromwell did not have the entire control; so, he decided to coup d'état. Presumably parliament was under control, but it was quite sure with the establishment of the Protectorate in which real power laid on Cromwell and his army. Under the Cromwell's Protectorate, the country was divided into eleven districts. Each of those districts had a major general in charge that had as responsibilities the tax collection, justice and public morality as well. Cromwell ruled until his death in 1658, leaving an image of economic prosperity and peace in the country. After his death, Charles II was called by the parliament to assume the lost crown of his father. As revenge, Charles II pursued puritans and tried to reestablish his father's ideals. Because of that, the parliament tried to set Cromwell and Puritan's essentials after Charles II's and his son's death.

Without a doubt, there exists a second vision about Cromwell's procedures and that is he was a villain. If we go back in history, we can see that the most determinant fact in Cromwell's life took place in 1642, when the tension among the Parliament and the King came to provoke the first English Civil War. He was a man of 42 years old without any previous experience that put himself in service of the parliament. In that way, he became a general with supreme power who organized the first regular army, demonstrated to be an influential politician responsible for the later proclamation of the republic. The title of the king by the house of the lords was offered Cromwell and refused by him. Afterwards, the house of the lords and Cromwell agreed a constitution document called The Humble Petition

and Advice where they defined his powers. That document was finally rejected by the House of Commons. When he was in the field of the battle, his conviction was to destroy completely the enemy. Due to, he never lost a battle between 1642 and 1651. But that caused many differences with the parliament that wanted to look for negotiations or be indulgent. He was cleverer and handled situations in order to create and specific setting that later was justified by the means. Cromwell did any possible thing to elicit other people to perform what he wanted and was careful in remain himself far away of the scene. He was able to keep his objectives in secret and create hides for his enemies. It is very well known the hide that Cromwell prepared for Charles I when he was prisoner but without a dictum of death. As Cromwell was afraid of the parliament's resolution, he decided precipitate the fact and convince some people. So, he facilitated the escape of Charles I and his refuge in the Wight Island. What was unknown by the king was the island's governor was Cromwell's cousin. The figure of Cromwell was emphasized by the lack of mercy with the enemy. Just in England, there existed a great amount of imprison people caused by crimes that nowadays would not be so serious. Cromwell sent people (who had psychiatric disease) to be tortured, permitted the execution of innocent people, sacked, sold slaves, and made fun of those who had misfortune. If we take a look of his actions from a contemporary point of view, it is right to say that he committed a lot of crimes. The fact that gives Cromwell the mythic category is what he represents for Scotland and Ireland. It is countless the amounts of signs that remain in both countries after the wars of conquest, such us destroyed castles and churches in ruins, mainly in Scotland. In contrast, Ireland suffered the uncontrolled death of Protestants. Drogheda's and <https://assignbuster.com/was-oliver-cromwell-a-hero-or-villain-history-essay/>

Wexford's battles are famous because they were besieged having the enemy surrendered. Under those circumstances, Cromwell left his soldiers go inside the land and kill everyone who had enough age to use arms. His decision left 3. 500 people died in Drogheda and 2. 000 people died in Wexford. Two letters sent by him are proves of that. There, he explained that few people could survive and he had liked to leave more people alive, but God was " who decided a fairer verdict" (2006; Giralt, Marcos). Those soldiers alive were exiled, killed or sold as slaves. The Cromwell's evilness reached the rest of the innocent population as he finished the food reserves and forests, banned wool trade and relinquished Catholics' lands. Otherwise, those who refused his measures were executed. His campaign in Scotland and Ireland lasted nine months, but the repression continued during his term of office as Lord Protector. According to that, it is estimated that in the eight years of conflict, the third part of the population died. Afterwards, the parliament wanted to limit the Protector's powers but it was too late, because Cromwell decided to dissolve it and establish a military rule. Considered what kind of republic is reasonable to expect. Certainly, a popular government imagined a more perfect o than absolute Monarchy. When a single person acquires power, the enough to convert the constitution into pieces and create a new one; It is clear that such a person will never leave his power or establish a real republic Cromwell was the author of the only regicide carried out during the modern history of Great Britain. He was the chief of the army and implacable repressor of Scottish and Ireland's rising. Finally, since 1654 until the day of his death, he was an absolute monarch with the title of lord protector of the republic of England, Scotland and Ireland; a dictatorship under the name of a Republic called Commonwealth.

Since Cromwell's birth, two elements were up to in his life. The first one was a sharp conscience of the social class to which he belonged. The other one was an idea about God that was the better one and the most convenient to the class's interests. It does not mean his religious beliefs were not sincere, because in terms of religion he was fanatically honest. He neither did not do anything without entrust himself to God nor perform a speech without mention him several times. Even though, it is possible to argue that he became a mad man in terms of religion, due to he said he was an instrument of God. Through that position, he killed people and acted as his pleasure to get anything he pursued. Any achieve in his bright career, almost of 15 years, becomes a minor fact if it is compared with his overdue military vocation. There is not a doubt about his abilities and intelligence which made of him the recognized historical figure that is today, but he committed crimes under the label of Puritanism's belief and Republic's desire. It is really difficult trying to decide if Oliver Cromwell was a hero or a villain, but taking in account all what he did it is possible to make a connection with a universal truth. God's message is that we will get heaven if we are able to recognize our sins and regret. In the case of Cromwell, he strongly believed to act in the best way; so there was not a reason for repentance. In contrast, all the suffering, deaths, destroyed places, and starvation cannot be erased from history, neither from those people that went under the unlimited power of Cromwell. So, neither repentance nor good deeds change our decisions and actions; they lay for the rest of the life and even after our death. A prove of that is Charles II who wanted revenge for his father and in order to get it, he dug the Cromwell's corpse out in order to tear it into pieces. If we say that Cromwell was a hero or a villain it would be deny the other side of the

history, the development of the countries and its people. It would be more suitable to establish this figure as a common man that did important things for his country by painful methods and became so important in his time. Altogether, his actions positioned as a controversial man representing two different and extreme sides of the history.

3000 words