

# A look at british history history essay



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It was a turbulent century in British history. A brief study of the era of 1550 to 1650 clearly illustrates why. This was a period of invention, scientific advancement and astrological discoveries, yet it remained filled with supernatural notions, superstition, mythology and plain ignorance. During this era, Britain embarked on an age of great world exploration and mighty conquests while fighting bloody wars of religion, class and political dominance at home. This century was marked by a great rebirth of the arts in which intellectuals and artists flourished in Britain, yet it was also a time of strife, hardship, disease and hunger. It was during this chaotic era that Britain came to be known as the “center of Western civilization” under the humane and rational rule of Queen Elizabeth I” (World). It was also during this time that the poet and playwright William Shakespeare lived, worked and wrote some of history’s most remarkable literary works having been influenced by and having drawn upon the social thought, religious conviction and political landscape of this tumultuous era (World).

Prior to and during the time of Queen Elizabeth and the time of the Renaissance, Britain was a breeding ground for religious and political unrest. Beginning in 1531, the country’s official religion changed five times in accordance with the choice of the King or Queen who was in power at the time (Elizabethan). Since most of the English common people believed that Kings and Queens were directly connected to God and must be obeyed at all times, the monarch’s chosen religion was also followed by most of the monarch’s subjects (Time). Britain’s official religion was Catholic until 1531, then it was Protestant until Queen Mary took the throne after which it became Catholic again and then back to Protestant during Queen Elizabeth’s

reign (Time). Each change in power led to a change in the nation's official religion which, in turn, led to persecution of the non-ruling religious group. The political thinking during this period was controlled by a small number of powerful ruling families and jealousies and rivalries within these families made these political conflicts even more severe (Time). During this era, England was a leader in world exploration and soon became a major commercial power. It was also a time of advancements in technology and invention. All of the unrest and uncertainty, however, left the common people feeling discontent and afraid of the many changes that were happening to their nation.

The era in British history between 1550 to 1650 during the time that Queen Elizabeth held the throne has been characterized by British people as one of the best epochs the country ever had (World). While it is true that during her time in power Queen Elizabeth calmed religious unrest, established Britain as a leading world power and ushered in the age of the Renaissance or rebirth of new ideas and new thinking, the life of ordinary citizen was harsh. The majority of the population, referred to as 'common people,' lived short lives filled with hard labor, little food, no schooling, rampant disease, poverty, violence, crime, high infant mortality and inequality between men and women (Time). In cities, life was particularly filthy, brutal and short. There was no running water in homes and so most people were dirty and smelly. Human and animal waste was thrown out directly onto the streets (Time). These unclean conditions formed a breeding ground for the spread of diseases such as typhus, bubonic plague, tuberculosis and influenza (Time). Rogues and vagabonds roamed the roads begging and stealing (Time). Riots

were common and could turn violent. Such harsh conditions at home were one of the reasons that many British common people chose to travel to the colonies in the New World in search of a better way of life.

It is, therefore, no surprise that entertainment was extremely important to the common people. Even the poorest of the people enjoyed entertainment from acting troupes, dancing, jugglers, strolling players, and plays. Theatre was especially popular with the common people and it was inexpensive to attend (Tudor). It was during this time that open air playhouses first came to be in the cities of Britain, including the Rose, the Swan, and the Globe Theatre in London which was owned, in part, by Shakespeare (Tudor). William Shakespeare fed upon the atmosphere and the feelings occurring during this turbulent era of British history and he used them extensively in his plays and other literary works. One such example is a speech by a character named John of Guant in Shakespeare's 1601 play, Richard II, expressing his love for England and his concerns about the country's future (Time). All of the major events, people, places and problems of this era, including class structure, religious discontent, fate, rebellion against authority and prominent figures of the time, influenced Shakespeare and provided inspiration and background for his literary works (Who). In his plays, Shakespeare chose to write about many of the period's topics of conversation and disagreement, including classical Greek and Roman tales, superstition, love, revenge and rebellion. The works of playwrights such as Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe contributed to London's eventual rise as a center of culture and art. Their contributions to this time period will forever mark the social, religious and political thinking of the time and

illustrate the conflicts that made the era of 1550 to 1650 one of the most turbulent eras in British history.

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