

Rewriting history? How well did Charles I and Oliver Cromwell defend their posthumous reputations?

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Nature and purpose of the enquiry

This is a two-part enquiry, ideally taught in two stages separated by work on the Interregnum, dealing with Cromwell's actions and the various attempts to establish an effective political system. The enquiry begins by examining the way in which Charles I quite deliberately sought to present himself, through his trial and execution, not merely as the rightful king but as a martyr and asks how effective this portrayal was.

The second part contrasts Charles' tightly managed presentation of his reputation with the more much more ambiguous images of Cromwell that circulated after the latter's death, asking why his reputation proved so much harder to defend.

Films related to this enquiry

This enquiry is directly linked to two films: 'The Regicide' and 'Oliver Cromwell: King in All But Name'.

In 'The Regicide' Andrew McRae puts forward the claim that it was the battle over how Charles I's death should be seen – either as the just death of a traitor or as the martyrdom of king – that made the eventual restoration of his son 'not only thinkable, but to some degree inevitable'. The first lesson presented here could be used to set up further work exploring this claim, asking students to consider how much it was Charles' skilful management of his reputation rather than Cromwell's actions or the challenges inherent in establishing an alternative political system that meant that the Republic was so short-lived.

Contexts for teaching this enquiry

This enquiry has been developed for students in Key Stage 3. Strong support is provided in interpreting the visual sources so that students can appreciate the very deliberate construction of the message conveyed by *Eikon Basilike* and of the difficulties in defending Cromwell's much more ambiguous position. Because of the focus of the enquiry on Charles

and Cromwell's *subsequent* reputations, there is scope to use it to develop students' understanding of historical interpretations, perhaps going on to explore how the reputations of each figure changed over time (and what relationship those interpretations bear to the images in circulation at the time.) This might make it a useful Key Stage 3 enquiry for developing students' understanding of how and why historical interpretations differ.

The enquiry can, however, be readily adapted to GCSE for use within the AQA thematic study (Britain, power and the people 1170-present) or the OCR thematic studies ('Power, democracy and monarchy c.1000-2014'). The images used in the enquiry and discussed in the two films provide powerful examples related to the role of 'communication' as a factor affecting political development (AQA) and to the 'methods of maintaining power' (OCR), including 'propaganda, control of information and the role of specific ideas'.

Resources

- A copy of the frontispiece of *Eikon Basilike* (The 'Royal Image')
- A set of cards that provide:
 - (1) Translations of each of the Latin phrases used in the frontispiece of *Eikon Basilike*
 - (2) Explanations of the meaning of each of the different elements within *Eikon Basliike*.
- A set of cards providing information about the publication and reaction to *Eikon Basilike* and the struggle for a political settlement after the death of Charles I
- A copy of the satirical portrait of Cromwell from the engraving 'Kroonzugtig-Voorspook' by Van den Engelshen Geweldenaer (1653).
- A copy of 'The Embleme of England's Distraction as also of her attained, and further expected Freedome, & Happines' engraved by William Faithorne, shortly before the death of Cromwell in 1658. (The engraving is traditionally known as 'Cromwell between Two Pillars'.)
- A set of cards identifying and explaining key features in 'The Emblem of England's Distraction' (1658) to help students decode its meaning.
- A copy of 'The Lord Protector lying in state at Somerset House'
- A copy of the engraving 'His Highness Effigies Standing in State (Oliver Cromwell)

Lesson 1: How successful was Charles in the 'final battle of the Civil War': the battle for his reputation?

Suggested structure and sequence of activities

Introduction

The framing of the question that guides this lesson is based on Andrew McRae's suggestion in the film 'The Regicide' that the last battle of the Civil War was:

the battle to imprint in the minds of British men and women an image of the executed King. Was he a traitor? Was he a martyr? Was he a man anointed to rule by God? Or was he just another mere actor in the game of politics?

You might choose to show a short extract from the beginning of the film as a way of setting up the lesson question. (Obviously, if you intend to use the first activity, inviting the students to suggest the message that the King might seek to convey and how he would do so, then do **not** show the whole film at this point!)

An alternative approach might be to explain to students that McRae has suggested that even after Charles was brought to trial and condemned to death there was still at least one more battle that he could fight in the civil war and ask them to consider what that battle might have been: what kind of fight was still possible or worthwhile at that point? This should help to remind students of the claims of Charles' son (then in the Netherlands). While the 19-year old could rely on support from Scotland (he was officially proclaimed King by the Scottish Parliament on 5 February 1649 and was crowned King of the Scots on 1 January 1650) and would seek foreign help in reclaiming the throne of England, success would depend on support from within England – from those who believed his father had been divinely appointed and unlawfully condemned.

It may be appropriate to provide information at this point about Charles' invasion attempt and defeat at the battle of Worcester in 1651, which is generally regarded as the last battle of the Civil War, but the fact that this attempt failed could also be introduced later as part of the evidence used to assess how effective his father's final propaganda campaign had been by that point).

Activity

1. What strategies could Charles I use to try to defend his reputation?

Get the students working in small groups (perhaps in role as loyal friends) to brainstorm ideas in relation to

(a) the kinds of messages that the king would want to present – both at his trial (how should he respond to his accusers) and more broadly, with an eye to how he would be remembered if the verdict of the trial goes against

- him; and
(b) how he might get these messages across.

Depending on any previous work you may have done on news distribution, publishing and levels of literacy, you might want to provide examples of the kinds of publications – broadsides, ballads and books – that might be found in mid-17th-century England, especially after censorship began to break down during the civil war. The film ‘Stuart Monarchy and the Invention of News’ provides background information about news publications and visual examples. Familiar sources such as ‘The World Turned Upside Down’ (1646) widely reproduced in textbooks and available online from the British Library (<http://www.bl.uk/learning/images/uk/crown/large2180.html>) could be used as examples. The texts [hyperlink] section of this website obviously provides a range of other kinds of publications.

What would Charles want people to be saying – or indeed singing – about him? What could he do to get these messages across? How could he convey these messages in visual form? (For those who could not read, and as a powerful means of establishing a strong image even for those who could.) Students could be asked to create their own images or plans for them.

2. What tactics did Charles actually employ in defence of his reputation?

Here you need to consider

- (a) How Charles acted when he was brought to trial
- (b) How Charles presented himself at his execution
- (c) The publication of *Eikon Basilike* [*The Royal Image*]: ‘*The Pourtrature of His Sacred Majestie in His Solitudes and Sufferings*’ that was circulating on the streets of London within a few days of the execution.

(a) and (b) could be tackled in some depth, using extracts from sources reporting the trial or you might simply outline the actions that Charles took. In presenting each detail of Charles’ behaviour, students should be asked to consider how this might help have helped to improve Charles’ reputation in the years that followed. They might also compare his actions to their own suggested strategies, explaining the parallels or seeking to account for decisions that may have surprised them.

- At his trial, Charles simply refused to accept the authority of the court.

He therefore refused confirm or to deny the charge against him that he had ‘traitorously waged a war against Parliament and the people’ and renewed that war again in 1648, making him responsible for ‘all the treasons, murders, ... burning and desolation’ caused by the wars. When he was accused of being a ‘tyrant, traitor,

murderer and an enemy to the Commonwealth of England' he did not deny the claim, he simply asked what authority Parliament had to act as a court of law and refused to engage with the process of the trial.

'... I would know by what authority I was brought from thence [the Isle of Wight], and carried from place to place, and I know not what: and when I know what lawful authority, I should answer. Remember, I am your King, your lawful King and what sins you bring upon your head and the judgement of God upon this land... Let me know by what lawful authority I am seated here, and I shall not be unwilling to answer. In the meantime, I shall not betray my trust. I have a trust committed to me by God, by old and lawful descent; I will not betray it, to answer you a new unlawful authority...'

[The Trial of Charles Stuart, King of England, published 1649]

- On the day of his execution, Charles put on two shirts so that he would not shiver and look as though he was afraid.
- Charles read out a short speech on the scaffold in which he said he forgave 'those who have brought me here.'
- He also said that he desired the 'freedom and liberty' of his people, but that freedom depends on observing the laws 'that allow people to hold on to their lives and belongings' not on them having a share in government.
- He told the executioners that he would kneel with his head on the block and then give them a sign for when to strike.
- When Bishop Juxon, who was with the King, had helped him to tuck his hair into a cap, Charles told Juxon that he was now going 'from a corruptible to an incorruptible crown, where no disturbance can be, no disturbance in all the world'.

(c) *Eikon Basilike* was a collection of prayers, reflections and meditations that was widely accepted at the time as having been written by Charles. (Historians now think that it was partly written by him.) The frontispiece was designed by the artist William Marshall. Focus on this in depth (using the cards giving the translation of the Latin phrases and the explanations of their meaning as appropriate).

3. What evidence is there of Charles' success?

The collection of cards 'Evaluating Charles' success' provide a range of information about the scale on which *Eikon Basilike* was published, about the reception that it received and

about subsequent events. Before giving out the cards encourage the students to consider what kind of evidence/information they would need to help them determine how successful Charles was in establishing his image as a martyred king.

Students should then be asked to rate each of the cards in relation to two scales:

- (1) How effective (on a scale of 0-10) does Charles seem to have been on the basis of this particular source or piece of information?
- (2) How confident (on a scale of 0-5) can we be in this judgement of Charles' success?

Students should record their judgements by placing the card at the appropriate point on a graph with one axis representing degree of success and the other representing the extent of their confidence. The reasons for their decisions and the further evidence that they would need to strengthen their judgment could be recorded in an annotation on the graph or in a separate table as suggested below.

Note: Two of the cards provide information about the struggle to achieve a stable political settlement after the King's execution. They cannot be used to determine how successful Charles was in establishing his reputation as a martyred king, so you might want to suggest that students have a category 'Not relevant' for information that they regard as irrelevant to the focus of the question, but you could return to these cards at the end of the lesson, especially if you are interested in pursuing the question of whether Charles' skilful promotion of his image made the Restoration inevitable, since they begin to reveal the importance of other factors.

<i>Source/ Information</i>	<i>Rating (out of 10) in terms of Charles' success</i>	<i>Reason for this rating</i>	<i>Rating (out of 5) in terms of your confidence in this judgment</i>	<i>What further evidence or information would increase your confidence in this judgement?</i>

Students' graphs could then be used as the basis to reach and substantiate a judgment about Charles I's success in this final battle.

The lesson could be used to set up subsequent work on the Interregnum, by focusing specifically on McRae's response (in the film 'The Regicide') to a question about the significance of the regicide:

The wider significance of the regicide depends very much on whether you see Charles as a traitor or a martyr. In answering that question you might want to come back to the whole question of the way in which people, in the years after the regicide, battled over their understanding of what had happened: whether a king had been martyred, whether a traitor had been rightly put to death.

And the extent to which that battle was fought in the subsequent years helps us, to some degree to understand how the restoration came to be, not only thinkable, but to some degree almost inevitable’.

Asking students how they might judge this claim effectively opens up the question of whether the Republic ultimately failed because of the success of the Royalists in promoting the image of Charles the martyred King, or to other factors. Was it due more to the failures of Cromwell and the other regicides, or to the incompatibility of the different expectations of those who had been radicalised by war? This question could frame subsequent work on the question of why the Republic failed and the monarchy restored.

An alternative (which could be pursued after completing the linked enquiry into Cromwell’s posthumous reputation) would be to explore how well the image of Charles as a martyr has endured. Christine Counsell has outlined ideas and some specific suggestions for activities within a scheme of work in the HA journal, *Teaching History*, 111 [<http://www.history.org.uk/publications/categories/300/resource/929/teaching-history-111-reading-history>], that focuses on C.V. Wedgwood’s (1964) account of his execution and of the reverence that she suggests the King inspired.

Lesson 2: Would Cromwell have approved of the way in which his image was presented after his death?

Suggested structure and sequence of activities

Introduction

Although this lesson is directly linked to the preceding one examining how Charles’ reputation was defended after his death, it is suggested that you come back to it after any other lessons that you plan to teach on the Republic itself. If you are *not* planning to look in any detail at Cromwell or at the struggle for a political settlement, then the information cards from the last lesson (provided for students to use in evaluating Charles’ success) could be used as a direct link, since cards P, Q and S give a summary of the difficulties in finding an acceptable form of government, the offer of the crown to Cromwell and his refusal of it.

If you *have* taught any intervening lessons, you might want to introduce this lesson by reminding students about the previous question asking how successful Charles I was in defending his posthumous reputation and explain that you are now going to compare his reputation with that of Cromwell in the years after his death to determine who had most success in promoting a positive image and why.

Activity

1. How would Cromwell like to have been remembered?

The nature of this activity will obviously vary depending on how much students know about Cromwell's role as a military commander and as Lord Protector. You might begin by presenting students with a number of summary cards (like Cards P, Q and S) outlining Cromwell's actions or you might have a recap activity (such as a factual knowledge quiz or set of claims about Cromwell's actions, with students required to recall or investigate whether they are true or false). It is important for students to know that the idea of Cromwell becoming King was considered twice, once in an early draft of the Instrument of Government in 1653 and once more in the Humble Petition and Advice, and that he rejected it on both occasions, albeit after three months of agonising on the second occasion. He did, however, accept the right to choose the next Protector. You can then ask students to make suggestions about the kind of image they think Cromwell would have thought it appropriate to be printed and circulated after his death – and that might perhaps have helped his son, Richard, in assuming the role of Lord Protector. You could draw a direct parallel with Charles: if he had planned as carefully as Charles had done what kind of image might he have created? What kind of story would he have wanted to be told about him?

You could introduce or develop this activity further by giving students a copy of two different images of Cromwell published *during his lifetime*, the engraving 'Kroonzugtig-Voorspook' by Van den Engelshen Geweldenaer (1653) and 'The Embleme of England's Distraction' by William Faithorne (1658) and asking which they think Cromwell would have preferred and why? Which comes closest to the kind of image that Cromwell might have wanted people to have of him after he was dead? What kind of message are they each giving about Cromwell – and how has this message been constructed?

In addition to the two images themselves, the resource collection includes a set of cards that could be used alongside the second image to help students to identify its key features and determine the overall message that it presents. There are no cards to accompany the first image, but you might want to provide a list of features for the students to identify to help make clear its essential condemnation of Cromwell and the implication that he has brought about the King's execution in order to claim power for himself:

- The execution in the background (suggesting that the king is only just dead)
- The crown (that Cromwell has obviously rushed to put on)
- The sword of justice
- The orb, as a symbol of royal power
- Royal robes
- Armour

- The devils (that must be driving him on)

For the second image translations of some Latin phrases and interpretations of the different elements have been provided (as was the case with *Eikon Basilike*) but you can obviously decide for yourself whether to give time to such detailed analysis and how much help your students would need in identifying the different elements and decoding their message.

A detailed account of the 'The Emblem of England's Distraction' can be found on the website of 'British Printed Images to 1700 (bpi1700) at

<http://www.bpi1700.org.uk/research/printOfTheMonth/august2006.html>

Rather than giving your students cards to match to the image, you might want some or all of them to work directly from the information on the website to annotate a copy of the image. While an online database of this kind can help to familiarise students to the way in which collections of materials are assembled by historians and archivists – collections that both reflect the detailed research needed to locate and identify relevant materials and that make them available as tools to support other historians' research.

2. What view of Cromwell was presented in the years immediately after his death?

Once the students have established a view of the kind of image that Cromwell would have wanted to present, explain that he died on 3 September 1658 and that the role of Lord Protector was assumed by his son, Richard Cromwell. It is worth stressing that – unlike Charles, who had lost power and was executed by his opponents – Cromwell died when he was in power and might therefore be expected to have had more opportunity to promote the kind of death-bed image that he wanted.

Present students with the two images of Cromwell's body, firstly showing it as it was lying in state and then as it was presented standing up. Here you might use a very short extract from the start of the film 'Oliver Cromwell, King in All but Name' which explains the details of Cromwell's lying in state and the switch from lying to standing. Stop the film *before* Dr John West explains that Cromwell seems now to have acquired the position of king that he had rejected during his lifetime (i.e. at 2 mins, 15 seconds), since this will leave the students to identify this development for themselves.

Distribute the two images for the students to study in detail, considering four key questions:

- How is Cromwell presented in this image?
- How has this impression been created?
- How does the image and its message compare with your expectations of what Cromwell would have wanted?

- Why do you think Cromwell's supporters chose to promote this particular image of him after his death?

To support the students' consideration of the fourth question, you might give them the following reminders, or ask them to use each of the following points of information in developing their answer to the question.

- Cromwell believed that executing the King had been the right thing to do. God approved of the execution because Charles had betrayed his people. Cromwell had expected that the country could be government by godly men in parliament.
- It was very difficult to find an acceptable form of government that satisfied the Army *and* the members of the parliament (the Rump) that had agreed to the execution of the King. Several different parliaments were called and dismissed and for a while the Republic was ruled by Cromwell and a group of army commanders (the Major-Generals).
- An early draft of the Instrument of Government, drawn up in 1653, included a proposal for Cromwell to become King. Cromwell rejected this idea and made sure that it was not included in the final draft.
- The Humble Petition and Advice of 1657 invited Cromwell to accept the title of King. If he had accepted his son would have had the automatic right (the hereditary right) to succeed him.
- Cromwell took three months to decide whether or not to accept the invitation to become King, but in the end he refused.
- Although Cromwell refused to become King, he did accept the right to be able to choose who should succeed him.

An alternative approach, after sharing students' own initial responses to each of the questions would be to play a further extract from the film *Oliver Cromwell* – up to the point where West explains that there was a lot of confusion about Richard's succession' (up to 10.05 minutes) – and ask how far West's views confirm the students' assumptions about whether Cromwell himself would have approved of the image and why the Republicans might have chosen to present him like this in death.

The objective here is to try to help students to understand why Cromwell's *supporters* should have promoted an image that Cromwell had himself explicitly rejected – to help them to understand the difficulties of establishing an alternative kind of political system –

that the idea of hereditary succession retained a powerful hold and was thought to be an effective way of maintaining stability – even after the King had been put on trial and executed. If Oliver Cromwell was recognised as a King, the rule of his son, Richard, became much more acceptable.

3. Which ruler had more success in defending their reputations and how can we account for this?

At this point, you can introduce a first stage comparison between Charles and Cromwell. You might introduce an element of humour here: how would their respective ghosts have reacted to the frontispiece of *Eikon Basilike* and to the image of ‘The Lord Protector lying in state at Somerset House’? Or you might revisit the rating scale that you used in Lesson 1 and ask for a rating out of 10 for Cromwell’s success in promoting his reputation as reflected in the image of him lying in state.

You can then extend the time-scale, reminding students that to make a fair comparison they need to track the images of Cromwell that were being circulated in the years after his death. If you used information cards T and S from the lesson exploring Charles I’s reputation, then students will already be aware that Richard Cromwell soon resigned and that in the chaos that threatened to follow, Charles Stuart was invited to return to the throne. If not, you will need to provide this information before explaining what happened not just to Cromwell’s image – but to his actual body – following the Restoration. Here you might use another extract from the film ‘Oliver Cromwell, King in All but Name’ (from 12.48 minutes onwards) in which John West recounts what happened to Cromwell on 30 January 1661 or you might prefer to tell the story in dramatic fashion yourself.

Focus on the image in the film of Cromwell’s head displayed on a spike, along with those of the other regicides (at 13.50 minutes). What rating out of 10 would this receive?

You could conclude with a written task asking students to explain why Charles I was so much more successful than Oliver Cromwell in defending his posthumous reputations? An alternative would be to ask students to devise their own interview – in a similar style to the film ‘Oliver Cromwell, King in All but Name’ asking and answering a short series of questions in the role of experts explaining why one was so much more successful than the other.

Ways in which the suggested structure could be adapted or developed further

Instead of ending with Cromwell’s head on the spike, you might ask students to speculate as to whether they think Cromwell’s reputation then remained at the very low rating they had

given to that image. What could possibly happen that might begin to restore his reputation? How long do they think it might be before his reputation revives? This could lead you directly into a study of the Restoration and the Revolution of 1688: although many members of Parliament do again lose faith in the sons of Charles I, they are not prepared to consider another alternative to monarchy!

Or you might choose to track Cromwell's reputation further – on a much longer time-scale. The Cromwell Association website provides a fascinating online exhibition of images of Cromwell over time so students can track when his reputation revives and how he is remembered in different contexts: <http://www.olivercromwell.org/exhibition.htm>

The very fact that there is an Association whose whole purpose is 'to advance the education of the public in ... the life and legacy of Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658), politician, soldier and statesman' is worth highlighting for students in itself, in terms of what it suggests about his reputation today!

You could thus extend this comparative study of the posthumous reputations of *both* Charles and Cromwell into a fully developed study of how historical interpretations change over time. As noted in the details for Lesson 1, Christine Counsell has outlined a short scheme of work examining two particular subsequent interpretations, C.V. Wedgwood's *The Trial of Charles I*, (published in 1964) and the 1970 film 'Cromwell' written and directed by Ken Hughes. In *Teaching History 125* Matthew Bradshaw shares a simple idea for graphing Cromwell's rising and falling reputation over time by altering the height of the plinth for his statue. <http://www.history.org.uk/publications/categories/300/resource/852/teaching-history-125-significance>