

# Why did the Civil War break out in 1642?

## Enquiry: Why did the Civil War break out in 1642?

KS3 History - Lesson 6 of 6

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# The Whig Interpretation

This was the common view of historians writing in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Whig historians like T B Macaulay believed the Civil War was inevitable as it was part of a process where England and then Britain gained more political and religious freedoms. Whig historians believe the war had to happen to change England from a country ruled by an absolute monarch (**tyranny**) to one where the people have more political power. Whig historians argue that political and religious causes were directly responsible for causing the Civil War. They believe that the rise of parliament's power was responsible for causing increased tensions with the monarchy, (for example, refusing to give Charles money). Plus, they argue that the rise of Puritanism caused conflict by challenging Laud's reforms which seemed to be moving the Church in a Catholic direction (for example, the Bishops' Wars).



# The Marxist Interpretation

On the other hand, Marxist historians, such as Christopher Hill argued in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that economic causes were the main reason why Civil War broke out in 1642. Marxist historians explain that at the time more people were becoming wealthier and gaining land. These people were known as the **gentry** and part of the rising middle class. Many members of the gentry could vote for members of parliament so used parliament to protect their interests. The gentry are believed to have been angry towards Charles because he changed ship money so that everyone in England had to pay the tax. The gentry viewed this decision as a barrier to their progress and ability to gain a better quality of life. Marxist historians refer to the English Civil War as the English revolution as they believe it gave the rising middle-class greater power and took away power from the **aristocracy**.



# The Revisionist Interpretation

By the mid-1970s, however, historians started to revise arguments about why the Civil War broke out. These revisionist historians, such as Laurence Stone argued that the Civil War was never inevitable or due to long term causes. Revisionist historians argue that actually it was a combination of short term causes that led to the Civil War. The revisionist historians state that the mistakes of Charles I between the Thirty Years War and the Bishops' War would not have caused England's Civil War to break out. Instead, they argue that Charles' actions during the Long Parliament between 1640-1642 led to war accidentally happening. They focus on how the aggressive actions of Parliament (Strafford's execution) and Charles' poor judgement (attempted arrest of five members) acted as the main triggers that launched the Civil War.



# Glossary

**Tyranny** - country ruled by a cruel or oppressive monarchy or government.

**Gentry** – Wealthy people that own a large amount of land.

**Aristocracy** – The highest class in society, these people would usually hold titles such as Lord, Lady, Earl or Duke.



# Comprehension Questions

1. According to Whig historians, the English Civil War was part of what process?
2. What events would Whigs argue directly caused the Civil War?
3. Why do Marxists believe the gentry caused the Civil War?
4. Why do Revisionist historians disagree with the Whigs and Marxists?
5. Which events do revisionist historians believe are directly responsible for causing the Civil War?

