Words are interesting. Sometimes different words may refer to the same thing, but convey completely different messages. A "revolution" is the overthrow of a government by force so that a new governing system can be installed. A "rebellion" is an open resistance against authority. A “revolution” always sounds noble, necessary, and courageous. A “rebellion” is wrong, unnecessary, and bad, right?

After Charles II died in 1685, his younger brother, James II became king. James was more like his father, Charles I, than his brother. He quickly antagonized the leadership in the Church of England. In doing so, he raised fears about his goals for Catholicism in England and threatened the freedoms and liberties the English held dear.

When James had a son, the potential for a Catholic heir to the English throne became a threat to English Protestants. James also worked to modernize the English army and navy. The fact that the king kept a standing army in times of peace greatly alarmed the English who believed that such a force would be used to crush their liberty. James’ opponents feared their king would turn England into a Catholic monarchy with absolute power over her people.

In 1689, England had what is referred to as the Glorious Revolution - perhaps the only revolution labeled as “glorious,” but glorious it was when the people asserted their power over the government: over the king. It was a direct result of English complaints about James II and his government. Ironically, many of these grievances bore a striking similarity to those that would be raised by the colonists in 1775 and 1776. When they were taking a stand for their liberties, the English referred to their resistance as a “revolution.” Less than 100 years later,
when the colonists conducted a similar fight for their freedoms, the English disparagingly referred to it as “the American Rebellion.”

After the Glorious Revolution, England established a constitutional monarchy that limited the power of the king and provided protections for English subjects. Many of the same issues the colonists would complain about were addressed in the 1689 English Bill of Rights: freedom of speech, the right to regular elections, the right to petition the king, the right to trial by jury and habeus corpus.

How did this happen? One country had a “revolution” prompted by many of the same principles they then denied to their colonies, leading to a revolution by those colonies (or "rebellion" in the eyes of the English). As in many issues in life, much of it had to do with money, some of it had to do with a lack of communication, and a lot of it had to do with a sharing, or turning loose, of power.

About this transcript:

- Transcript title: The People Take a Stand: The Glorious Revolution
- Corresponding Lesson: The Glorious Revolution in England and Rebellions and Independence in the Colonies
- Author and curator: Jay Reynolds J.D. for The TEL Library.
- Creative Commons License: CC BY NC SA