



A Dire Need for Parliamentary Reform: or, the Role of Elite Fears in Britain's Great Reform Bill of 1832

RYAN MILLER 

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ABSTRACT

Countless historians consider the 1832 reform bill one of Britain's most pivotal legislations in transitioning into a modern representative democracy for its undeniable impact on the country's electoral system. The same historians, however, vary on their determination of its causes mostly from comparing major developments surrounding the bill. Parliamentary speeches tend to be neglected or presupposed which causes valuable aspects of the development to be missed. This work demonstrates that fear of revolution, launched by France and catalyzed by Bristol, by the British elite was the primary motivator for reform. It does so by focusing specifically on parliamentary debate between the pro-reform party (Whigs) and the anti-reform party (Tories), supplemented by private correspondence and other public documents. Whig M.P.s insisted Britain reform or face revolution, but Tory M.P.s downplayed any immediate threat. When massive unrest materialized at Bristol, the conversation radically shifted. Bristol exploded because the House of Lords rejected an earlier form of the bill, giving the Whig's argument substance. Direct resistance to the bill faded as Whig urgency increased. While some contemporary and modern historians doubt the reformers' true fear of revolution, the speeches and letters reveal that preventing disaster was the sincere objective.

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

Ryan Miller

University of Georgia, US

miller.ryan517@gmail.com

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INTRODUCTION

Poet William Thomas Moncrieff wrote “REFORM or ruin—you must choose, Awake! Arouse! JOHN BULL!” to represent the emotion in Great Britain leading up to the year 1832.¹ Similar to other nations, Britain’s citizens struggled to gain their voice through democracy. The push for electorate expansion by the progressive Whig party, which culminated in the Great Reform Bill of 1832, served as a pivotal moment for the British democracy. I argue that an overwhelming fear of popular revolution motivated the Whigs to pursue this parliamentary reform, especially after the Bristol riot.

The Reform Bill of 1832 fundamentally changed British democracy. The reform expanded representation in the House of Commons, the lower house of Parliament, to better reflect the demographic changes that came from the Industrial Revolution. Parliament intended this act to “take effectual Measures for correcting diverse Abuses that have long prevailed in the Choice of Members to serve in the Commons House of Parliament... [and] to extend the Elective Franchise to many [more] of His Majesty’s Subjects.”² The act extended voting rights beyond landholders and eliminated “rotten boroughs” or overrepresented parliamentary districts.³ In the House of Commons in 1831, 152 of the 406 elected members of Parliament (MPs) came from rotten boroughs with fewer than 100 voters each.⁴ Meanwhile, cities that blossomed during the Industrial Revolution, like Manchester and Birmingham, did not elect any MPs. The Great Reform Bill of 1832 resulted in substantial and sweeping change for Britain’s Parliament by incorporating these industrialized districts and empowering more voters. The Whig party, backed by the growing middle class, fought vehemently against the conservative Tory party for this electoral reform because they feared the alternative to reform.

This article analyzes the parliamentary debate over the electoral reform before and after the Bristol revolt in late October 1831. By centering this dramatic event, I argue that Whigs pushed for reform because they feared a popular revolution. First, I highlight relevant foreign and domestic developments that undergirded their fear and analyze the parliamentary debate after the bill’s first introduction to the House of Commons in March 1831. Second, I explore how the Bristol riot shaped fears of revolution through subsequent parliamentary debate and the private correspondences of prominent Whigs. I include a brief timeline of the bill in Parliament to situate the bill’s progression around the Bristol riot and other relevant events. Finally, I analyze how the reform added representation as a hope to prevent revolution and succeeded at doing so. In assessing the arguments, before and after Bristol, this

article concludes that the Whig MPs supported the Reform of 1832 primarily because of their fear of revolution.

HISTORIOGRAPHY

Scholarship on the Great Reform of 1832 focuses primarily on the periods prior to or following the passage of the act, which leads to different conclusions.⁵ Eric Hobsbawm’s *The Age of Revolution* argues that potential gains of political power, with the support of an emerging middle class, likely motivated Whigs to push for the idea of expanded voting rights.⁶ Alternatively, J. R. Dinwiddy’s *From Luddism to the First Reform Bill* argues that contemporary conditions of Britain served as a catalyst for reform.⁷ Historians largely agree that the Industrial Revolution and two French Revolutions determined the timing of reform, but historians disagree over whether the Whigs took advantage of or rose to meet the situation.⁸ I add to the historical conversation by assessing the Whigs’ motivation by focusing on parliamentary debate and private correspondence essential, sources that remain largely anecdotal.⁹

Historians who argue that the Whigs pushed reform for their own gain focus on the effects of the bill and the subsequent political gains of the Whig party. The reform stripped seats in parliament from fifty-six boroughs—including rotten boroughs—and enfranchised another twenty-two boroughs, including the centers of England’s industrialization: Manchester and Birmingham.¹⁰ The bill’s passage expanded the electorate by almost fifty percent; however, the new voting districts still disproportionately reflected the population.¹¹ The inclusion of wealth restrictions to the bill excluded the working-class from voting, which prevented the average British citizen from gaining a political voice.¹² Meanwhile, Whigs won a landslide victory in the December 1832 general election, and continued to dominate British politics until 1841.¹³ F. B. Smith, in *The Making of the Second Reform Bill*, argues that even after the reform, “the House of Commons was still largely the prerequisite of the old ruling caste.”¹⁴ Smith also argues that Whig MPs reflected conservative ideals consistent with the unchanged Parliament.¹⁵ These historians criticize the Whigs because the bill hardly accomplished the enumerated intention, while giving the Whigs considerable political gain.

Scholarship that focuses on the period prior to the legislation’s passage primarily argues that the Whigs prioritized preventing a British revolution in promoting the reform. J. R. Dinwiddy, in *Reform in England*, claims the Whigs’ personal words and actions reveal they pushed reform for Britain as a whole, not for personal gain. According to Dinwiddy, contemporary speeches and correspondence lack evidence to indicate Whig MPs

considered political gains.¹⁶ Additionally, Nancy LoPatin, in *The Great Reform Act of 1832*, argues the Whig MPs believed delay or absence of reform would endanger British society and government.¹⁷ Richard Brown and Christopher Daniels, in *Nineteenth-Century Britain*, explain that radical demands, a growing middle class, and the clearly flawed electoral system caused the ruling elite to fear that Britain would reform or revolt.¹⁸ Ultimately, these scholars agree the Whigs acted in the interests of the country in pushing for reform, but the arguments lack a clear connection between the MPs who passed the bill and their motivations. This article looks specifically at the public parliamentary debate before the bill, supplementing it with contemporary newspapers and private correspondence.

My deeper focus on the preceding parliamentary debate provides new evidence in support of this conclusion. Much of the historical record distills the narrative inside of Parliament to a few players and their ideologies, such as Earl Grey (a leader of the Whigs), the Duke of Wellington (a leader of the Tories), and King William IV (the king of the United Kingdom).¹⁹ This limited focus causes an underrepresentation of important details to the parliamentary struggle.

For example, the Bristol riot altered the reform's narrative significantly, but the scholarship overlooks this change in the discussion of revolutions taking place in Europe.²⁰ Modern approaches target relevant themes but would be strengthened through a close inspection of the MPs. Through a close reading of the parliamentary debates, this essay illustrates the significance of the MPs' direct words in understanding the progression of the bill and reflecting developments beyond Parliament. Through my analysis, I ultimately conclude that the reform did accomplish the Whigs' top priority: preventing revolution in Britain.

WILL REFORM CREATE OR PREVENT A FRENCH REVOLUTION IN BRITAIN?

British elites connected violence with poverty and the mob, demonstrating a fear in popular movements prior to the foreign revolts of 1830 and 1831. According to David Jones, British elites viewed the common people as a "dangerous class" because of "real or imaginary criminal behavior and popular movements."²¹ Their fear intensified with the formation of densely populated manufacturing towns at the beginning of the nineteenth century. For example, poets of the era expressed negative impressions of the "mob," connecting groups of common people to barbarism.²² Elites expressed these fears through more than just art, as well. John Stuart Mill, the English philosopher, wrote that the "mob" was "more cruel than the average of its members"

as "the predatory and parasitic tendencies of combinations are far stronger than those of individuals."²³ The British elites clearly feared the mob, and with the effects of the 1789 French Revolution, they imagined the Palace of Westminster being stormed like Bastille. According to Hobsbawm, appealing to the masses was "urgent and unavoidable" because "social revolution by the urban poor was a real possibility."²⁴ British elites already feared a group of common people united, even before contemporary events.

The development of a discontented middle class made the possibility for revolution more likely in Britain, hence making the fear of revolution greater. While the mob was a dangerous and an unpredictable force, the potential revolution needed leaders, and the middle class often filled the roles.²⁵ Due to the Industrial Revolution, a powerful and expanded middle class formed in Britain. The wealth of the industrialists allowed them to gain significant influence over state affairs, but this class still could not vote without owning land.²⁶ They also became discontented from the passage of the Corn Laws in 1815.²⁷ Since the legislation passed despite the industrialists petitioning, the Corn Laws distanced the industrialists from the unreformed Parliament.²⁸ Therefore, these industrialists formed a wealthy and disgruntled middle class that could promote popular revolution in Britain—something that scared the current ruling elites. Additionally, an economic recession in 1829 through 1830 created overall discontent in the country.²⁹ Due to past legislation and an overall lack of representation, the industrialist middle class seemed potentially revolutionary to the British elites of 1830.

The popular revolutions on the European continent in 1830 and 1831 made the British elites even more concerned about popular movements becoming violent and an upset middle class becoming involved. This wave of unrest began with the second French Revolution in late July of 1830, only days before the British parliamentary election. Importantly, the election followed the death of King George IV. This meant a brand new administration and monarch needed to weather the revolutionary fervor spreading through Europe. By the end of 1831, the political unrest spread quickly from France to Belgium, Italy, Portugal, Poland, and Switzerland.³⁰ Similar to 1789, revolution threatened traditional, aristocratic societies, but now Britain appeared to resemble its European neighbors as the country had not before.³¹ For example, the new King William IV requested that "communications with reference to Polish and the Italian questions" be sent through him as to avoid any spread of revolutionary doctrine.³² The British aristocratic elite feared that they too might fall victim to revolutionaries, and electoral reform became the best option to prevent a revolution.

The parliamentary debate initially focused on foreign revolutions. On 1 March 1831, Lord John Russell, a leader in the Whig party, introduced the first version of the reform bill to the House of Commons. Upon this introduction, both Whig and Tory MPs spoke about preventing the foreign revolutions from spreading to Britain, but they disagreed on the best course of prevention.³³ Supporters of reform, primarily Whigs, believed strongly that Britain needed reform because the preconditions for the French Revolution also existed in their country. Opponents of reform, primarily Tories, attacked this belief and instead argued that reform would create those preconditions for revolution. With the debate over revolution, public attitudes became a matter of great concern and a point of major disagreement.³⁴ Importantly, both sides' rhetoric lacked the desperate urgency that came to Parliament later after unrest materialized on the island in Britain at Bristol and elsewhere. The MPs viewed the threat of revolution as real but distant.

Tory MPs distanced British conditions from those on continental Europe and argued the reform would make Britain more susceptible to revolution. Tory MP Twiss insisted that the French and Belgian revolutions did not set an example but provided a warning for even "the most ardent admirers of revolution."³⁵ Twiss argued that not even the revolutionaries won because the events left "Belgium and France devastated—trade suspended—property unsafe—security lost."³⁶ He did not direct these comments to the Whig MPs because they were supporting open rebellion, however. Instead, he believed the Whigs' reform might lead to revolution. For example, Twiss later explained, "[admirers] would find, that moderation was better than revolution; and that these countries held out no encouragement to us to imitate them."³⁷ To Twiss and other Tory MPs, the reform imitated the trajectories of these countries recently devastated by revolution. For Twiss, reforming the electorate threatened revolution more than doing nothing.

Another Tory, MP Charles Wetherell, further described Britain's distinctiveness and agreed that reform would push them closer to revolution. Wetherell claimed Britain to be exceptional and warned against challenging her greatness with reform.³⁸ Before Parliament, Wetherell inferred a connection between constitutional debate to the troubles in Belgium, France, Greece, and Portugal.³⁹ He connected debate over their government to the subsequent revolutions.⁴⁰ Therefore, he argued the reform threatened revolution rather than protected against it.⁴¹ In line with Twiss's urge for moderation, Wetherell insisted that constitutional reform would cause them the same issue: revolution. Wetherell connected reform to unrest, trying to undermine the Whigs' reasons for the bill. Importantly,

this line of argument demonstrates that both these MPs acknowledged that Whigs supported the reform because they perceived the bill would prevent revolution. Twiss and Wetherell accepted revolution as a possibility, arguing that their Whig colleagues incorrectly believed reform would help prevent the potential violence. By offering the alternative interpretation, the Tory MPs demonstrate they understood the Whig argument.

The Whig MPs argued that Britain possessed the preconditions for revolution already, so a lack of action assured revolution. Whig MP Lord Althorp attacked Twiss's claim that Belgium and France did not compare to Britain. Althorp explained, "[Twiss] had stated the evils which had resulted to Belgium and France from the revolutions in those countries; and was it not, then, the duty of those who looked after the welfare of this nation to take measures to prevent such a revolution here?"⁴² Althorp questioned how they could acknowledge the consequences in their close neighbors and not accept that they needed to take measures to prevent revolution. His speech demonstrated his belief that domestic conditions compared to Belgium and France, which supported the Whig belief that only reform could prevent Britain from suffering similarly.

Another Whig MP furthered the argument presented by his colleague. In response to Tory MP Wetherell, Whig MP Denman claimed that "a contrast was mistaken for a resemblance" by Wetherell, claiming that the French Revolution showed reason not to reform.⁴³ Denman argued that the French ruling class' ignoring the people's calls for reform caused the July Revolution, and he warned the same threatened Britain. Seeing Britain in 1831 as equivalent to France in 1830, he believed inaction could push their country to unrest. Therefore, his fear of potential revolution caused him to support the reform bill. Whig MPs saw clear similarities between Britain and Europe, which pushed them to support reformation in hopes of preventing the same fate.

Tory MPs further claimed that the proposed reform would have detrimental effects on Britain equivalent to a revolution. Twiss embedded part of his critique on reform into his earlier statement cautioning against imitation of Belgium and France.⁴⁴ His statement, "that moderation was better than revolution," proved far more divisive than the statement might seem. Opponents of the reform commonly referred to it as revolutionary.⁴⁵ Twiss signaled that moderation solved Britain's ills while avoiding the consequences of revolution. For Twiss, the Whig MPs senselessly threatened upheaval of their own system by suggesting the reform.⁴⁶ Solidifying this position, Twiss said that "[France and Belgium] showed, that if sometimes distress produced a revolution, a revolution always caused distress."⁴⁷ The second part of the phrase utilized the

perceived double meaning of the word revolution: conflict or reform. He implied revolution, in the shape of reform, *always* caused distress; whereas, the distress pushing for reform, only *sometimes* caused an actual revolution. This phrasing effectively downplayed current British distress. Twiss equated reform to revolutionary spirit, which confirmed the Tory fear that revolution would come from reform. The Tory MPs demonstrated that they understood their Whig opponents strove for reform to prevent revolution by equating the reform to revolution, proposing that the Whigs truly proposed what they wanted to prevent.

Whig MPs rejected the Tory comparison between their reform and revolution and confirmed that they desired reform to prevent revolution. The Whig Attorney General Denman declared that “if he thought that this measure [the reform] was calculated to lead to revolution, or to produce a convulsion, no man would struggle against it with more zeal and determination than he would.”⁴⁸ This Whig MP suggested he would oppose the reform if he believed the measure would lead to revolution. Denman later proclaimed that “nothing could be more senseless, nothing more irrational, nothing more absolutely absurd, than to compare the measure now submitted to the House on the subject of reform, either to the revolution in France or to the revolution in Belgium.”⁴⁹ In this argument, Denman directly targeted the Tory position, suggesting the Tory MPs absurdly compared reform to revolution. In Denham’s argument, reform to the government did not contribute to or equate to the revolutions elsewhere in Europe. For Whigs like Denman, reform protected from revolution and did not create revolution’s negative effects.

Another Whig MP explained that more representation did not cause the revolution in France but could have been a potential cure. Sir John Hobhouse concurred: “it was not because the Parliament of France was too much the representative of the people, but because the people were dissatisfied with the very reverse.”⁵⁰ In his view, representation of the people did not cause revolution but could have prevented it in France. Hobhouse, like Denman, found the Tory argument absurd. He believed reform prevented revolution by satisfying the people. Hobhouse concluded that he “had not heard one single argument, or anything worthy [of] the name of argument, to show that there was any danger what[so]ever that could arise...”⁵¹ For Whigs, their reform intended to spare the country from danger, not create revolution. Whigs openly argued that they supported reform to stop a revolution from ever forming, expressing their fear of revolution as the primary motivator.

Tory MPs believed that the government could handle any revolutionary fervor within their borders by being firm and steadfast, opposite of the Whigs’ calls for change.

Twiss believed that “there was nothing to fear” if “the Government acted firmly, and relied on the calm and deliberate judgment of the people, and did not follow the current of revolution.”⁵² Twiss, and other Tory MPs, argued that the “current of revolution” would pass over Britain should they hold firm in their current system.⁵³ While referencing the “calm and deliberate judgement of the people” might seem to support the Whigs’ argument for reform, Twiss actually references the dissolutions and elections characteristic of the British Parliament.⁵⁴ British Parliament at the time could be dissolved and new members could be elected at any point. According to Twiss, the reform subverted this tradition and threatened the country’s stability since Britain prospered under this form of government for so long.⁵⁵ Another Tory even argued that alterations to Britain’s government even threatened the stability of all of Europe.⁵⁶ By arguing that the government should hold firm, Twiss favored retaining this traditional process as a solution to the revolutionary fervor. Again, his attack on the reform demonstrates his understanding that the Whigs promoted reform because of a fear of popular revolution.

Whig MPs countered that maintaining the current government assured sparking revolution in Britain. Whigs significantly opposed the Tories because they did not share their belief that the fervor would fade. Denman believed “[reform] was almost the only mode of preventing a revolution,” and he insisted the measure was “in strict accordance with the spirit of the Constitution.”⁵⁷ Denman described reform as absolutely necessary, and his ominous ultimatum firmly contrasted the Tory claim. In their debate, Denman defended the reform as a defense against revolution, directly countering the claim made by Twiss. Denman also directly rebutted Twiss’ argument that the reform contrasted with British tradition. Notably, he claimed that reform stayed within the spirit of the Constitution (like dissolutions and elections). Through his refutations, Denman represented the Whigs in denying the Tories’ comparison between reform and revolution and affirming the Whigs’ belief that no reform assured revolution.

In addition, Althorp scolded the Tory MPs for insisting that the complaints calling for reform could be ignored. He reminded Parliament these complaints “had long been made” and had been made on a “good ground.” Therefore, Althorp countered the claim that simple dissolutions or elections could manage these concerns, as they already failed to do so for years. To Althorp and the other Whigs, the British people clearly wanted reform. This belief led Althorp to ask, “if there were such grounds of discontent, and if they were permanent, was it not necessary that something should be done to remove them, and prevent

complaints?”⁵⁸ Althorp argued that these public sentiments were serious and needed to be treated by reform. Like other Whigs, Althorp recognized the British people desired the reform and might act violently should it not pass.⁵⁹ The Whig MPs repeatedly insisted that reform was necessary to prevent these expressions of popular discontent from evolving. These arguments solidified the Whigs’ fear of popular revolution and their belief that reform could prevent a potential outbreak of revolution.

IS IT TOO LATE TO REFORM?

The results of the next general parliamentary election demonstrated a popular desire for reform, which made parliamentary debate over reform even more significant and potentially volatile. The House of Commons, which first faced the reform measure in March 1831, was the body elected after the French Revolution and death of King George in July 1830.⁶⁰ From July to March, the people rallied behind the reforming Whigs and rejoiced that the King did the same.⁶¹ The promises of reform ignited metaphorical flames across the country that added greater urgency to passing reform.⁶² When the first version of the reform bill seemed unable to pass in the House of Commons, the Whigs arranged a dissolution of Parliament and subsequent election in April 1831.⁶³ In this election, the Whig party gained a majority in the unreformed Parliament.⁶⁴ The result legitimized the fear of revolution and the preference among voters for reform. This newly elected Parliament quickly passed the bill through the House of Commons with great public support.⁶⁵ However, the reform bill remained far from becoming a law.

Tensions grew around Britain as the bill moved to the House of Lords. The bill needed to be passed in the House of Lords after the House of Commons, and this house of Parliament remained hardly affected by the reform sentiment. The espoused Whig anxieties about the deliberations of the House of Lords showed their consistent fear of popular revolution. An anonymous writer to the *Edinburgh Review* wrote that “every man in the three kingdoms” was asking “what will the Lords do?” They added on stating, “the answer which the Lords will give, depends the sum of our affairs, the continuance of our most valued institutions—the whole safety of our state.”⁶⁶ According to this writer, the entire fate of Britain seemed at stake with this vote: an astronomical claim for an otherwise normal parliamentary proceeding. This writer suggested that a rejection or delay of the bill would have serious consequences on Britain.⁶⁷ This supporter mirrored the Whigs’ fear of the consequences from a potential rejection.⁶⁸

When the House of Lords rejected the reform bill on 8 October 1831, small pockets of popular unrest occurred throughout Britain, legitimizing the expressed fears of the Whigs.⁶⁹ That very night, revolts began in Nottingham and Derby, and before the month ended, rioters controlled one of Britain’s largest manufacturing cities, Bristol, for a weekend. The Bristol mass formed on 29 October with the arrival of their very own, Sir Charles Wetherell.⁷⁰ The Tory MP that strongly opposed reform represented a city that “vehemently championed parliamentary reform,” according to Phillips.⁷¹ The Bristol riot brought mass destruction to the city and required the British cavalry to intervene.⁷² Most importantly, the events in Bristol showed Parliament and the King the seriousness of the threat of revolution. Bristol represented only one of many cities filled with people upset by the Lords’ decision.

The parliamentary rhetoric around the reform bill shifted after Bristol, as both sides appeared to accept that a British revolution could happen. The Whig MPs reintroduced the reform bill a third time in the next session of December 1831.⁷³ Parliament did not see debate about whether Britain compared to foreign countries or had the conditions for revolution then; the MPs did not need more evidence than Bristol. Whig MPs spoke as if Parliament operated with a popular ultimatum, and every day of inaction moved the country closer to destruction.⁷⁴ They expressed a willingness to do anything, even push the creation of more peers, to prevent an expected revolution.⁷⁵ The King also supported the reform after Bristol. Tory MPs recognized the looming threat but continued to advocate for modest change.⁷⁶ They feared that reacting drastically would ruin British democracy forever. However, some Tories deflected from the opposition as they feared another denial of the bill would result in “a blow to the aristocracy and the sanctity of the Upper House by a creation of peers or possibly a political and social revolution among the people,” according to LoPatin.⁷⁷

The Whig MPs spoke with a greater urgency in Parliament after Bristol, connecting the recent unrest to the historic to argue in favor of reform. Whig MP Thomas Macaulay worried greatly for Britain’s future. For example, Macaulay wrote, “all that I know of the history of past times, all the observations that I have been able to make on the present state of the country, have convinced me that the time has arrived when a great concession must be made to the democracy of England.”⁷⁸ The “past times” and “present state” alluded to the recent French Revolutions, revolutionary waves in Europe, and recent riots in Britain. Macaulay’s statement showed his belief that Parliament could not afford to take reform slowly. Macaulay and other Whig MPs demonstrated their belief a change needed to happen.

The Whig MPs believed they needed change because they feared the popular revolution that might come without reform. Fellow Whig MP Montague Gore expressed this reason for urgency, warning, “it requires no prophet to foretell that the days of the Peerage and Monarchy, and allow me to add, that the days of the Constitution are numbered.”⁷⁹ Gore believed the British government would soon end if something did not change. Gore supported his declaration with a comparison to Rome, the prime example of power and decline: “from the moment [Praetorian Guards of Rome] began to discuss the merits of their Emperors, the fate of the empire was sealed.”⁸⁰ Gore saw middle-class leaders, who could wield the mob into a revolution and already questioned the legitimacy of the unreformed Parliament, comparable to the Roman guards. For these Whig MPs, recent events made them afraid of what might happen if the Parliament did not pass reform.

The urgency of the Whig MPs demonstrated a greater overall fear among the British elite population. Gore insisted that they must legislate differently, according to the circumstances they were in: “bear in mind, that these are no *ordinary* times; that the measures which may be *expedient* in *ordinary*, are *dangerous* in *critical* moments!”⁸¹ Gore insisted that Parliament could not treat the reform like any other proceeding. Continuing in this observation, Whig MP Macaulay concluded that “whether the change be in itself good or bad, has become a question of secondary importance; that good or bad, the thing must be done; that a law as strong as the laws of attraction and motion has decreed it.”⁸² This line gave an apocalyptic ultimatum to inaction, and the line revealed that Macaulay believed that the quality of the reform did not matter as much as what it represented. Whig MPs urged the House of Lords to treat the reform situation with great speed and care because of the deep fear of an unavoidable revolution otherwise.

The bill once again passed from the House of Commons to the House of Lords on 23 March 1832. According to Thomas May, “the peril of again rejecting [the bill] could not be concealed,” as the same Lords who rejected the bill before had to vote on it again.⁸³ Despite the realized threat, Tory MPs did not fully concede, so another parliamentary clash began. Both parties recognized the peril but differed on how to act upon the threat. In the House of Lords, the Whig MPs insisted that Parliament had to act because Bristol and other riots showed that the people would act if they did not. The Tory MPs countered that the Whigs convinced the people to believe in the reform as their relief, so Parliament should convince them of why not to reform. In the following paragraphs, an exchange between the Earl of Shrewsbury, a Whig MP, and the Earl of Mansfield, a Tory MP, on 10 April in the House of Lords will demonstrate the two parties in this tense moment.⁸⁴

Whig MPs in the House of Lords argued the reform bill could prevent the popular unrest seen at Bristol from enveloping the entire country. Whig MP Shrewsbury stipulated that the growing starvation and crime indicated that the people had real concerns with the current system.⁸⁵ Shrewsbury declared that, without reform, “the people, driven to desperation by their evils and their sufferings, [will rise] with one accord, determined to emancipate themselves from a state of oppression which they [can] endure no longer.”⁸⁶ Shrewsbury clearly believed that a lack of reform would lead to popular revolution. Shrewsbury acknowledged that “agitation is undoubtedly an evil,” so he pleaded for the fellow MPs to have “the present system altered, and the grievances of the country redressed by the great influence of a real and effective representation of the people.”⁸⁷ Shrewsbury determined that the people demanded their own representation, which Parliament needed to provide for them. Like other Whig MPs, Shrewsbury observed the people held true concerns that could not be appeased without reform.

The Tory MPs argued that, because the Whigs convinced the people that the reform bill solved their ills, the Whigs could convince them of a better method. Tory MP Mansfield claimed, “in times of excitement the cry for Reform has always been heard, but, under the sanction of Ministers, it is certainly more general on the present occasion than it has ever been before.”⁸⁸ In line with that accusation, Mansfield asked of the reform: “may we not be permitted to express a doubt as to the existence of that necessity?”⁸⁹ Mansfield inferred that, if the people were convinced that they needed reform, then the want of reform did not truly come from the people’s concerns. Mansfield concluded that he would not support a reform with mere “speculative” advantages but implied he would support one that had “real” advantages.⁹⁰ Incomplete rejection of the bill represents a shift in attitudes before and after Bristol. Tory MPs opposed all reform before, but the situation became too dire. As Cornish and colleagues acknowledged, the months following Bristol was “a time when even wise conservatives appreciated full well the value of timely concession.”⁹¹

Whig MPs believed that they should answer to the needs of the people to prevent revolution. Whig MP Shrewsbury argued that Parliament had a direct responsibility to the people, “we now stand for judgment before the people”; therefore, they should complete the will of the people, “the judgment has been pronounced, and our only hope of pardon is, to sue for it in this act of justice.”⁹² Shrewsbury insisted the Lords should not determine if the people were in error. He framed his words to put Parliament on trial, supporting his stance that the current system was corrupt and needed correcting.

Shrewsbury determined that the reform bill helped not only the people but the whole country.⁹³ Like other Whig MPs, Shrewsbury felt that the future of Britain rested on passing the reform because he feared that only the reform could stop popular revolution.

Tory MPs countered that they must not give in to popular sentiment because of the dangerous implications that might have on their country. MP Mansfield completely disagreed with Shrewsbury. Mansfield used an analogy that highlighted the dangers of complete responsiveness to the public:

If the wish of the people were for the declaration of an unjust war—the continuance of peace incompatible with the honour and security of the country—if their clamour were directed against some obnoxious but innocent individuals, would you, in the first case, deviate from a prudent policy, or, in the latter, allow the even course of justice to be diverted? Certainly not.⁹⁴

Mansfield expressed that the peoples' desire alone did not constitute legitimate claims for legislation. He denied the claim that Parliament only existed as a representative body of the peoples' current wishes. Further, Mansfield stated, "an attempt should be made to persuade the people that the evil of delay would be preferable to the danger of falling into irretrievable errors by inconsiderate... Legislation."⁹⁵ For Mansfield, Parliament risked greater danger to Britain by responding than waiting. Mansfield recognized the dangers of rejection, so he and the other Tories pushed for discussions and amendments to delay and alter the reform bill instead. The words of Mansfield and Shrewsbury demonstrate that they understood the pressing danger of popular revolution but disagreed with the Whigs on how to respond to the danger. The Tory arguments indicate that they understood the Whig MPs proposed reform based on their own conceptions on how to prevent revolution.

The drastic proposal of expanding the House of Lords shows just how seriously the Whig MPs feared popular revolution. The proposed expansion of the Peerage would have greatly weakened the House of Lords and the King. Prime Minister Earl Grey, a Whig MP, described the measure as "evil" when suggesting to the King that it might be the only course of action.⁹⁶ The Whig MP Thomas Creevey, a friend and ally of Grey, claimed that the King "*hates* the peer-making," and the King expressed direct opposition to the proposal.⁹⁷ The staunchest leaders of reform appeared to sincerely hate the idea of peer-making. However, the Whig MPs felt they needed to do whatever was necessary to ensure the reform passed because they viewed revolution as the alternative.

Assessing the role of the King in the idea of peer-making provides further evidence that the Whigs' pushed reform to prevent popular revolution. Since peer-making took the King's approval, the Whig MPs approached him directly. Earl Grey, the leader of the Whig MPs, wrote to the King and explained that peer-making would be necessary because the fate of Britain depended on passing reform to prevent revolution.⁹⁸ The King also recognized the need to settle the country, and Earl Grey presented the Whigs' reform as the option. While the King favored the reform, he did not favor peer-making initially. However, the riots gave King William IV "a taste of what could come if the Bill was rejected again," making him more willing to participate in the drastic proposal.⁹⁹ After showing repeated hesitation, the King finally offered full support to create more Peers, if necessary.¹⁰⁰ The King himself wrote that "he did not persist in that opposition; he yielded, rather than risk the continuance of agitation in the country."¹⁰¹ Ultimately, the Whig MPs convinced the King such a measure could be necessary if the reform did not pass. The reluctant willingness by the King indicates that he perceived the Whigs' intentions for the reform as sincere.

When the King's support became apparent, leading Tory MPs in the House of Lords expressed severe revulsion to the idea. Wellington declared that "if [the creation of Peers] be a legal and constitutional course of conduct . . . there is no doubt that the Constitution of this House and of this country is at an end," and the Earl of Carnarvon asked, "the noble Earl whether a more cool and deliberate insult was ever offered by any Minister to an independent Legislature."¹⁰² The Tory MPs pointed out that the idea completely diverged from democratic governance. Earl Grey echoed the Whigs' intentions: "looking at the situation of the country, I thought the measure could no longer safely be deferred without danger."¹⁰³ From his public to private statements, Earl Grey demonstrated that the perception of imminent danger undergirded this drastic proposal to ensure the reform passed. As the leading figure for the Whig MPs, he confirmed the ideas espoused by his colleagues. Grey's words provide the penultimate proof that the Whigs likely feared revolution above all else.

The Representation of the People Act 1832 was formally approved on 7 June 1832. Tory MPs conceded to the threat of creating more Peers, so the bill received the necessary majority in the House of Lords.¹⁰⁴ Whig MPs celebrated this accomplishment with the greatest of zeal. Thomas Creevey declared that passing this reform "against a great majority of peers, and without making a single new one, must always remain one of the greatest miracles in English history" because reform "has saved the country from confusion, and perhaps the monarch and monarchy from destruction."¹⁰⁵ In reflecting on Britain's avoidance of

revolution after 1848, Thomas Macaulay shared the same perspective:

If I am asked why we stood by our Government in its peril, when men all around us were engaged in pulling Governments down, I answer, It was because we knew that though our Government... was a good Government, that its fault admitted of peaceable and legal remedies, that it had never inflexibly opposed just demands, that we had obtained confessions of inestimable value... by the mere force of reason and public opinion.¹⁰⁶

In keeping with their reasons for reform, Whig MPs heralded the act as preventing the ultimate evil from befalling their country. Both immediately after the victory and years later, they firmly believed that Parliament acted from necessity. Since fear of revolution was the primary motivator, the Whigs could declare this preventative measure as a total success for all of Britain.

Not all in Britain celebrated the reform as a victory, however. Critics of the bill pointed to the bill's relative lack of expansion as proof of Whig self-interest, mirroring the arguments of the later historians. When the Tory MPs like the Earl of Mansfield accused the Whigs of stirring public discontent, they attributed furtive motivations to the Whigs' actions. Friedrich Engels wrote that the Reform Bill "made the bourgeoisie the ruling class," and Benjamin Disraeli accused the new Commons of being as "privileged, irresponsible, and hereditary, like the Peers."¹⁰⁷ These social commentators observed the immediate effects of the act and concluded that the reform actually did little to represent the British people and the new working class. Chartist leaders, representing the working class, championed further reform beyond the modest gains which hardly impacted the everyday worker.¹⁰⁸ These commentators and leaders saw that the reform merely benefited the Whigs and their main constituents, the industrial middle class. This view corroborated the remarks made by the later historians, i.e. Hobsbawm, Smith, and Dinwiddy.¹⁰⁹ Seeing the reform's representative shortcomings caused these detractors to retrospectively attribute surreptitious motivations onto the Whig reformers, missing the true intentions of these men.

CONCLUSION

Moncrieff's aptly named poem, "The Triumph of Reform!," reveals a glimpse of the popular agreement with the Whigs, while vouching for the sanctity of their intentions. The poem, which personified John Bull as an estate owner struggling to maintain his "house" against reform, heavily aligned with

the contemporary Whig accounts of the factors surrounding the reform.¹¹⁰ Moncrieff explained, "[those] who had *Lorded* [Reform] so long" were forced "to yield" which allowed Reform to "triumphantly" prevail.¹¹¹ Moncrieff's ultimate praise came when he declared the reform was a "sure harbinger of PLENTY, PEACE, PROSPERITY, and JOY!" While Moncrieff's poem clearly dramatizes the events, the poem implies some popular agreement that the Whigs focused on preventing unrest. For those who believed Britain neared revolution, the reform appeared to save the kingdom from the destruction seen throughout Europe at the time.

While the bill's critics make fair assessments of the reform bill's impact, they misrepresent the Whigs' intentions in their analysis by only looking at those impacts. Observers like Engels and Disraeli conclude that the reform did not do enough to represent the people, but they mischaracterize the bill's main purpose. As demonstrated, preventing the revolution was the goal of the Whig reformers, which they accomplished. Their rebuttals to Tory opposition provide even further proof. The Whigs benefitted additionally and incidentally. One could never determine if a revolution would have happened, but the absence of revolution indicated a victory for the Whigs. Later commentators and Chartists determined the reform to be unsuccessful based upon their definitions of success, but the Whigs did not share the same definition. As Parliament cast the votes to make the bill law, Whig MPs likely considered only their current circumstances and the potential dangers, not the distant political ramifications.

The Representation of the People Act in 1832 had a considerable impact on the British electorate. This reform may not have altered the parliamentary system itself, but it allowed many new reforms to follow during the 1830s. By bringing the middle class into the British Parliament, the reform peacefully chipped at the political stronghold of the upper classes.¹¹² The Whigs' domination in British politics until 1841 allowed for the introduction of numerous progressive reforms which would have otherwise not been possible.¹¹³ The Slavery Abolition Act and Factory Acts passed in 1833, and the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 and Municipal Corporations Act of 1835 passed in the years following. As Dinwiddy described, this trend represented an "unprecedented spate of important legislation" that introduced some protections for vulnerable parties and "a degree of democratization into local government."¹¹⁴ The Whig government leading this charge created a foundation for later and more effective popular policies. Without this measure, truer representation and progress might have been achieved far later in British history. Historians aptly termed this reform, "Great," as the bill started the trajectory to improved electoral representation and forever altered the British political system.

NOTES

- 1 “John Bull” is a term used to represent Great Britain (comparable to “Uncle Sam” for the United States of America). William Thomas Moncrieff, “The Triumph Of Reform! A Comic Poem,” (London: 1832), 323–4.
- 2 The “Great Reform of 1832” was officially titled the “Representation of the People Act.” (“Representation of the People Act, 1832”: An Act to amend the Representation of the People in *England and Wales*. [7th June 1832] Extracts from PGS, 2 Will. IV, c. 45) H. J. Hanham, *The Nineteenth-Century Constitution: 1815–1914: Documents and Commentary*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 262–263.
- 3 Hanham, *The Nineteenth-Century Constitution*, 262–263.
- 4 William Carpenter, *The people’s book; comprising their chartered rights and practical wrongs*. (London: W. Strange, 1831), 406.
- 5 The different focuses on the event can be seen in the titles of the historical works. Both Dinwiddy and LoPatin culminate their works in 1832, but Smith focuses on the second reform bill that corrects the errors of the first while Hobsbawm assesses the entire period. J. R. Dinwiddy, *From Luddism to the First Reform Bill: Reform in England, 1810–1832*. (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1986). Nancy D. LoPatin. *Political Unions, Popular Politics, and the Great Reform Act of 1832*. (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999). F. B. Smith. *The Making of the Second Reform Bill*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1966). Eric J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution: Europe 1789–1848*. (London: Abacus, 1977).
- 6 Hobsbawm, *Age of Revolution*.
- 7 Dinwiddy, *Reform in England*.
- 8 Hobsbawm specifically places the reform in the context of the external happenings. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution*. Smith argues that the bill did little more than direct power to the industrialists. Smith, *Second Reform Bill*. LoPatin argues that revolution was all but sure if the Whigs did not sponsor the reform. LoPatin, *Political Unions*.
- 9 Dinwiddy references the speeches and correspondence as strong evidence to support his argument “that ministers regarded civil war and revolution as real possibilities.” However, the author does not go into detail with the specific rhetoric of those ministers. Dinwiddy, *Reform in England*, 51.
- 10 (“Representation of the People Act, 1832”: An Act to amend the Representation of the People in *England and Wales*. [7th June 1832] Extracts from PGS, 2 Will. IV, c. 45) Hanham, *The Nineteenth-Century Constitution*, 262–263.
- 11 Hanham, *The Nineteenth-Century Constitution*, 262–263.
- 12 Eric Hobsbawm concludes that Britain in the Reform of 1832, “side-stepped the problem of the citizen’s politics by limiting political rights to men of property and education.” Aligning with Phillips’ observation, Hobsbawm argues that the reform did not benefit the electorate by maintaining the property restriction. John A. Phillips, *The Great Reform Bill in the Boroughs: English Electoral Behaviour, 1818–1841*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 30.; Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 83.
- 13 Dinwiddy, *Reform in England*, 68.
- 14 Smith, *Second Reform Bill*, 15.
- 15 Smith, *Second Reform Bill*.
- 16 Dinwiddy stated, “direct evidence that the Whig ministers had party political considerations in mind is hard to find, either in their speeches or in their private correspondence.” Dinwiddy, *Reform in England*, 50.
- 17 According to LoPatin, “Whigs could not back away from enacting the Bill, or even tolerate much amending of the measure, without courting a popular revolution and jeopardizing the whole structure of the English constitution.” LoPatin, *Political Unions*, 132–133.
- 18 Richard Brown and Christopher Daniels. *Nineteenth-Century Britain*. (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986), 17.
- 19 Dinwiddy, *Reform in England*.
- 20 Hobsbawm, *Age of Revolution*.
- 21 David Jones, *Crime, Protest, Community, and Police in Nineteenth-Century Britain*. (London: Routledge, 1982), 17.
- 22 Illustrating this development, the poet William Wordsworth embodied the mob in one verse, “all laws of acting, thinking, speaking man Went from me, neither knowing me, nor known,” while fellow Poet Robert Southey claimed the “manufacturing poor is more easily instigated to revolt.” (“The strife of singularity, 1805”: Extracts from William Wordsworth *The Prelude, of, Growth of a Poet’s Mind* (1805 version), books vii and viii.) B. I. Coleman, *The idea of the city in nineteenth-century Britain*. (London: Routledge, 1973), 31.; (“Sleeping upon gunpowder, 1807” Extracts from Robert Southey, *Letters from England* (1807), letters 36 and 61.) Coleman, *The idea of the city*, 35.
- 23 John Stuart Mill, *Principles of Political Economy*. 5th edition. (London: D. Appleton and Company, 1897), 220.
- 24 Hobsbawm, *Age of Revolution*, 151.
- 25 Hobsbawm, *Age of Revolution*, 142–3.
- 26 In his history of the era, Hobsbawm expressed the common phrase that “it was accepted that money not only talked, but governed.” Hobsbawm, *Age of Revolution*, 47.
- 27 Hobsbawm, *Age of Revolution*, 58.
- 28 Dinwiddy, *Reform in England*, 12.
- 29 Dinwiddy, *Reform in England*, 45.
- 30 Hobsbawm, *Age of Revolution*, 139–40.
- 31 “Last, but not least, all these traditional legitimations of state authority were, since 1789, under permanent challenge. This is clear in the case of monarchy. The need to provide a new, or at least supplementary, ‘national’ foundation for this institution was felt in states as secure from revolution as George III’s Britain...” Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism*, 84.; Hobsbawm wrote elsewhere that the foreign influence was so intense that he described 1830 to 1832 as “the only period in the nineteenth century when the analysis of British politics in such terms is not wholly artificial.” In other words, the progression of the British constitutional system aligned with those of the European systems for once. Hobsbawm, *Age of Revolution*, 140.
- 32 The King claimed that he did this in the interest of “preventing the issue of instructions, or the use of expressions, which might not accord with his view of the subject, and which it would be difficult to cancel or recall” which reflected his fear of revolutionary doctrine entering Britain that would be problematic and difficult to control. (“William IV requires to see foreign dispatches, 1832” [Sir Herbert Taylor to Earl Grey, 19 April 1832] Extract from Grey, *Reform Act, 1832*, II, 376–7) Hanham, *The Nineteenth-Century Constitution*, 54.
- 33 Among these M.P.s were the Tories Mr. Horace Twiss, Sir Charles Wetherell, John Walsh, and Sir Robert Inglis. The Whig M.P.s were Lord Althorp, Attorney General Denman, Sir John Hobhouse, and Thomas Creevey. Twiss and Althorp countered each other on the first day of debate after the proposal, March 1, and Wetherell and Denman did the same on the next day.
- 34 According to analysis of the searchable Hansard parliamentary papers, over the course of 1831, the phrase “public opinion” was used by M.P.s more than any other year in the nineteenth century. Great Britain, *Hansard’s Parliamentary Debates*.
- 35 *Hansard*, Mr. H. Twiss, 1 March 1831.
- 36 *Hansard*, Mr. H. Twiss, 1 March 1831.
- 37 *Hansard*, Mr. H. Twiss, 1 March 1831.
- 38 *Hansard*, Wetherell, 2 March 1831.
- 39 *Hansard*, Wetherell, 2 March 1831.
- 40 *Hansard*, Wetherell, 2 March 1831.
- 41 “Was there not a question now pending as to the Constitution to be established in Greece? Was not the Charter of Portugal a subject of difficulty and discussion? In Belgium, was it not a matter of anxious inquiry...? And what had taken place in France...” *Hansard*, Wetherell, 2 March 1831.
- 42 *Hansard*, Althorp, 1 March 1831.
- 43 *Hansard*, Attorney General, 2 March 1831.
- 44 *Hansard*, Mr. H. Twiss, 1 March 1831.
- 45 In a public meeting after the rejection of the Reform Bill by the House of Peers, a gentleman, Mr. James Hunton, rose and declared that the “House of Peers has deprived us of the benefits we so sanguinely anticipated from the Reform Bill, which they have rejected under the specious pretence that the measure was revolutionary.” *Times*, “Public Meeting at Richmond, in the County of York,” 27 October 1831.
- 46 Twiss further condemned the reform as revolutionary: “it was impossible to suppose that Englishmen could be so senseless, and of so light a nature, that they would run the hazard of a

- revolution, to obtain some theoretical improvements in their Constitution.” *Hansard*, Twiss, 1 March 1831; Wetherell similarly related that “Great Britain ought not to add to the examples of experimental States that visionary projects of his Majesty’s present Government.” Wetherell saw reform expediting revolution in Britain as the reform itself was too revolutionary. *Hansard*, Wetherell, 2 March 1831.
- 47 *Hansard*, Twiss, 1 March 1831.
- 48 *Hansard*, Attorney General, 2 March 1831.
- 49 *Hansard*, Attorney General, 2 March 1831.
- 50 Hobhouse also added, “This was the cause, and the sole cause, why there were likely to be any disturbances in France...” *Hansard*, Hobhouse, 3 March 1831.
- 51 *Hansard*, Hobhouse, 3 March 1831.
- 52 *Hansard*, Twiss, 1 March 1831.
- 53 *Hansard*, Twiss, 1 March 1831.
- 54 Another Tory, Sir Robert Inglis, explained this on the same day: “Their local rights, their municipal privileges, we are bound to protect; their general interests we are bound to consult at all times; but not their will, unless it shall coincide with our own deliberate sense of right... We are sent here to legislate, not for the wishes of any set of men, but for the wants and the rights of all... If in our conduct there be error, our constituents have their remedy at a dissolution.” (“Sir Robert Inglis defends the unreformed House of Commons, 1 March 1831” Extracts from 3 *Hansard* II, 1095–7, 1108–9.) Hanham, *The Nineteenth-Century Constitution*, 140–1.
- 55 Twiss said, “if, however, surrounded by factions the Parliament should legislate blindly... if they went forward without experience to direct them, every day would only carry them further into danger...” *Hansard*, Twiss, 1 March 1831.
- 56 John Walsh wrote a commentary on the idea of reform in which he said: “We must remember, while we are discussing such extensive changes, at this critical period, in our own Government, that we are a most influential part of this great whole; that we shall act upon Europe, and, in turn, be acted upon by it. If we add a fresh momentum to the popular excitation of the Continent, it will, in turn, give back an additional impulse to our own.” Walsh acknowledged Europe and Britain’s reciprocal influence by alluding that reform would apply a “fresh momentum” to Europe’s “popular excitation” which would only further work against Britain, reinforcing the claim that reform would be incendiary. John Benn Walsh. *Observations on the ministerial plan of reform*. (London: J. Ridgway, 1831), 75.
- 57 *Hansard*, Attorney General, 2 March 1831.
- 58 *Hansard*, Althorp, 1 March 1831.
- 59 In a private letter, fellow Whig Thomas Creevey wrote that “the country will be in a flame from one end to the other in favor of the measure” within days of this initial debate. “Mr. Creevey to Miss Ord, 3 March 1831”: Thomas Creevey and Herbert Maxwell. *The Creevey Papers: a Selection From the Correspondence & Diaries of the Late Thomas Creevey, M. P., Born 1768—died 1838*. v. 2 (London: J. Murray, 1903), 221.
- 60 Thomas Erskine May. *The Constitutional History of England since the Accession of George the Third*. (London: Longmans, Green, 1863).
- 61 Lord Earl Grey had approached the King to seek support for Reform, and “the King’s conduct was perfect” in relaying his support. “Mr. Creevey to Miss Ord, 4 February 1831”: *Creevey Papers*, 216.; At a public gathering in the St. Andrew parish, a leading gentleman expressed that “the ministers of the Crown, backed by the King (immense cheering), and supported by the people, came forward and declared that a reform in Parliament was necessary to support the Government, and afford stability to the Constitution.” *Times*, “Reform,” 4 March 1831.; The King’s word was immense in rallying public support for the Reform measure: “Partly as a result of the King’s support, expectations raised by Reform among thousands of Englishmen in 1830 and 1831 exceeded Hardy’s. Many felt that only the Reform Bill could save England from catastrophe.” Phillips, *The Great Reform Bill in the Boroughs*, 20.
- 62 Hortatory speakers such as William Cobbett also helped establish belief in Reform: “The enemies of reform jeeringly ask us, whether reform would do these things [improvements to daily life] for us; and I answer distinctly that IT WOULD DO THEM ALL!” (“Excessive hopes placed on electoral reform: William Cobbett, 1 April 1831”: Extract from *Cobbett’s Weekly Political Register*, LXXII, 4–5.) Hanham, *The Nineteenth-Century Constitution*, 262.
- 63 May, *The Constitutional History of England*, 360.
- 64 May, *The Constitutional History of England*, 361.
- 65 May, *The Constitutional History of England*, 361.
- 66 Sydney Smith, 1771–1845. “What will the Lords do?” *The Edinburgh Review*. v. 54, Aug.–Dec.1831 (Edinburgh: A. and C. Black, September 1831), 259.
- 67 The writer later asserted that “never since the world began... was there a more gross deception, or a more grievous delusion...” than the Lords “flattering themselves that all this expression of public opinion proceeded only from a sudden and transient impulse.” Later, the writer concluded, “the anxiety, the fervour—the unprecedented ardour with which the people regard a measure in which their whole hearts are embarked, renders the rejection, or even delay of its passing, a matter of the most serious consideration.” Smith, “What will the Lords do?”, 261.
- 68 Similarly, Creevey wrote, “if this bill is rejected, the question will be, will you have revolution or will you have a larger House of Lords?” “Mr. Creevey to Miss Ord, 16 September 1831”: *Creevey Papers*, 236.
- 69 Phillips, *The Great Reform Bill in the Boroughs*.
- 70 Phillips, *The Great Reform Bill in the Boroughs*.
- 71 In Bristol they had formed a Reform Committee and drafted a supporting petition with 12,000 signatures. Bristolians also gave the petition to Lord Althorp rather than their own representative, Wetherell, because they did not feel that Wetherell respected their desires. Phillips, *The Great Reform Bill in the Boroughs*, 65–6.
- 72 Phillips, *The Great Reform Bill in the Boroughs*.
- 73 May, *The Constitutional History of England*, 361.
- 74 The key Whig M.P.s in this final push for reform in the House of Lords were Earl Grey, Montague Gore, Thomas Macaulay, and the Earl of Shrewsbury.
- 75 The King had the authority to create more peers which means he could expand the number of representatives in the House of Lords (also known as the House of Peers). This was considered a radical solution with nefarious implications as summed up by the anonymous writer who wrote that “nothing is more plain than that the application of so violent a medicine, must leave behind it serious evils in the system. The Peers will be weakened in their authority incalculably, and at a time when the Commons are exceedingly strengthened; so that the just balance of the government will be shaken, if not destroyed. The country has a deep interest in avoiding this extremity, and of all the country the Peers have the deepest.” “What will the Lords do?” *The Edinburgh Review*, 264.
- 76 Among these Tory M.P.s were the Duke of Wellington, the Earl of Mansfield, and the Earl of Carnarvon.
- 77 These specific Tory M.P.s, such as Lords Wharnccliffe and Harrowby, were known as ‘waverers.’ LoPatin, *Political Unions*, 133–4.
- 78 (“Macaulay on reform, revolution, and the middle classes, 16 December 1831”: Extracts from Macaulay, *Works*, VIII, 71–2.) Hanham, *The Nineteenth-Century Constitution*, 11–12.
- 79 Montague Gore. *Observations on the reform bill, and on the dangers of the present crisis*. (London: J. Ridgway, 1831), 26.
- 80 Gore, *Observations on the reform bill*, 26.
- 81 Gore, *Observations on the reform bill*, 31.
- 82 Later, Macaulay compared the pressure of reform to Newton’s laws on attraction and motion, calling it “as strong as the laws of attraction and motion.” The Whig MP expressed directly that he saw the popular desire for reform to be as fundamental as the laws of nature. (“Macaulay on reform, revolution, and the middle classes, 16 December 1831”: Extracts from Macaulay, *Works*, VIII, 71–2.) Hanham, *The Nineteenth-Century Constitution*, 11–12.
- 83 May, *The Constitutional History of England*, 361.
- 84 *Hansard*, Shrewsbury, 10 April 1832.; *Hansard*, Mansfield, 10 April 1832.
- 85 *Hansard*, Shrewsbury, 10 April 1832.
- 86 *Hansard*, Shrewsbury, 10 April 1832.
- 87 *Hansard*, Shrewsbury, 10 April 1832.
- 88 *Hansard*, Mansfield, 10 April 1832.
- 89 *Hansard*, Mansfield, 10 April 1832.
- 90 *Hansard*, Mansfield, 10 April 1832.

- 91 W. R. Cornish, Jenifer Hart, A. H. Manchester, and J. Stevenson. *Crime and Law in Nineteenth Century Britain*. (Dublin: Irish University Press, 1978), 115.
- 92 *Hansard*, Shrewsbury, 10 April 1832.
- 93 Shrewsbury believed that passing this bill would restore the Lords' "power of doing good, by cooperating with the people for the benefit of all, and the regeneration of the empire." *Hansard*, Shrewsbury, 10 April 1832.
- 94 *Hansard*, Mansfield, 10 April 1832.
- 95 *Hansard*, Mansfield, 10 April 1832.
- 96 "393: The King to Earl Grey, 5 April 1832," Charles Grey. *The Reform Act, 1832: the Correspondence of the Late Earl Grey With His Majesty King William IV. And With Sir Herbert Taylor, From Nov. 1830 to June 1832*. (London: J. Murray, 1867), 311.
- 97 "Mr. Creevey to Miss Ord, 13 February 1832," *The Creevey Papers*, 241.; "439: The King to Earl Grey, 15 May 1832," *Correspondence of Earl Grey and King William IV*, 411.
- 98 The proposal materialized because "His Majesty is assured, and he believes, that the peace and the tranquility of the country depend upon an early settlement of the question which so intensely agitates it," and Earl Grey assured that the measure was necessary to "have the effect of speedily passing the Reform Bill in such a shape as would satisfy the just expectations of the public, and put an end to the agitation which now prevails..." "301: The King to Earl Grey, 5 Jan 1832," *Correspondence of Earl Grey and King William IV*, 73.; "438: Earl Grey to the King, 15 May 1832," *Correspondence of Grey With His Majesty*, 410.
- 99 LoPatin, *Political Unions*, 88.
- 100 The dramatic period of time when the King was undecided is known as the May Days. The King initially agreed to create enough peers for the bill but withdrew his support in late April of 1832. This withdrawal caused Earl Grey and his entire cabinet to resign and forced the King to ask the leading Tory MP, the Duke of Wellington, to try and form a new government. When Wellington was unsuccessful, the King became desperate and brought back Earl Grey with full support to create more Peers if necessary. LoPatin, *Political Unions*.
- 101 "439: The King to Earl Grey, 15 May 1832," *Correspondence of Earl Grey and King William IV*, 411.
- 102 *Hansard*, Wellington, 17 May 1832.; *Hansard*, Carnarvon, 17 May 1832.
- 103 *Hansard*, Earl Grey, 17 May 1832.
- 104 May, *The Constitutional History of England*, 362-3.
- 105 "Mr. Creevey to Miss Ord, 26 May 1832," *The Creevey Papers*, 246-247.
- 106 ("Macaulay accounts for the absence of an 1848 revolution in Britain": [Speech at Edinburgh, 2 November 1852] Extracts from Macaulay, *Works*, VIII, 418-19.) Hanham, *The Nineteenth-Century Constitution*, 12-3.
- 107 Friedrich Engels and V. G. Kiernan. *The Condition of the Working Class in England*. (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 2005), 225.; ("Disraeli on the House of Commons, 1835" Extracts from Hutcheon, *Whigs and Whiggism*, p. 96.) Hanham, *The Nineteenth-Century Constitution*, 143.
- 108 Friederich Engels observed the Chartist movement "steadily consolidated itself, since [the Reform Bill], as a more and more pronounced working men's party in position to the bourgeoisie" and became quite popular among the lower middle and working classes after the Reform Bill's disappointment. Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, 236-7.; Chartism' 'Six Points' included" manhood suffrage, the ballot, equal electoral districts, abolition of property qualifications, payments for MPs, and annual Parliaments." Christopher Harvie and H. C. G. Matthew. *Nineteenth-Century Britain: a Very Short Introduction*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 38.
- 109 Hobsbawm stated that "1830-32 had decided the issue of power in favour of the industrialists," Hobsbawm, *Age of Revolution*, 368.; Smith concluded that Parliament was "still predominantly aristocratic" a generation later "more accurately because of the Act itself," Smith, *Second Reform Bill*, 15.; and Dinwiddy interpreted that the Whig governments after the bill displayed "a consistent indifference or even hostility to the interests of working men," Dinwiddy, *Reform in England*, 72.
- 110 The poem blamed the "Tenants of his neighbour, FRENCH... a POLE... MR. BELGE... ITALIAN boys... [and] cousin Germans," for rousing the "Tenants of John Bull" to vow to "die or have Reform!" The work also characterized the Tory Lords as a "PRETTY LAWYER without cause" and indirectly referenced M.P.s Twiss

and Wetherell accordingly. Twiss' name was represented by the phrase: "The plan most strangely Twiss-ted"; and Wetherell appeared as "One old Knave, swore he'd Weather-all." Moncrieff, "The Triumph Of Reform," 233-56; 377-81.

- 111 Moncrieff, "The Triumph Of Reform," 479-83.
- 112 Nineteenth-century British historian, James Murdoch, wrote that "[This reform] was the first break, too, in the great political 'ring'—the 'close corporation' of the three Estates which had reigned over the country for a hundred and forty-four years." James Murdoch, *History of Constitutional Reform in Great Britain and Ireland; with a Full Account of the Three Great Measures of 1832, 1867 and 1884*. (Glasgow: Blackie & Son, 1885), 160.
- 113 Dinwiddy, *Reform in England*, 68.
- 114 Dinwiddy, *Reform in England*, 69.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

AUTHOR AFFILIATIONS

Ryan Miller  orcid.org/0000-0001-7672-8637
University of Georgia, US

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ryan Miller grew up in Winder, Georgia and graduated from the University of Georgia in 2020 with a Bachelor of Arts in History and a Bachelor of Science in Chemistry. As an undergraduate at UGA, he became interested in early modern to modern European history and wrote his senior thesis on a British reform in the 19th century. After undergraduate, Ryan completed a Master of Public Administration at UGA in the spring of 2021 and began pursuing a J.D. at Harvard Law School in the fall of the same year.

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