



# The Significance of Society in the 18th Century: Conversations about Governance

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## Summary

The American Revolution was an episode in a transatlantic outcry against the corruption of the British balance of power and liberty institutionalized in the Glorious Revolution of 1688–1689. English speakers during the 18th century reflected on this constitutional crisis within a larger conversation about the problem of human governance. Although many people excluded from Parliament supported political reform, if not revolution, they also sought remedies for the perversion of political power and influence in new forms of social power and influence. This article looks at the convergence of political and social discussions in a common discourse about the nature of power and the ways in which human beings influenced each other. The first section outlines the meanings of power and influence in British politics. The second section uses the novelist Sarah Fielding's *Remarks on Clarissa* (1759) to delineate revolutionary notions about social power and influence. The third section turns to the speeches and writings of Edmund Burke in the run-up to the American Revolution to look at how English speakers deployed notions of social power to advocate for political reform.

**Keywords:** [Power](#), [influence](#), [authority](#), [society](#), [politics](#), [commerce](#), [imagination](#), [sentiment](#), [judgement](#)

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1At first sight, eighteenth-century Russian society and its social structure seem to be a thoroughly studied field, with numerous books and articles on government policies and on certain social classes – nobility, clergy, townspeople, functionaries, peasants, and the Cossacks. These were the classes recognized by the Russian state, which in the eighteenth century made every effort to transform them into European-style judicial estates and to construct a social framework based on legislation created specifically for this purpose. It is only natural that from the nineteenth century on, most hist This is a list of state leaders in the 18th century (1701–1800) AD, except for the many leaders within the Holy Roman Empire. These polities are generally sovereign states, but excludes minor dependent territories, whose leaders can be found listed under territorial governors in the 18th century. For completeness, these lists can include colonies, protectorates, or other dependent territories that have since gained sovereignty. Angola. Kingdom of Kongo (complete list) –.