

History 320C Bloodfeud, Politics, and Culture in the Celtic "Fringe," 1485-1746

Subject to change

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Over recent decades the concept of a British history distinct from the history of the English state has become fashionable amongst historians. With regard to the British Isles, this approach raises the question of the role of peoples who were not English in the construction of a British identity. This course will explore the evolution of the "Celtic" or Gaelic-speaking cultures of the British archipelago in the early modern period. This period was pivotal in the evolution of the British state: over the course of this era, the power of the crown was enhanced greatly, and its growing intolerance of more traditional and personal forms of exerting authority resulted in many conflicts. The Celtic peoples were central players in many of these clashes, and their distinctive cultures were increasingly threatened by the centralizing and anglicizing agenda of the crown. In this course we will look in turn at the history of the Gaelic-speaking Irish, the Highland Scots, and the Welsh over the early modern centuries, exploring how their experience of the growth of the state's power was similar, and how it differed. We will also briefly compare their history to that of the Cornish, Manx, Bretons, and Galicians. Traditional and distinctive cultural and political practices at odds with the agenda of centralizing monarchies typically survived much longer in the western and northern reaches of the British Isles that some have dubbed the "Celtic fringe," and as Highland Scots and the "Scots-Irish" of Ulster (what is now Northern Ireland and adjacent areas of the Republic of Ireland) figured so prominently amongst the colonists who settled in North America in the eighteenth century, some have wondered if a "Celtic fringe" was transplanted to Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, and the frontiers of the colonies of New York, North Carolina, and Georgia; we will devote some attention to this hypothesis.

Students will be asked to submit a paper on a subject of their choosing relevant to the course, write a final examination, and participate in class discussions.