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## Prince George and a Royally Late End to Gender Bias

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There was something radically different about the world-wide wait for the royal baby last month. For the first time in British history, it no longer mattered whether the new arrival was a girl or a boy. Parliament had finally reversed a thousand years of tradition, not to mention law and custom. Approved with just weeks to spare, the new law of royal succession awards the crown to the eldest child rather than the first male.



It doesn't spoil the party to concede that it's been 325 years since the question really mattered. The last time the English caused a fuss over primogeniture was in 1688, when the House of Stuart occupied the throne. The issue flared after James II and his second wife, Mary of Modena, became the proud parents of a baby boy. Unlike his older half-sisters, the putative James III was baptized a Catholic. For a nation gripped by anti-Catholicism, all of a sudden those Protestant older sisters became awfully important.

Conspiracies and rumors abounded. It was widely claimed that the real heir had been stillborn and that the little boy was in fact an impostor, smuggled into the royal bed inside a warming pan. When the libel failed to stick—queens were required to give birth in full view of the court in those days—a group of noblemen took matters into their own hands. They sought help from the Dutch, inviting James's eldest daughter, Mary, and her husband, Prince William of Orange, to save Britain from the threat of popery. On Nov. 5, 1688, William landed in England with his "rescue" force of more than 40,000 men. James II fled to the safety of France, leaving William and Mary to enjoy the fruits of the so-called Glorious Revolution.

For the next century, the British monarchy resembled a periwigged version of the great papal schism of 1378, with two rival courts claiming legitimacy. But, as is so often the case in life, location proved to be everything. Just as the popes of Avignon were outflanked by the popes of Rome, so were the attempts by the exiled Stuarts to take back the throne easily defeated by the new incumbents. James II's descendants

ended their days watching enviously from abroad as their former haunts became home to the Hanoverians: Georges I, II, III and IV.

The current heir to the Stuart line is the 80-year-old Franz, duke of Bavaria, who leads a blameless life amid the splendors of Nymphenburg palace in Munich. Franz isn't the only pretender to the throne. He is joined by the descendants of Richard of York, the wicked anti-hero of William Shakespeare's *Richard III*. In another case of primogeniture versus the sword, the much-maligned Richard was hacked to pieces in 1485 by supporters of his distant cousin, Henry VII.

The legitimate heirs to the House of York meekly accepted being usurped by Henry, preferring to keep their heads rather than the crown. Today, none of Richard's descendants dispute the right of the Windsors to sit on the throne. However, last year's discovery of Richard's remains—hunchback and all—under a municipal parking lot in northern England has galvanized the surviving Yorkists into action. A campaign is under way to give their ancestor a more fitting burial at York Cathedral.

The irony, for those who have followed the primogeniture debate, is that for 125 of the past 200 years, the British have been ruled by queens. Moreover, the three most famous monarchs in British history are arguably all women: Elizabeth I, Victoria and Elizabeth II. It's going to be quite a shock for the British when they have a king once again on the throne.

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