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The British Monarchy: Symbolism and Salience in Times of Crisis

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The British Monarchy: Symbolism and Salience in Times of Crisis

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Table of Contents

Abstract

In this paper I endeavor to answer the question: what accounts for the British monarchy's continued salience in British affairs? My hypothesis is that the monarchy is a symbol of continuity, stability, and British values during times of crisis or upheaval, and that the monarch's performance of this essential function has resulted in an enduring relevance for the institution. Through a historical analysis of the reigns of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth II, I aim to establish a foundation for my hypothesis and help fill a considerable gap in the literature. Few scholars have written on the function of the monarch during crisis, and the specific role of Queen Elizabeth during decolonization is unexplored territory. This comparative-case study yields the finding that there is indeed support for the hypothesis, leading to the conclusion that the symbolism of the monarchy in extraordinary circumstances helps explain its sustained relevance in Britain.

Introduction

Over the 20th and 21st centuries, monarchy has become an increasingly

irrelevant institution in many parts of the world. Nowhere is this more apparent

than in Europe, where a strong and deeply-rooted tradition of monarchy has been

diminished to a handful of constitutional sovereigns, whose roles have become

largely ceremonial. Often, a royal family does not figure prominently in the

national consciousness. However, the British monarchy is notable for its

continued relevance in Britain and for its high profile both domestically and in the

international community. Given the general decline in power and importance of

the institution of monarchy, the prominence of British royalty presents an

exceptional case that demands closer examination.

The history of the British Crown is marked by tumult, but it has persisted

as an institution. Although the same can be said of other monarchies in the world

today, Britain's Throne has encountered unique circumstances over the last two

centuries. The British monarchy is remarkable in that it has survived Britain's fall

from the world superpower to a second-rate power. Suffering a significant

downgrade in status and power has been the demise of many political systems and

leaders. Yet, the British monarchy has not only endured as an institution, but

continues to claim import in Britain.

The extent of the interest and enthusiasm surrounding the Royal Wedding

of Prince William and Kate Middleton in April 2011 and the increasing

monarchical fervor evident in Queen Elizabeth's Diamond Jubilee year suggest

that the monarchy still occupies a central spot in the public consciousness, and

various polls conducted in Britain confirm that the monarchy is still a salient

institution today. Undoubtedly, the monarchy is not always popular and has

experienced intervals of reduced support, such as after the death of Princess

Diana. Nevertheless, polls conducted throughout the past decade reveal that the

majority of people still regard monarchy as important to Britain. Since 2000, a

consistent majority of over 70% have reported that they would favor retaining the

monarchy over becoming a British republic[1]. In a 2011 poll conducted by the

Guardian and ICM Research, 63% of respondents said Britain would be worse off

without the monarchy, 60% felt that the monarchy improves Britain's image

around the world, and 67% stated that the monarchy is relevant to life in Britain

today[2]. Additionally, a poll by Ipsos MORI and Techneos shows that post-Royal

Wedding, more people are convinced than before that there will still be a British

monarchy in fifty years (an increase from 62% to 73%), and 75% of respondents

favor remaining a monarchy, opposed to 18% who would prefer a republic[3].

These latest figures indicate positive and enduring feelings towards the monarchy,

for the percentages in favor of monarchy and republicanism have remained stable

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[1] Ipsos MORI.

[2] Julian Glover, "Monarchy still broadly relevant, Britons say," *Guardian*, Apr. 24 2011, http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2011/apr/24/monarchy-still-relevant-say-britons.

[3] "One Moment in Time: The Royal Wedding, Six Months On," *Ipsos MORI*, October 28, 2011, http://www.ipsos-mori.com/newsevents/ca/913/One-Moment-in-Time-The-Royal-Wedding-Six-Months-On.aspx.

for forty years[4]. It is apparent that the British monarchy is still a key element in British society and culture, and it is therefore pertinent to explore why it has remained relevant.

My goal in undertaking this project was to explore the distinctiveness of the British monarchy and gain insights into why it is still important today. This paper ultimately seeks to provide an answer for the question: what accounts for the British monarchy's continued salience in British affairs? My research concentrates on the reigns of the past two British monarchs, King George VI and the current Queen Elizabeth II. The principal focus of the study is the role of the sovereign in times of crisis. I examine primarily the reign of Queen Elizabeth II during the period of decolonization, although I also analyze King George VI's leadership during the Second World War. The argument to be investigated is that the monarch is significant because during times of crisis, whether concrete or intangible, he or she is indispensable for the British people as a source of stability and symbol of continuity. The idea is that the monarch is uniquely equipped to fulfill this role and is able to guide the people through periods of upheaval. I aim to show, through representations of the monarchy in newspapers, journals, and scholarly research, that both King George VI and Queen Elizabeth II were key figures as their country navigated challenges, change, and disaster.

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[4] "One Moment in Time."

The motivation for my research is a lifelong fascination with royalty and the British royal family in particular. As an American, the institution of monarchy has always been a distant but intriguing concept, and due to the high international profile and extensive media attention on the Windsor royals, the British royal family is the model on which I have based my perceptions of monarchy. It is evident that the British monarchy has maintained a relevance unmatched by its peers, and the reasons for this are of interest to me. Why, for example, is the reaction and participation for royal occasions such as weddings, deaths, coronations, and jubilees so much more extensive in Britain than in other nations? Why has public opinion remained so steadfastly pro-monarchy for so long? Research on the monarchy may offer some insights. History has shown that leaders and figureheads are particularly important when crisis confronts a country, and it therefore seems reasonable to assume that the monarchy in Britain would gain especial significance during such times. Given the unique circumstances and challenges that have affected Britain in the last century, I am interested to see how the monarchy has played a role in guiding the nation, which is why the focus of my analysis is the monarchy during periods of crisis.

From a scholarly standpoint, this subject is consequential because it helps illuminate political and social dynamics in Britain. Research on the institution and its individuals may shed light on why Britons continue to value constitutional monarchy as a political system, while so many other nations have transitioned to

republicanism or other political frameworks. It may also enhance our comprehension of British society and the conditions and customs that govern it. Through an analysis of the monarchy, we may gain a better understanding of British culture – its values, attitudes, and ideals. Furthermore, since the British monarchy is a more powerful and salient institution than other European constitutional monarchies, it is of academic interest to explore the relationship between the British monarchy and people as a way to establish a framework of comparison.

Consequently, an implication of this study is potentially deepening our understanding of an old and influential monarchy, its relationship with its people, and of British culture and society in general. This study may also contribute by establishing variables through which other monarchies can be analyzed. However, the most significant contribution this study will make is helping to fill a considerable gap in the literature. Presently, there is very little research devoted specifically to how the British monarchy has been important in times of crisis. In particular, there is almost nothing on the role Queen Elizabeth played in guiding Britain through decolonization. Although there is a wealth of literature on the topic of decolonization, I have not found a single piece of scholarly research that explicitly addresses how the queen may or may not have been influential during this period and to what effect. My hope is that this research will be of worth in examining the British monarchy through this particular perspective.

Ultimately, I would like to make the case that King George VI and Queen Elizabeth II symbolized continuity and fundamental British values, and that their symbolism and stabilizing presence during periods of crisis help explain why the monarchy is still salient today. Therefore, the explanation I offer in this paper to the overarching question of what accounts for the British monarchy's continued relevance is: during crisis and change, the monarch is a potent symbol to whom the people look for reassurance, something exemplified in Britain over the tumultuous past seventy-five years.

In the next two sections, I lay out the theory to be tested and the methodology. I then provide a historical overview of the British monarchy and the political and social developments in Britain that are applicable to this study. The literature review follows, after which I present my findings. I have divided my findings into three sections: the first discusses my findings for the case study on George VI, the second details those for the case study on Elizabeth II, and the third section is a summary of the findings. After, I briefly address some alternate hypotheses and finish with my conclusion.

Theory to be Tested

The theory to be tested in this paper is that the monarchy symbolizes various concepts for the British people, and that the value of this symbolism during crisis is a contributing factor to the present relevance in Britain of the institution of monarchy. Something to note is that throughout the paper, I use various terms interchangeably to signify the monarchy. These terms include monarchy/monarch, sovereign, the Crown, the Throne, and the royal family. The most fundamental core assumption of my research program is that the British monarchy is indeed still relevant today. I have based this assumption on a collection of public opinion polls indicating thus, as well as the extraordinary amount of media attention on the British royal family, unparalleled by any other monarchy in the world and by many world leaders and celebrities.

Another core assumption is that the decolonization process was a crisis for the British, albeit an intangible one. It was not a crisis in the same sense that the Second World War was; rather than physical damage, it inflicted psychological harm through the destruction of British identity and world prestige. Decolonization signaled the demise of Britain's status as the world superpower, resulting in greater dependence in international affairs, a decline in the respect and esteem of other countries, and a diminished sense of pride at home. In a world where power means everything, such a loss of power is a substantial predicament. Furthermore, decolonization triggered a wave of immigration from the former

colonies to Britain. This influx of "immigrants of colour" threatened the "Englishness" of society and created an atmosphere of uncertainty and discord. It had a divisive effect on society and bred considerable racism. Together, immigration and the end of empire demolished many facets of the existing British identity, requiring a society-wide reassessment of what it meant to be British.

 I also assume that, as the Head of State and traditional fount of authority, the British monarch is a figure to whom Britons are likely to look for reassurance and guidance when crises arise. While the Prime Minister also serves this purpose, the monarch is especially appealing as a symbol because he or she is apolitical, with no agenda to uphold. The sovereign unequivocally represents the entire populace, while the Prime Minister's political loyalties, affiliations, or ulterior motives may hinder his or her effectiveness as a figurehead. Finally, I assume that in making a historical analysis I can draw conclusions about present conditions.

My main hypothesis is that the British monarchy's sustained relevance in British affairs is a result of the symbolism of continuity, stability, and British values it offers in times of crisis. The dependent variable in this study is the relevance of the British monarchy, defined as the prominence of the institution in British culture, identity, and social affairs and its important place in the public consciousness. The independent variable is the symbolism of the monarchy/monarch. I define this as the way the institution or the individual

sovereign represents some idea, concept, or value and all of its associated meanings for the British people. I hypothesize that the monarch is a symbol of continuity, stability, and fundamental British values in the following cases: during World War II, for an embattled and deprived populace, and during decolonization, for a nation stripped of its imperial might and world supremacy. In essence, I am arguing that the monarch's role as a symbol renders it important and gives the monarchy lasting significance. However, I am not attempting to claim that the monarchy's symbolism during crisis is the sole reason why the Crown remains relevant in the 21st century.

The hypothesis applies when Britain experiences any sort of crisis, whether concrete or intangible. The control variable is therefore any period during which Britain is not facing a crisis, when things are going smoothly.

I believe that the hypothesis is true, because when faced with a calamity such as war or when undergoing significant change, a country's people often look up to and rally around their leader. This is related to the political science concept of the rally effect, which describes the increase in popularity of a U.S. president during an international crisis, when Americans respond by rallying around their leader. Although in the United Kingdom there is a head of state (the sovereign) and a head of government (the prime minister), it is conceivable that the people could rally around both. When facing a crisis, a nation's populace is at its most vulnerable and has the most need for familiarity and assurances of continuity. In

Britain, nothing represents continuity better than the monarchy, which has been in existence for over one thousand years. The hypothesis is plausible, because Britain has gone through significant change and challenges, and the monarchy has emerged intact and respected, not drastically weakened.

The Research Design: Methodology

The study design for this research paper is a historical analysis. My research plan was to examine as many primary sources as possible for the time period in question and to supplement these sources with a representative sample of scholarly work on the subject. Therefore, the written assessments of others constitute the majority of my sources. In order to glean insights from the materials, I paid close attention to how the writers talked about the monarchy and in what context they discussed it. I selected to examine a combination of primary and secondary sources so that I could analyze first-person perspectives as well as take advantage of the work already completed in the field. The scholars who carried out this research had access to more resources, and through their work I gained access to information that is unavailable to me. Since this is a historical analysis, it was necessary to examine written records and not numerical data, except in the case of public opinion figures.

To narrow the focus of the broad research question "What accounts for the British monarchy's continued salience in British affairs?" I chose to analyze the monarchy in the context of crisis or upheaval. I further narrowed the scope of the project by selecting two case studies to examine in depth: the reigns of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth II during the Second World War and decolonization, respectively.

I decided to conduct a comparative-case-based research project because I could make a stronger argument for my hypothesis with evidence from more than one case. I chose the reigns of George VI and Elizabeth II as my case studies because they are the two most recent British monarchs and thus have had the most immediate impact on the current prominence of the monarchy. I did not perform an analysis of King Edward VIII, the predecessor of George VI, because he reigned for less than a year and was never even officially crowned. The short duration of his reign means that he was not able to establish a relationship with his people akin to those of long-reigning monarchs. Furthermore, his reign was not typical of the British monarchic tradition because he voluntarily abdicated. His choice produced a unique situation in the history of the institution, and controversy embroiled much of his time on the Throne. In addition, there would not be enough source material on the topic of investigation for so short a reign. I chose not to study the reigns of the preceding monarchs – King George V, King Edward VII, and Queen Victoria – because their time as sovereigns is further and further removed from the present and the current status of the Crown in Britain. Additionally, to take on too many case studies would be a disservice to the project, for it would prevent a thorough enough analysis of each individual case, and I feel that two cases are sufficient to make an argument.

I have drawn my sample of evidence from the available sources over a time period of slightly less than seventy-five years. For my evidence, I use a

combination of primary and secondary sources. My research consists of a content analysis of archives and historical records. For primary source material, I rely heavily on newspaper articles from the *Times*, which is the only British newspaper to archive the entirety of its content online. Other primary source evidence comes from other major newspapers, British journals, and public opinion polls. The remainder of my evidence comes from books, journals, and other scholarly work on the pertinent subjects. This includes biographies, academic and expert papers, and historical accounts of the British monarchy, empire, and decolonization. I analyze the content of these sources to build my case and make my argument.

For the broad research question driving this paper, there are many possible claims. The purpose of this project is not to identify one explanation as the definitive answer to the research question, but rather to make the case that the variable in the hypothesis is a strong contributing factor. There are other plausible hypotheses that could help explain why the British monarchy is still a salient institution in Britain, but their validity does not necessarily nullify my own hypothesis. One factor rarely determines relevance, and with the expansiveness of the topic of investigation, there are almost certainly several reasons that account for the monarchy's continued significance. Therefore, it is not necessary to eliminate other theories, because they could be as legitimate and convincing as

my own and could help provide a more comprehensive answer to the research question.

In evaluating the sources, I looked at how much the authors and observers mentioned the monarchy/the monarch and how they discussed it in the context of crisis. In the primary sources, frequent discussion of the monarchy and references to the queen as she relates to decolonization would lend support to my hypothesis. In the secondary literature, what would advance my claim is significant scholarly consensus that the monarch is an important symbol in times of crisis, particularly during the Second World War and the end of empire. The conditions that would lead to the rejection of my hypothesis are an absence of scholarly support for the theory, insufficient discussion of the monarchy in the press, and a preponderance of outright statements in the primary sources about the monarchy's lack of relevance or symbolism.

Historical Overview

The British monarchy has a rich history dating back to medieval times. Initially extremely powerful, the Crown gradually transferred most of its authority to other political institutions, resulting in the current constitutional monarchy. At present, the sovereign reigns over the United Kingdom, comprised of England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

The British monarchy has historically been powerful not only in Britain, but around the world. Starting in the 16th century, British colonialism spawned an empire that spanned the globe. The British Empire was the largest in history, and its vastness was epitomized by the phrase "the sun never sets on the British Empire." Helmed by the monarchy and fortified by its immense sphere of influence, Britain was the world's foremost power for over a century. However, the 20th century brought major changes for Britain, and its status as the supreme world power eroded as other nations came to prominence, the First and Second World Wars inflicted significant physical and economic damage, and the Empire began to disassemble.

The current House of Windsor came into being in 1917, when King George V changed the royal family's Germanic name of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha in order to establish a distance with Britain's World War I enemy. Upon his death in 1936, he was succeeded by his eldest son, Edward VIII, who abdicated the Throne within a year in order to marry an American divorcee. Following the abdication of

his older brother, King George VI acceded to the Throne in December 1936. He was a reluctant monarch, and soon after becoming king he faced a serious situation in Europe that was rapidly worsening. On September 3rd, 1939, Britain officially was at war with Germany, after Germany had failed to withdraw its troops from Poland.

George VI led Britain through the Second World War, and afterwards he tried to help his country and empire adapt to the post-war world. The latter part of his reign saw the beginning of the decolonization process, with India and Pakistan becoming independent in 1947, Burma following suit in 1949, and Ireland leaving the Commonwealth in 1948. George VI was therefore the last British monarch to hold the title of Emperor of India. King George VI reigned until his premature death at the age of fifty-six on February 6, 1952, upon which his daughter Elizabeth became Queen. During her reign, Elizabeth would see the realization of the end of empire and would witness substantial transformation in Britain.

Following the initial rupture in South Asia in the late 1940s, the primary period of decolonization occurred during the 1950s and 1960s. The process extended into the next decades and culminated in the 1997 handover of Hong Kong to China. As decolonization progressed in Asia, Africa, and the West Indies, the migration of former colonial peoples from these regions to Britain became a major issue. European immigration was not a cause for concern, but rising numbers of South Asian and black immigrants created a perceived "colour

problem." The government passed a series of legislative acts, beginning with the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act, that restricted immigration from the Commonwealth to Britain, specifically targeting Asian and black migrants. The racialization of British society generated much social unrest, and many Britons had difficulty adjusting to and accepting the new multiracial Britain.

As the Empire disbanded, the British Commonwealth took its place, as a voluntary association of nations that formerly comprised the British Empire. At present, there are fifty-four Commonwealth countries, all of whom acknowledge Queen Elizabeth as the Head of the Commonwealth. Of those nations, fifteen in addition to the United Kingdom are Commonwealth realms, which continue to recognize the queen as their monarch and Head of State. These countries are: Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Jamaica, Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Grenada, Belize, St. Christopher and Nevis, St. Lucia, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Papua New Guinea. Leadership of the Commonwealth is an important aspect of the British monarchy that distinguishes it from other monarchies in the world.

Although the monarchy maintains this special Commonwealth connection, its powers today are limited. According to the influential English scholar Walter Bagehot, the constitutional monarch has three rights: "the right to be consulted,

the right to encourage, the right to warn"[5]. His ideas are applicable in the 21st

century, as the British monarch does not execute a political function, but rather

performs a more ceremonial role. Queen Elizabeth currently serves as a symbol in

various capacities: as Head of State, Head of the Church of England, and Head of

the Armed Forces. Additionally, as the informal "Head of Nation," she "acts as a

focus for national identity, unity and pride; gives a sense of stability and

continuity; officially recognises success and excellence; and supports the ideal of

voluntary service"[6]. The formal duties of the sovereign include meeting with the

Prime Minister, opening Parliament, dissolving Parliament before a general

election, signing Acts of Parliament, receiving foreign ambassadors and

dignitaries, and making State visits abroad[7]. Queen Elizabeth II has now reigned

for sixty years and will celebrate her Diamond Jubilee in June 2012. At the age of

eighty-five, she continues to fulfill her duties as Head of State in Britain and Head

of the Commonwealth.

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[5] Walter Bagehot, *The English Constitution (2nd edition)* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), e-book, 67.
[6] "The official website of the British Monarchy," *The Royal Household,* http://www.royal.gov.uk/.
[7] "The official website of the British Monarchy".

Literature Review

In investigating the topic of the British monarchy in times of crisis, there is at once too much and too little literature. My research program consisted of tracking down primary source material from the beginning of World War II through the Falklands War of 1982 and then complementing it with secondary sources. The literature encompasses old newspaper and journal articles and scholarly work in books and journals. The bulk of the primary source articles come from the London *Times*. My secondary sources include the work of several official and veteran royal biographers such as John Wheeler-Bennett, Sarah Bradford, Elizabeth Longford, and Robert Lacey. The remainder of the secondary source literature incorporates the works of scholars of British culture and history, empire, decolonization, and the British monarchy.

An additional portion of the literature provides a general background on the importance of leadership during crisis. Scholars agree that leaders gain special significance when any kind of crisis threatens their nation. Boin and Hart write, "It is a natural inclination in such distress to look to leaders to 'do something'"[8]. In the same vein of thought, Keith Middlemas maintains, "But the nature of a society's organisation in any desperate emergency, as well as the methods of its press and radio, focuses attention with peculiar clarity upon its leaders, whether

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[8] Arjen Boin and Paul 't Hart, "Public Leadership in Times of Crisis: Mission Impossible?," *Public Administration Review* 63, no. 5 (2003): 544,
http://spartan.ac.brocku.ca/~bwright/4P68/Boin_Hart.pdf.

generals, politicians or monarch"[9]. As a result, leaders exert more influence during periods of crisis than during non-crisis periods. During any given emergency, a group may have more than one leader, and often different leaders discharge different functions. One function is what Robert L. Hamblin calls the "socioemotional leader," who is influential in "helping group members handle their emotions and thus in maintaining group cohesion"[10]. This study examines this type of leadership. Moreover, the literature emphasizes that successful crisis leadership effects lasting admiration and approval. Boin and Hart observe, "When crisis leadership results in reduced stress and a return to normality, people herald their 'true leaders'"[11]. The literature thus supports the assumption that when a calamity arises, people rely more on their leaders and that their contributions can potentially bring about long-term significance.

There are extensive materials on the topics of the British monarchy, empire and decolonization, and World War II, but not many sources explicitly address the role and importance of the contemporary monarch during periods of upheaval. Scholars have overlooked this general area, with the exception of studies on the Second World War and the monarchy. The literature on World War

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[9] Keith Middlemas, *The Life and Times of George VI* (Great Britain: George Weidenfeld and Nicolson Ltd., 1974), 124.
[10] Robert L. Hamblin, "Leadership and Crises," *Sociometry* 21, no.4 (1958): 324, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2785796.
[11] Boin and Hart, "Public Leadership in Times of Crisis," 544.

II and on George VI does discuss the king's role during the conflict, and it offers a strong foundation of support for my hypothesis.

Scholars who have written on the Second World War and on George VI agree that the king represented stability and continuity for war-torn Britain. As the turmoil of conflict transformed daily life, King George's steadfastness and unifying effect on the people was perceived to be a stabilizing force. The monarch is a representative of all British people, and this function served to counteract the divisions that threatened societal unity. Furthermore, as a bedrock of British society, people regarded the monarchy as a symbol of the continuation of British culture. The literature also indicates that Britons widely admired King George's personal qualities and considered him to embody the best aspects of Britishness. His courage, dignity, dedication, hard work, and devotion to his family won him considerable respect and set an example for his subjects. Overall, the scholarly consensus is that King George VI served a valuable purpose as a symbol and that he helped unify Britain. The people needed a rallying point, a morale booster, reassurance of the continuation of their way of life, and above all a symbol of hope. King George satisfied all of these needs. The literature contends that his contributions during the war engendered lasting respect and appreciation for the monarchy and established it as an essential institution in British society.

It is far more difficult to determine whether Elizabeth II replicated this feat during the "crisis" of her reign. While scholars have addressed King George's

role during the Second World War, it is an entirely different story for Queen Elizabeth and decolonization. There are hundreds, if not thousands, of newspaper articles on the royal family for the time period in question, but surprisingly few among this collection make assertions about why the monarchy is important or not. Even in the wealth of published work by experts, very few sources make the direct connection between the monarchy and its role during decolonization. This gap in the literature provided motivation for my paper, but it also complicated the research process.

In addition to the lack of scholarly work on Queen Elizabeth's role during decolonization, a number of other factors coalesced to hinder the progress of my research and prevent the compilation of a more complete sample of the literature. One major problem that I encountered was the inaccessibility of many excellent primary sources that could help me make my case. It was very difficult to gain access to newspaper content from the decolonization period, the 1950s through the 1970s. The *Times* is the only British newspaper that has its entire archive available online. Several papers have their content on microform, such as the *Guardian*, but I was unable to obtain the reels for the right years. Furthermore, most of the newspapers I initially planned on looking at do not have their content before the 1980s and 1990s archived at all. These include the *Daily Mail*, the *Telegraph*, the *Independent*, and the *Daily Herald*. British journal content from the relevant time period is equally difficult to access.

Another source that could have been enormously useful in my research is the archives of a British social research organization called Mass Observation. Beginning in 1937, the group has conducted public opinion polls on a variety of subjects. They have also collected information on social dynamics in Britain by having people of diverse backgrounds keep diaries for them, transcribe day to day conversations, and discuss the issues of the day in interviews. Unfortunately, the Mass Observation archive is kept at the University of Sussex, and only limited parts of their collection are available in the United States on microform. I was unable to acquire any Mass Observation reels from the decolonization period, through either the CU library or through inter-library loan.

Additionally, I have found it impossible to locate British public opinion polls from the 1950s through the 1970s. Among the polling organizations that I have come across in my research, none offer data from Britain for that time period. These include organizations and databases such as Gallup, the Ipsos Group, iPoll, Polling the Nations, and the Roper Center for Public Opinion. Unfortunately, the inaccessibility of such key primary sources greatly impeded my research.

For these reasons, this literature review is not as complete as I would have liked. The challenge for this project was therefore extrapolating using the existing scholarship and primary sources. The lack of some resources and the unavailability of others for the decolonization case study have forced me to make

inferences about how the monarchy played a role during critical episodes in recent British history and about what kind of long-term effect it produced. Yet, though various impediments in the research have prevented a comprehensive literature sample, the existing scholarship and available primary sources do provide a foundation that supports my hypothesis.

Findings

My overall aim in analyzing the primary source material and historical records was to determine whether my hunch had any solid backing. The conjecture that the monarchy's symbolism of continuity, stability, and British values during times of crisis has contributed to its sustained relevance seems like a legitimate and defensible premise, but research was needed to support this hypothesis. Since I could not hope to make conclusions about how the British people viewed the monarchy based on the opinions and judgments of a handful of scholars, an examination of primary sources was important. The only valid way to make determinations about public sentiment is through analyzing sources that reveal first-hand the views, criticisms, assessments, and emotions of a representative sample of the population in question. Given the difficulty in accessing primary sources for this study, it is harder to draw definitive conclusions. Nonetheless, having investigated a combination of primary and secondary sources, this project has yielded several findings.

The evidence shows that the monarchy figured prominently into the consciousness of the British people during the Second World War and throughout the era of decolonization. What was more difficult to ascertain was whether the royal family offered any measure of substance to their people. Was the monarchy simply an establishment so deeply rooted in British culture that it was an accepted, but meaningless, presence in Britain's social landscape? Or did the

monarchy actually stand for something and provide a service to its subjects? The sources explored for this study suggest that the latter is true.

George VI and World War II

The literature on the Second World War and George VI provides much material on the role of the monarchy. Although the king's role as a constitutional monarch limited how he could act, John Wheeler-Bennett, the official biographer for George VI, suggests that more than anyone else, it was the king who was able to rally the British people and raise morale. His strength and support for his people in turn resulted in renewed loyalty and respect for the monarchy. The King's broadcasts, visits to the troops and his citizens, and personal conduct and courage were key elements in inspiring an embattled nation.

One way in which he helped raise morale was through his speeches and radio broadcasts. When Britain first declared war, George VI broadcast a message throughout the Empire, in which he asserted his belief in the justice of their cause and summoned his people to be strong. This address "struck the right note and gave encouragement to the British Empire in its time of peril"[12]. His Christmas broadcasts, a tradition continued from his father's reign, also gave comfort to many of his people.

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[12] Charles Douglas-Home and Saul Kelly, *Dignified & Efficient: the British Monarchy in the Twentieth Century* (Great Britain: Claridge Press, 2000), 143-144.

King George VI also made an effort to interact directly with his embattled subjects. He visited the troops regularly, and he and the queen often toured areas that had suffered bombing assaults. British citizens appreciated his public presence and visible concern and welcomed it as a symbol of unity. Following one such visit, a survivor of a German bombing said, "We suddenly felt that if the King was there everything was all right and the rest of England was behind us"[13]. The royal family's visits promoted a sense that all Britons were in it together, and it had the effect of "entrenching the Monarchy even deeper in the nation's affections"[14].

Throughout the sphere of British influence, King George VI was a figure of stability and hope. This was especially true during the German bombing assault on England. Even though Buckingham Palace endured multiple bombings, the royal family stood firm in their resolution not to flee. The queen famously declared, "The children won't leave London without me. I won't leave London without the King. And the King will never go"[15]. This display of steadfastness was a great example, and the fact that they suffered the same hardships as the common citizen brought them closer to their people. The king also shared in the privations of his people through his imposition of strict rationing at the royal

[13] John Wheeler-Bennett, *King George VI: His Life and Reign* (Great Britain: Macmillan and Company Limited, 1958), 478.
[14] Douglas-Home and Kelly, *Dignified & Efficient*, 153.
[15] *The Windsors: a Royal Family*. Directed by Kathy O'Neil, Stephen White and Annie Fienburgh. 1994. Brook Lapping Productions and WGBH/Boston, 2002. DVD.

residences. For instance, during a visit to Britain, "Mrs. Roosevelt, noting that

wartime restrictions on heat, water and food were as strictly observed at the

Palace as any other home in Britain, wondered at the painted black line in her

bathtub showing the minuscule amount of water allowed" [16]. King George also

experienced the loss endured by countless British families, for his brother, the

Duke of Kent, died in 1942 while on active service. Forging a bond with their

subjects through shared hardships, the royal family exemplified esteemed British

values such as perseverance, restraint, and dignity.

Another aspect tying the monarchy to the masses was the king's

embodiment of the resolve and strength of his people: "In his role as head of the

nation, George VI personified Britain's dogged resistance to the Axis

juggernaut"[17]. In many ways, King George VI served as an important symbol of

what the British people stood for and valued.

Many scholars concur that George VI's unwavering presence, messages of

encouragement, and devotion to Britain and the Commonwealth played a large

part in raising morale, reaffirming people's commitment, and promoting unity.

Wheeler-Bennett asserts, "the King's oft-repeated, and quite patently sincere and

indomitable, belief in ultimate victory, even in the darkest hour, not only provided

a factor of inestimable value in maintaining national morale but established

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[16] Sarah Bradford, *The Reluctant King: the Life & Reign of George VI 1895-1952* (United States: St. Martin's Press, 1989), 348.
[17] Douglas-Home and Kelly, *Dignified & Efficient*, 153.

throughout the land a deep and unshakable loyalty to the monarchy, bred of love

and admiration"[18]. Charles Douglas-Home and Saul Kelly echo a similar

sentiment: "As the German war machine rolled through Western Europe

destroying all opposition, the King performed a useful role, as head of state, as a

rallying point for the continued resistance against the Nazis"[19]. As the British

sovereign, George VI was a figure around whom the nation could unite, and some

felt that he was indispensable for this reason. One diarist for Mass Observation

wrote, "All the other countries have gone to pieces – and why? Because they

didn't have a popular King to bind the country together. I think they give a feeling

of national unity…"[20]. The monarchy is a deeply engrained institution in Britain,

and it is not surprising that the people would rally around the king.

 The monarch represented not only British resolve and unity, but continuity

as well. A 1943 *Times* article stated about the king: "He is the continuous element

in the constitution, one of the main safeguards of its democratic character, and the

repository of a knowledge of affairs…King George VI is doing a work as

indispensable for English governance as any of his predecessors, just as he has set

his peoples from the first day of the war an unfailing public example of courage,

confidence, and devoted energy"[21]. During a time of so much upheaval, the

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[18] Wheeler-Bennett, *King George VI*, 448-449.
[19] Douglas-Home and Kelly, *Dignified & Efficient*, 150.
[20] Philip Ziegler, *Crown and People* (United States: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1978), 76.
[21] "King and Minister," *The Times*, May 18, 1943.

monarchy's long history and role in British culture offered a sense of permanence and stability.

During the tumultuous war years, King George VI served as a symbol of strength, stability, continuity, and British values such as courage, restraint, resolve, and perseverance. Scholars argue that the actions of George VI and the purpose he served for his people during the war gained significant respect and appreciation for the monarchy as a whole. This respect came from the British people and from important political figures. In a letter to the king, Prime Minister Winston Churchill wrote, "This war has drawn the Throne and the people more closely together than was ever before recorded…and Your Majesties are more beloved by all classes and conditions than any of the princes of the past"[22]. The king's role in this turbulent period of crisis was invaluable and appears to have cemented the monarchy as a vital institution in Britain.

The monarchy's contributions during the war earned more than ephemeral feelings of appreciation that were lost in the tide of victory; they engendered enduring admiration and gratitude among the people. Years later, Britons still remembered the importance of the royal family during the war and expressed their thankfulness. For instance, on the occasion of the king and queen's Silver wedding anniversary, "A torrent of letters reached the Palace, expressing their authors' gratitude at what the royal family had meant to them during the grim past

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[22] Wheeler-Bennett, *King George VI*, 467.

decade"[23]. Later, King George VI's death prompted unprecedented public

mourning, and heartfelt tributes poured in from all over Britain, the

Commonwealth, and the world. To this day, people regard him as an exemplary

man and monarch, and his service during a time of need proved to be an enduring

legacy.

Elizabeth II and Decolonization

One of the defining elements of the reign of Queen Elizabeth II is the

process of decolonization that began in the late 1940s and continued principally

into the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. The "end of empire" required a transition away

from the imperial mindset that was so deeply rooted in the British collective

consciousness and signaled the decline of Britain's supremacy in the world. John

M. MacKenzie describes decolonization as a series of implosions. The first

implosion, from 1947 to 1948, was the combination of swift decolonization in

India, Pakistan, Burma, and Sri Lanka, Ireland leaving the Commonwealth, the

upheaval in Palestine, and the creation of the state of Israel. The second implosion

took place from 1956 to 1957 with the Suez crisis and decolonization in Ghana,

Singapore and Malaya. The third implosion he identifies, during the years 1961-

1965, is the extensive decolonization in Africa. The dismantling of the British

Empire and the Suez crisis in particular showed Britain's loss of prestige and

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[23] Middlemas, *Life and Times of George VI*, 199.

power in the world. As Robert Lacey put it, Suez was "a massive and sapping blow below the belt of national self-respect"[24]. The Suez disaster demonstrated that Britain was henceforth dependent on the United States in matters of international crisis, something which was particularly hard to swallow for the world's former undisputed superpower.

Although some historians have contended that the end of empire did not have a great effect on British society and culture, recent literature has begun to question this assumption. Empire was undoubtedly a significant influence on British identity; Stuart Ward states, "Historians are generally in agreement that 'empire was a major component in British people's sense of their own identity, that it helped to integrate the United Kingdom, and to distinguish it in the eyes of its own citizens from other European countries.' An apparently thriving empire promoted the idea of a world-wide British identity – the myth of a greater Britain – that resonated at all levels of metropolitan culture"[25]. Enoch Powell asserted more succinctly that, "Without the Empire, Britain would be like a head without a body"[26]. In response to scholars advocating a "minimal impact" approach, Ward argues, "On the contrary, the demise of empire posed a formidable challenge, not only to the idea of Britain as a world power, but also to the legitimacy and

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[24] Robert Lacey, *Majesty: Elizabeth II and the House of Windsor* (United States: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977), 229.

[25] Stuart Ward, *British culture and the end of empire* (Great Britain: Manchester University Press, 2001), 4.

[26] Wendy Webster, *Englishness and Empire 1939-1965* (United States: Oxford University Press, 2005), 178.

credibility of key ideas, assumptions and values that had become implicated in the imperial experience"[27].

Other scholars explicitly express a sense of loss associated with imperial decline. For instance, John Strachy, writing in the 1950s, declared, "THE MORALE, THE SPIRIT, the mental health even, of all of us in Britain are deeply involved in the question of the dissolution of our empire…Quite apart from whether or not they suppose that their economic interests will be affected, many people in Britain feel a sense of personal loss – almost of amputation – when some colony or semi-colony, Burma or the Soudan for example, becomes independent"[28]. In addition to the loss of identity stemming from the decline of imperial power and influence, increased immigration to Britain also threatened British identity, particularly immigration of "subjects of colour" from the former Empire. The white population perceived a growing black community and South Asian community to endanger the fundamental Englishness of society, and significant racist attitudes developed in Britain. Decolonization transformed British power in the world and necessitated a shift in the way Britain perceived itself.

The role of Queen Elizabeth in guiding Britain through this period of change and adjustment is more difficult to decipher. Most of the literature on the queen during decolonization does not make outright assertions about how the

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[27] Ward, *British culture*, 12.
[28] John Strachy, *The End of Empire* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1959), 204.

British people viewed her in the context of loss of empire and identity

transformation. However, scholars generally agree that Queen Elizabeth has

served as a steadfast and potent symbol throughout her reign, of continuity,

stability and of values that the British people cherish, such as dignity,

responsibility, family life, and courage. The content in the primary sources

supports this scholarly consensus as well.

The newspapers of the era usually mentioned or discussed the queen and

the monarchy with respect or even reverence. Many articles simply detail the

numerous activities and movements of the royals, not making direct comments on

the role of the monarchy or how people viewed the queen. Yet there are also

plenty of pieces in which writers affirm that the monarchy is an indispensable part

of British life, both in general and in the context of decolonization specifically.

Regardless, the newspapers offer much insight on the relationship between the

sovereign and her people.

Many articles speak of the stabilizing effect the monarchy provides. In a

1977 article from the *Times*, the author claims that "In conjunction with

Parliament the Throne, as an institution, enables us to maintain a stability widely

admired overseas"[29]. The article also features Margaret Thatcher's statements that

the monarchy in particular provides "a great stability and constancy which

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[29] "Tributes to the Queen: stability and continuity provided by the throne," *Times*, May 4, 1977.

nothing else can provide"[30]. In a different article, the English historian John Grigg (formerly Lord Altrincham) expresses a similar sentiment, describing the queen as "a bastion of stability in an age of social and moral flux"[31].

Other pieces recognize the British values that the monarchy epitomized. In her Silver Jubilee year, there was an abundance of newspaper articles espousing support and gratitude for the monarch, and many writers asserted that Queen Elizabeth symbolized many qualities and values admired by her people. One wrote, "her own qualities of dutifulness, grace, cultivation of family life, dignity, reliability and unimpressibility by publicized fashion…are readily perceived to be qualities of which the world stands much in need, especially in high places. We are grateful to her for possessing them"[32]. Another declared, "We have a Royal Family with whom we can identify all that is best in the family life of our country"[33]. Praise for the queen was particularly abundant in 1977, but throughout her reign people have lauded her virtues, morals, and personality strengths. Other observers over the years have singled out the embodiment of British values of the monarchy as an institution. For instance, in 1947 a *Times* editorial remarked that "Every generation makes the British monarchy less political and more social and representative. It is to-day above all the mirror in which the people may see their

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[30] "Tributes to the Queen".

[31] Andrew Roberts, "How the Queen Saved and Soothed Britain," *Wall Street Journal*, Feb. 9, 2012.

[32] "Grateful For Her Possessing," *Times*, June 7, 1977.

[33] "Tributes to the Queen".

own ideals of life"[34]. It is clear from the commentary over the decades that the

monarchy is a national symbol of British qualities and morality.

Perhaps most significantly, the monarchy is often tied to the

Commonwealth, which succeeded the Empire and serves as Britain's remaining

association of influence in the world. This indicates that the British people saw

the monarch as a symbol linking Britain's imperial past with the newer

Commonwealth. Moreover, they perceived the monarchy as a symbol of

continuity throughout this transition. Many articles discussing decolonization or

the Commonwealth make only passing mention of the queen. Yet, the tie with the

monarchy is ever-present. Articles relaying the news of a British colony's

independence often made reference to the queen's response to the event or to her

presence (or an alternate delegate from the royal family) at the official

independence ceremony or opening of Parliament/government in the former

colony. There is also quite of lot of material on the queen's travels around the

Empire and the Commonwealth. The papers reported warm receptions for the

queen almost everywhere she went and underlined the success of her visits.

Representations of the queen's continued involvement in the Commonwealth

suggest nostalgia for Britain's imperial past, when the Crown symbolized

Britain's extensive influence and power in the world. As the Empire fell apart,

people emphasized Queen Elizabeth's relationship with former colonies, their

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[34] "Heiress of Empire," *Times*, Apr. 21, 1947.

people, and their leaders as an indication of continuity. This is largely unspoken,

but some writers openly acknowledge the monarchy's value in the transition from

Empire to Commonwealth. A 1977 *Times* article declares, "Together, the

Sovereign and Parliament provide the instruments by which momentous changes

have been, are and will continue to be reconciled with continuity in our

country"[35]. Several years later, another *Times* piece commented, "Her political

gifts, however circumscribed they may be, have also been seen at work in the

Commonwealth…Many would claim, indeed, that it is only Elizabeth II who

holds it together"[36]. This article depicts the queen as a symbol of Commonwealth

unity, a sentiment that was oft-repeated.

Newspaper content from the 1940s-1980s abounds with references to the

symbolism of the monarchy. British journal articles provide further evidence that

the monarchy was a key symbol during the period of decolonization. For instance,

Liberal Party leader Jo Grimond wrote in an article for the journal *Encounter*,

"The importance of the monarchy lies in its expression of our judgment of values.

It is an example of the quality of our society. It may have less political importance

than some Presidencies but it has general importance as symbolising the way of

life Britain admires"[37].

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[35] "Tributes to the Queen".
[36] Alan Hamilton, "Thirty years of rule that changed reverence to affection," *Times*, Feb. 1, 1982.
[37] Jo Grimond, "Muggeridge and the Monarchy," *Encounter* 17, no. 6 (1961): 64.

An even stronger argument in support of the hypothesis comes from a 1961 article from the same journal. Henry Fairlie, a prominent journalist, argued that the monarchy is an important institution, and his statements suggest that the queen was a vital figure for Britain during decolonization. He asserted that he could not understand how critics of monarchy "can deny the value of the Monarchy in making even more difficult changes, not only popularly acceptable, but acceptable even to those most likely not to be reconciled to them. The transference of power in British territories since 1945 has been made considerably easier by the presence and actions, even by the courtesy, of the two reigning monarchs"[38]. He even went so far as to draw an analogy with France and its own process of decolonization, claiming that, "The acceptance of reality in Algeria might have been considerably easier for the *colons* and the Army, if there had been the symbol of an accepted Sovereign to emphasize the continuity which exists in all established societies in spite of actual change"[39]. Fairlie's views bolster the argument that the monarch was an essential figure for the people as they grappled with Britain's decline in the world.

Of course, there are scholars and social commentators who reject the idea that the monarchy was important or played a significant role during the decolonization period. The British historian David Cannadine suggests that the monarchy may have survived not because of the important role it played during

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[38] Henry Fairlie, "On the Monarchy," *Encounter* 17, no. 4 (1961): 52.
[39] Fairlie, "On the Monarchy," 52.

crisis, but simply because the British people are fundamentally loyal. Another

possible reason he suggests is that Britain happened to be the victor in both the

First and Second World Wars. Other repudiations of the monarchy's significance

came from two of the most well-known and vocal royal critics of the time,

Malcolm Muggeridge and Lord Altrincham (later known as John Grigg).

Muggeridge declared that while the monarchy might have gained more popularity

as its power and authority decreased, it had become "ineffectual and irrelevant"[40].

Meanwhile, Lord Altrincham referred to the queen as a "priggish schoolgirl" and

called the Palace establishment "a second rate lot, simply lacking in gumption"[41].

However, the attacks on the monarchy of Muggeridge and Lord

Altrincham met with tremendous public backlash, suggesting that theirs was a

minority viewpoint. Many Britons would not stand for their affronts to the

monarchy and denounced their statements. Both men suffered professionally from

their comments, and Lord Altrincham was famously slapped in public by a

member of the League of Empire Loyalists. What is interesting is that even some

of the most forceful critics of the monarchy, like Muggeridge and Altrincham,

also later made statements that seemed to contradict earlier criticisms. For

instance, Muggeridge stated, "History shows that institutions survive only to the

degree that they fulfil an authentic purpose. The British monarchy does fulfil a

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[40] Malcolm Muggeridge, "The Queen and I," *Encounter* 17, no. 1 (1961): 18.
[41] Robert Lacey, *Majesty: Elizabeth II and the House of Windsor* (United States: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977), 227-228.

purpose. It provides a symbolic head of state transcending the politicians who go

in and out of office…"[42]. Even he acknowledges that the British monarchy carries

out a symbolic purpose.

As mentioned earlier, the collection of scholarly work on Queen Elizabeth

and on the process of decolonization does not really address how the queen may

or may not have been important to the British people during this transition away

from Empire. Rather, the literature refers more to what effect the queen had

abroad and how her foreign subjects felt about her than how Britons did.

Nevertheless, the body of scholarly work does consistently reinforce the

hypothesis that the monarch was a symbol of continuity, stability, and British

values.

Just as George VI represented stability during the Second World War,

Queen Elizabeth has served a similar purpose throughout her reign. During Queen

Elizabeth's Silver Jubilee in 1977, some were surprised by the level of enthusiasm

shown for the occasion. Charles Douglas-Home states, "The celebrations also

showed a significant emotional need to identify with a seemingly permanent

institution like the Monarchy at a time when other entities, like Parliament,

Whitehall, industry, the United Kingdom, Europe and the Commonwealth were

changing rapidly"[43]. And again, Malcolm Muggeridge made a concession in favor

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[42] Elizabeth Longford, *The Queen: the Life of Elizabeth II* (United States: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1983), 198.
[43] Douglas-Home and Kelly, *Dignified & Efficient*, 200.

of the monarchy, observing, "When the social fabric rattles from the deep reverberations of our time, and the winds of change howl and shriek in the outside darkness, it is comforting that in our old English homestead we have one truly stable element, the Throne; one truly beloved figure, the Monarch"[44]. Faced with considerable change, including the incorporation of "coloured" immigrants into society and the continued dismantling of the British sphere of influence, the British people seem to have clung to the monarchy as an anchor of stability.

There is solid support for the view that the monarchy served as a symbol of continuity and British values, even among the monarchy's critics. The monarchy as a representation of continuity is a common idea in the scholarly literature. Charles Douglas-Home is not alone in pointing out that monarchy is the one constant in the British political domain. He notes, "…the Monarchy, as has been pointed out, 'offers fixed constitutional landmarks and a degree of institutional continuity in a changing world, so that the costs of change come to appear easier to bear"[45]. Governments and prime ministers come and go, but the monarchy is constant. Indeed, during her reign Queen Elizabeth's presence has offset the changes in the British government, which has seen twelve Prime Ministers since her coronation. David Cannadine also acknowledges the continuity aspect in his article on the examination of the modern British monarchy: "for more than one wartime generation, many of whom had witnessed

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[44] Muggeridge, "The Queen and I," 21.
[45] Ibid., 222.

such bestial depths of man's inhumanity to man, the British imperial monarchy seemed, by agreeable and admirable contrast, to embody decency, continuity, reassurance and hope, by combining order with freedom, and tradition with liberty"[46]. The continuous nature of the monarchy balances the many changes in society and contextualizes modernity in tradition.

The literature talks about Queen Elizabeth and the monarchy not only as a symbol of continuity, but also as an embodiment of fundamental British values. According to Dermot Morrah, "The Monarchy in the late 1950s…was not so much a system of government as a way of life, an aspect of being 'British' which was still the uniting quality of the peoples of the Commonwealth. She was the expression of an idea"[47]. People often associated family values with the royal family in the first twenty-five years of Elizabeth's reign. The queen, her husband, and her children exemplified the importance of family in British society, and people saw them as a model for family values such as responsibility, cohesion, and domestic contentment.

The British historian Philip Ziegler also discusses the ways in which the British royal family represents British values. He remarks that the queen's Silver Jubilee was filled with recognition of Elizabeth's values: "It was striking in 1977 how many tributes were paid to her conscientiousness and dignity, to the way in

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[46] David Cannadine, "From biography to history: writing the modern British monarchy," *Historical Research* 77, no. 197 (2004): 310.

[47] Ben Pimlott, *The Queen: a Biography of Elizabeth II* (United States: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1997), 294.

which she embodied qualities such as decency, respectability, familial loyalty, which were often represented as being out of fashion but were still cherished by the great mass of her people"[48]. Significant transformation has marked the years of Elizabeth II's rule, and in an uncertain and unfamiliar world, the British people value the monarchy as an institution that has preserved their traditional and cherished values. Ziegler states that the institution appeals to "the conservative instincts of most of the British people of every political persuasion. The royal family is at the least a symbol, at the most a guarantee of stability, security, continuity – the preservation of traditional values"[49].

Such estimations of the monarchy as a symbol of British values and continuity transcend political party lines. In his article entitled "A Libertarian Defence of Monarchy," David Botsford provides a rationale for monarchy in general. One of his points, originally articulated by Count Otto von Habsburg, is that "The monarch represents a continuity of tradition, and, being above party or faction, is a powerful symbol for all his or her subjects, making for social cohesion, the administration of justice, the maintenance of laws and customs, and national identity"[50]. In regards to the British monarchy specifically, he argues that

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[48] Ziegler, *Crown and People*, 197.
[49] Ibid., 198.
[50] David Botsford, "A Libertarian Defence of Monarchy," *Libertarian Alliance*, no. 135 (1997): 1.

it is a symbol of the unity of the British people and of the "continuity of certain values"[51].

An analysis of the rhetoric used in both the primary sources and in the scholarly literature presents a strong case that the queen was a symbol of stability, continuity, and British values. Why this was important and how it translates to enduring relevance is not as obvious as with George VI and his World War II contributions. The dissolution of empire was a more obscure crisis, and in many ways Elizabeth II had a more difficult job than her father in dealing with the less tangible change and upheaval.

The literature does not explicitly identify the importance of the queen's symbolism, but one can make inferences by scrutinizing the rhetoric. For instance, one 1972 article from the *Times* uses interesting language to indirectly hint at the queen's significance. The title "Queen Elizabeth II: reigning over a revival in tribalism?" implies a connection with imperialism and colonial subjects. The author makes various statements throughout the article that allude to the unrest in society. He asserts that, "Britain is no longer a homogeneous nation but a pluralistic society with diffused loyalties" and that the queen "has splendidly succeeded in remaining the stable centre of a not-so-stable national life"[52]. Without overtly referring to the troubles society was grappling with, he hints at the tumult in society and singles out the monarch as a key actor in the transitional

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[51] Botsford, "A Libertarian Defence," 2.
[52] Louis Heren, "Queen Elizabeth II: reigning over a revival in tribalism?," *Times*, Feb. 5, 1972.

period. He notes, "What is reasonably certain is the majority still defer to the

Monarchy, if to few other institutions, and that it has been strengthened by the

Queen. The old argument that the Monarchy is the final bulwark of English

liberties has perhaps gained strength as other institutions have come under

attack"[53].

Since the loss of empire was such an intangible crisis, it is difficult to

assess Queen Elizabeth's direct impact. The literature vaguely hints at the queen's

importance in guiding Britain through the end of empire, but an explicit

connection is lacking. However, the queen's importance as a symbol becomes

clear in an examination of one of the concrete consequences of decolonization:

the increased immigration of former colonial subjects to Britain. The wave of

migration is directly related to the disintegration of the British Empire and is

representative of the upheaval of the process of decolonization. In the context of

immigration issues, it becomes apparent that Queen Elizabeth's symbolism was

much-needed for Britons.

Immigration concerns embodied the unease about decolonization. Wendy

Webster notes that immigration represented "the reversal of the colonial

encounter through black and Asian migration to Britain"[54]. It was thus a clear

manifestation that Britain's days of imperial conquest were over. The sizeable

immigration of former imperial subjects to Britain had a divisive impact on

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[53] Heren, "Revival in tribalism".
[54] Webster, *Englishness and Empire*, 149.

British society. The violent imagery of the colonial wars of the 1950s lingered, which depicted a white community of Britons as under siege from multiracial, colonized peoples. People feared that black and Asian immigrants endangered the "Englishness" of British society with their encroachment upon white communities, foreign customs and values, and supposed criminal tendencies. The result was anxiety among many Britons about the incorporation of increasing numbers of "subjects of colour" into their daily lives. Many also resented the economic competition represented by immigrants. During the economic downturn of the 1970s, a social policy correspondent for the *Times* wrote, "The depression has bred resentment against 'outsiders' in British society, the coloured immigrants who have come since the 1950s and who now total 3.3 per cent of the population"[55]. The perceived economic competition and threat to Englishness of the immigrants produced a sense of social instability.

Rampant racism grew out of this social atmosphere of uncertainty and instability, exemplified by Enoch Powell's 1968 "Rivers of Blood" speech. Although many politicians criticized and denounced his speech, a large section of the populace supported his statements. By 1976, Powell's "message of racial intolerance and of black people as the source of danger to British society had been

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[55] Neville Hodgkinson, "Britain celebrates strength of the Monarchy," *Times*, June 6, 1977.

embraced by a majority of Britons…"[56]. Widespread racism only bolstered the volatile social situation.

In this hostile atmosphere, the queen served to hold together Britain's fragmented post-empire society, which was rapidly becoming multiracial and multicultural. The queen was uniquely suited to help Britons through this period of transition. As Sir Malcolm Rifkind pointed out, "the Queen has perhaps found it easier, and at a much earlier date, to contemplate the fact that Britain is a multiracial society because her family ruled a multiracial Empire and she is head of the Commonwealth"[57]. As Head of the Commonwealth, she represented the link to the former Empire and its peoples. Furthermore, she had extended an invitation to former colonial subjects to come work in Britain. Queen Elizabeth thus helped bridge the gap between Britain, the Commonwealth, and its people.

With the instability so many people felt as a result of immigration, the monarchy's symbolism of continuity and stability proved indispensable. At a time when so many things were changing, the continuity aspect of the monarchy provided assurances that not everything was in flux. Most importantly, though, the queen's symbolism of stability counteracted the feelings of unsteadiness that penetrated British society. People saw the monarchy as a symbol of stability because it could unify the population and because it was dependable and

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[56] Susan Kingsley Kent, *Gender and power in Britain, 1640-1990* (London: Routledge, 1999), 345.
[57] Deborah Hart Strober and Gerald S. Strober, *The Monarchy: an Oral Biography of Elizabeth II* (New York: Broadway Books, 2002) 306.

steadfast. Stability was exactly what was needed during this period of tumult, and the queen's presence was therefore invaluable.

Decolonization and its related influx of immigrants upset social conditions and disrupted societal stability. However, the queen acted as a figure that kept together British society in the aftermath of decolonization. For a society struggling to adapt to its new heterogeneity, the monarch was invaluable.

Another specific, concrete example of decolonization's impact was the Falklands War, and again the queen's symbolism played a part in the brief conflict. On April 2, 1982, Argentina invaded the Falkland Islands, a meagerly populated British territory in the South Atlantic. The government and the Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher saw it as an opportunity to reassert Britain's "greatness" and make up for the humiliation of the Suez crisis. The Falklands War represented a last gasp of the British empire mentality, and Thatcher relied on the "nostalgic longing" of the British people for the glories of the past to assemble support for the operation[58]. One biographer of Elizabeth II contends, "The symbolism of the Queen of Britain and the Commonwealth, whose realms had been violated, and whose forces were set on recapturing them, was powerfully invoked as a weapon in the psychological side of the war"[59]. Queen Elizabeth symbolized the Commonwealth connection and the link to Britain's imperial

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[58] David Monaghan, *The Falklands War: Myth and Countermyth* (United States: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1998), 4.
[59] Pimlott, *The Queen*, 486.

might of the past. Although we can hardly categorize the Falklands War as a true

crisis, the queen was a figure around whom people rallied, especially since her

own son, Prince Andrew, was fighting in the conflict. In this incident, people once

again saw the monarchy as a symbol of stability: "In fact their position as a

constant background to the turbulence of daily news was underlined during the

Falklands crisis"[60]. The Falklands War came near the end of the decolonization

process and the intangible crisis of identity associated with it, and the episode

showed that the monarchy was still very much a consideration when people were

confronted with a calamity, even a constructed one. In the words of Ben Pimlott,

"…at time of war – even a small one – the Monarch became, as in the past, a

focus of loyalty and patriotism"[61].

Summary of Findings

The investigation and analysis of primary sources and scholarly research

reveals support for the hypothesis that the British monarchy has been a symbol of

stability, continuity, and British values during times of upheaval, and that this

symbolism has yielded lasting effects.

At the very least, there is a clear consensus among scholars of the British

monarchy and of empire and decolonization that the monarch is a potent symbol.

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[60] "The Falklands War: the home front," in *Glasgow Media Group Reader, Volume 2: Industry, economy, war and politics*, ed. Greg Philo (London: Routledge, 1995), 125.
[61] Pimlott, *The Queen*, 488.

The experts diverge in opinion over precisely what the sovereign symbolizes, but continuity, stability, and British values are commonly ascribed to the monarchy throughout the literature. It is not surprising that the monarchy is a symbol for many of its people, as it has become an almost entirely symbolic institution, devoid of any real political power. However, the scholars characterize the monarchy as being a symbol that bears real meaning.

The primary sources also depicted the monarchy as a powerful symbol. From the beginning of the Second World War through the present, there is a plethora of articles describing the symbolism of the monarch. Through newspaper articles and journal editorials, writers and observers of all generations noted how the monarch represented continuity, stability, and a wide range of British values. Arguably, characterizations of the monarchy as a symbol in the primary sources have more import than the evaluations of the experts, because they provide key indications as to the British public's actual feelings.

An analysis of the sources in full demonstrates without a doubt that there was almost universal recognition of the monarchy as a symbol. What is more, the sources provide strong evidence that the monarchy's symbolism was important in the context of crisis. The hypothesis maintains that the special service the monarchy renders their people during crisis, distinct from the general value it offers, partly explains its relevance.

The evidence from the literature shows that the scholars and primary sources recognized the monarchy not only as a symbol, but as a symbol during times of crisis in particular. In the case of King George VI and the Second World War, the literature overwhelmingly supports the notion that the monarch was a critical symbol during the crisis. As Sarah Bradford contends, "The Second World War was to project the image of the King as the unifying symbol of his people as no peacetime experience could have done. From the moment when, six hours after the declaration of war on Germany on Sunday, 3 September 1939, he donned uniform to broadcast to the Empire, he became the focus of an intense loyalty and identification on the part of millions"[62]. The literature and primary sources from this period are full of references to the king's embodiment of continuity, courage, hope, dignity, and duty. They describe the presence of the monarchy as a stabilizing force for a nation caught up in the throes of wartime. From the evidentiary support, it is valid to draw the conclusion that in this case study of crisis, the monarch indeed symbolized continuity, stability, and British values.

The strength of the support for the hypothesis in the instance of World War II provides a context and precedent for the next case study. The process of decolonization was an intangible crisis, and therefore it is more difficult to determine the monarch's role. Although few explicitly identify decolonization as an outright crisis, the scholars concur that the monarchy continued to serve as a

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[62] Bradford, *The Reluctant King*, 301.

symbol of stability, continuity, and British values for the British people throughout the time period of this case study. Assertions of the monarch's symbolism are also found in the newspapers and journals of the time period. Some articles merely alluded to how the monarchy was important during times of crisis, while others directly commented that the monarchy undeniably helped guide Britain through the rough patches of their recent history. One such statement came from a 1977 article in the *Times*: "The process of decolonization can never be easy, but it can be worse than unhappy, and it is in a large part thanks to the Queen's influence…that the genuine good that was done in an imperial past lives on, and was not interred with the bones of the Empire"[63]. For this one individual who vocalized his sentiments, there are doubtless countless others who felt the same way.

Just as with the first case study, I conclude that Queen Elizabeth did in fact play a considerable role in helping to guide Britain through decolonization, the related domestic social transformations brought on by immigration, and the corresponding shift in identity and self-perception. This is not made as explicit as with George VI and the Second World War, since there are fewer unequivocal statements on the matter. However, the evidence provides sufficient backing for this conclusion. Due to the intangibility of the "crisis" of decolonization, I think it is likely that the people's need for the symbolism the monarchy provided and

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[63] "A Lead From the Commonwealth," *Times*, June 8, 1977.

their response to the monarch's contributions were more intangible as well. Yet, the recognition of her service is existent, even if it is rarely acknowledged. For instance, when the *Sunday Times Magazine* published an alphabet of "The Greatest," the letter Q was for Queen Elizabeth II, and one of the explanations given for this selection was that she had "so much dignity in presiding over the dissolution of the Empire 'that Commonwealth is still not quite an empty concept'"[64]. It is possible to make inferences about the role of the monarchy, even with the sometimes ambiguous evidence.

All in all, the evidence uncovered by my research sanctions the conclusion that the monarch was a symbol of continuity, stability, and British values and that it served in this capacity during times of crisis. This facet of the British monarchy impacts its salience today, because in fulfilling this role the monarchy provides a great service to its people. Throughout the last seventy-five years, Britain has undergone a great deal of change and trauma, impacting every citizen in some way. The horrors of the Second World War, the loss of world prestige and transformation of British identity, and the significant societal changes taking place at home have resulted in an era of much upheaval. Amidst so much change and turbulence, it is natural that people seek out something familiar and trusted. The British monarchy, as a pillar of stability, continuity, and morality, is such an entity. The British people have come to rely on their monarch to lighten the

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[64] Longford, *The Queen*, 378.

weight of their troubles and guide them through change, and it is for this reason that the monarchy has maintained a relevance in modern British affairs.

The findings detailed above have no bearing on the validity of other hypotheses on the research question. Other suppositions for the monarchy's continued prominence have the potential to be authenticated even in light of the discoveries of this study. My findings simply illuminate one aspect explaining the monarchy's enduring hold on the people.

This project has resulted in a better understanding of just how venerated and meaningful the British monarchy is today in 21st century Britain. That the monarchy is relevant was one of my core assumptions going into this project, and my research has served to reinforce and validate this assumption. I myself have gained a new respect for the monarchy and for Queen Elizabeth II in particular. It is impossible to know what would have happened had she not been around over the past sixty years, but given my findings, I feel certain that, in the absence of the monarchy, it would have been far more difficult for the British people to cope with decolonization, immigration, and the other changes taking place in Britain. I am not alone in this sentiment. A recent article in the *Wall Street Journal* outlined the importance the monarchy, and Queen Elizabeth in particular, have had. The author states, "The past six decades haven't been easy for the United Kingdom, and were it not for the monarchy there is no telling what social and political

unrest might have dominated"[65]. Queen Elizabeth has done a great service to her country, the extent of which will probably never be fully appreciated.

The research has demonstrated that the monarchy is an institution that is an essential part of British identity. Philip Ziegler concurs: "Whether one likes it or not the fact of monarchy is engraved into the consciousness of every Briton: it can be rejected or acclaimed, but it can not easily be sloughed off as an unwanted and irrelevant relic"[66]. The monarchy is far from irrelevant, as the world will see this summer with the celebration of Queen Elizabeth's Diamond Jubilee. The findings of this paper will help contextualize and explain what will likely be an outpouring of love and gratitude for the queen in Britain. The event will be a recognition of her achievements, contributions, and personal qualities that have been an element of constancy in an ever-changing world. The same *Wall Street Journal* article notes, "the queen has actually made an enormous difference in her long reign – all of it to the good. And it's by no means over"[67]. A sentiment I encountered often in my research is that the British would miss the monarchy if it were no longer in existence. The monarchy remains an important institution in Britain, arguably because of the contributions it has made when its people most needed it.

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[65] Roberts, "How the Queen Saved and Soothed Britain".
[66] Ziegler, *Crown and People*, 162.
[67] Roberts, "How the Queen Saved and Soothed Britain".

Alternate Hypotheses

The monarchy as a symbol is a significant theme in the literature, particularly of continuity, stability, and British values (or a combination of the three). The literature also tends to highlight this symbolism in the context of crisis or change. However, there are other plausible hypotheses advanced in the scholarship that could help explain the continued salience of the British monarchy.

One hypothesis is that the British Crown is still relevant because of its leadership of the Commonwealth. This is related to part of this paper's hypothesis, which argues that the monarchy is a symbol of continuity, an aspect of which is the continuous relationship with the Commonwealth. It is a more limited answer to the research question, but it has basis. The British monarchy is the only monarchy that claims the special role and function of heading a large association of nations. Therefore, the scope of its international connections gives it an advantage. Charles Douglas-Home and Saul Kelly note, "It is no wonder then that the Palace properly cherishes, and indeed cultivates, the Commonwealth connection, since it gives a vast extra dimension to the status of the British Crown compared to that of the other European monarchies"[68]. The Commonwealth represents the remnants of the British Empire, which was such a big part of British identity, and because the monarchy is the force that holds it together, one

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[68] Douglas-Home and Kelly, *Dignified & Efficient*, 218.

could argue that this helps account for its relevance in Britain today. The monarchy is an indispensable element of the Commonwealth; Charles Douglas-Home contends, "Crown and Commonwealth are in my view indivisible…So much so, I think that few people could imagine the Commonwealth preserving its distinctive character unless its personality included the monarchy"[69]. The argument is that without the monarchy, the Commonwealth would disintegrate and Britain would lose much of its remaining influence in the world. Therefore, this hypothesis postulates that it is the Commonwealth connection which renders the monarchy significant today.

Another hypothesis is that the British monarchy remains meaningful because it embodies an element of mystery and magic that appeals to the people. The royal biographer Elizabeth Longford noted, "In laying out millions on monarchy the public is paying partly for a unique product – magic. The mysterious side of monarchy is something that interests the British quite extraordinarily, the British Royal Family not excluded"[70]. The Royal Wedding in 2011 exemplified the magic of the British monarchy and its mesmerizing effect on people. The magic goes hand in hand with the mystique of the royal family, a product of its separateness from the general public. Another aspect of the mystery is the link of the monarchy with the sacred traditions and rituals of the past. This

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[69] Charles Douglas-Home, "Crown and Commonwealth (II)," *The Round Table* 73, no. 292 (1984): 360.
[70] Longford, *The Queen*, 347.

hypothesis argues that the magic and mystery of the monarchy has a powerful

hold over the imagination of the British populace. Douglas-Home and Kelly assert

that, "However pervasive the presence within the political machine, the monarchy

is only as strong as its hold on the whole nation's imagination"[71]. Since the

monarchy's hold on the imagination remains strong, it maintains relevance in

modern society.

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[71] Douglas-Home and Kelly, *Dignified & Efficient*, 214.

Conclusion

My purpose when I embarked on this project was to gain insights into why the British monarchy is still relevant today. In doing so, I aimed to acquire a better understanding of British culture and the factors that figured prominently in their national identity. Using a historical analysis of the reigns of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth II, I investigated the hypothesis that the salience of the monarchy was due in part to the monarch's symbolism of continuity, stability, and fundamental British values in times of crisis. My research program consisted of exploring the scholarly literature on the subject and in seeking out primary source material from the 1940s through the 1980s, in order to provide a foundation for my assertions about the sentiments of Britons. My findings were that the monarch undeniably serves as a symbol of continuity, stability, and British values, especially during periods of crisis or upheaval, therefore supporting my hypothesis. The British people have needed an anchor of stability and an element of continuity as they have coped with the many societal changes and cultural changes that have occurred since 1939. The monarchy has fulfilled this need, which is one reason why it still claims importance today.

A consequence of this study is to introduce a different framework for looking at the royal family and at the institution of monarchy. Other implications include expanding our comprehension of British society and its relationship to the monarchy and shedding light on cultural dynamics in Britain.

My research has contributed to filling a significant gap in the literature. It is surprising that the scholarship has overlooked such an important area, and the significance of my work lies in its exploration of new territory. I have not been able to make my case using the existing arguments of scholars, because no one has written on the precise subject that I am studying. I have had to make inferences from the available materials, building an argument based on the characteristics and quality of comments in the literature and in primary sources from the time period of decolonization. Therefore, what I am most satisfied with is my ability to forge an argument where there was not one before.

Undoubtedly, my case could be stronger, and if more resources had been available to me, I might have been able to make a more compelling argument. The inaccessibility of many sources limited my analysis, leading to an incomplete sample of evidence. Admittedly, another limitation is that I am not British, and while I can make inferences about how Britons feel about their monarchy, I cannot fully grasp exactly how the monarchy figures into British identity. The available primary sources and scholarly work have given me reason to affirm the verity of my hypothesis. However, this paper by no means presents an airtight claim, since my findings are based on a limited collection of evidence. Given access to polling data from the decades of decolonization and a complete archive of newspapers and journals from the time, I could make much stronger conclusions. Alternatively, I might discover that my hypothesis does not have as

much support as I initially thought. Due to these obvious and unavoidable shortcomings, I cannot be completely satisfied with my work. Yet, despite these drawbacks, I fulfilled my original motive of gaining a deeper comprehension of the fascinating institution that is the British monarchy.

This study leaves much room for further research on the topic. Future work should attempt to fill the gap in my literature by examining a more comprehensive sample of primary sources. If possible, future researchers should try to access quantitative data from the time period in question, such as public opinion poll figures. This would provide a stronger indication of British opinions and estimations.

In sum, while the research on the topic of the British monarchy's symbolism during times of crisis or change is still incomplete, the findings from this paper are a step in the right direction. This study has yielded insights on the role of the monarchy in Britain and tentative conclusions about why it is still relevant today. While the British monarchy can no longer claim a political importance, it remains a key institution in the contemporary British landscape.

Furthermore, that relevance is not likely to diminish in the immediate future, as Britain celebrates Queen Elizabeth's sixty years on the throne and continues to focus its attentions on the activities of the younger generation of royals. Given the insights of this study, I think it is very likely that Britons will continue to look to the monarchy as Britain copes with the challenges of the 21st

century and attempts to establish its place in the world order. Globalization, the

continued rise of China and India in the global pecking order, and economic

rehabilitation are all problems Britain will probably deal with in the future. As in

the past, the monarchy will likely act as a counterforce to social, economic, and

political disorder and continue to represent what Britons cherish most about their

way of life. Yet with the queen at eighty-five, in all likelihood the monarchy will

change hands within the next decade. It will be noteworthy to see how the

monarchy weathers this transition. It is unclear how things will evolve after

Queen Elizabeth's death, as public opinion is decidedly lukewarm about Prince

Charles. However, there is much enthusiasm in Britain for the next generation,

and many people have faith in the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, William and

Kate. The British monarchy appears to be safe in their hands, and at the moment,

there is every reason to believe that the British monarchy will endure as an

institution. It will be very interesting to see how the monarchy evolves and what

kind of a role it will take in the future.

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