

# The Exclusion of Hereditary Peers: A Historic Transformation of the British House of Lords

The House of Lords, an integral part of the British Parliament, has undergone a remarkable transformation over the centuries. One of the most significant changes came in 1999 with the passage of the House of Lords Act, which excluded the vast majority of hereditary peers from the House.



## House of Lords Reform: A History: Volume 4. 19712014: The Exclusion of Hereditary Peers Book 1: 19712001 Book 2: 20022014 by Sarah M. Stitzlein

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## Historical Context

For centuries, the House of Lords was dominated by hereditary peers, individuals who inherited their titles and seats in Parliament from their fathers. This system, known as the peerage, had its roots in the medieval era, when powerful nobles and landowners were appointed to a council to

advise the king. Over time, these councils evolved into the modern Parliament, with the House of Lords serving as the upper chamber.

However, the hereditary nature of the peerage came under increasing criticism in the 19th and 20th centuries. Critics argued that it was undemocratic and outmoded in an age of universal suffrage. They pointed out that many hereditary peers had little or no expertise or experience in government, and that their presence in the House of Lords gave them an unfair advantage over elected members of the House of Commons.

### **The House of Lords Act of 1999**

Growing public pressure for reform led to the passage of the House of Lords Act in 1999. This landmark legislation abolished the automatic right of hereditary peers to sit in the House of Lords. Instead, it created a new system in which only 92 hereditary peers were elected by their fellow peers to continue serving in the House. These elected peers were chosen to ensure a balance of political views and expertise.

The Act also introduced a number of other reforms, including:

- The creation of a new category of life peers, appointed by the monarch on the advice of the Prime Minister.
- The establishment of an independent commission to recommend appointments to the House of Lords.
- The of a statutory code of conduct for members of the House of Lords.

### **Impact of the Exclusion**

The exclusion of hereditary peers from the House of Lords had a profound impact on the British political system.

First, it made the House of Lords more democratic and representative. The elected peers who replaced the hereditary peers were more likely to reflect the diversity of the British population and to bring a wider range of experiences and expertise to the House.

Second, the exclusion helped to strengthen the power of the elected House of Commons. With the hereditary peers no longer able to block legislation, the Commons became the dominant chamber in Parliament.

Third, the exclusion helped to modernize the British constitution. It removed an archaic and outmoded element from the political system, and made the House of Lords more accountable to the public.

The exclusion of hereditary peers from the House of Lords was a historic transformation that had a profound impact on the British political system. It made the House of Lords more democratic, representative, and accountable, and it strengthened the power of the elected House of Commons. The House of Lords is now a more effective and modern legislative body, better equipped to meet the challenges of the 21st century.



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