



Was William the Conqueror's impact on England positive or negative?

Overview: Following the death of the English King, 'Edward the Confessor', in 1066, there was a succession crisis. William of Normandy, from what we would know as modern day France, won the Battle of Hastings against Harold Godwinson and became King. William then became known as 'William the Conqueror', as he established his control across England. He used a variety of different methods, such as Castles, the Feudal System, the Domesday Book, the system of Sheriffs and the 'Harrying of the North'. The question remains, however, 'Was the Norman Conquest 'good' for England and the English?'.

Conal's arguments William's impact was negative.	Elliott's arguments that William's impact was positive.
William's conquest had a hugely negative impact on the ruling classes within England. He replaced the English power holders with foreign invaders, only 13 of the 1,000 tenants in chief were English by the end of his reign. <i>"Those who remained in England generally survived in relative poverty and dramatically reduced status." R. Salem</i>	William reorganised and unified England in a manner that laid the foundation for its projection of power into Europe and the rest of the world. Prior to his arrival, England was noted neither for its international prestige nor its domestic calm.
William's direct control of England was to the detriment of ordinary English people who were treated as second class citizens as made clear in <i>Henry of Huntingdon's</i> description that " <i>it was even disgraceful to be called English</i> " and the 'murdrum' fine which meant the unsolved murder of a Norman led to a fine of the whole community.	At a time of uncertainty, chaos, and disunity, William was able to exert near total control over a country badly in need of it. He did this variously by building 86, castles, importing the feudal system and his barons from France, gaining the loyalty of all landowners by the <i>Oath of Salisbury</i> in 1086, and cataloguing the ownership of all property in England through the Domesday Book.
The level of destruction brought by William to England meant hugely negative consequences, particularly in the North of England. In the <i>Harrying of the North</i> alone an estimated 100,000 people died, somewhere between 5-10% of the population. This destruction had a lasting impact, with much land described by Domesday Book as simply 'waste'.	William was able to organise the English economy in such a way that helped GDP double or triple after the conquest (The Economist). Total wealth increased in all counties for which there is data (The Economist). The Domesday Book illustrates the booming markets, from 60 to around 350 by the end of the 12 th Century. <i>"Generations after 1066 saw a progressive expansion both of the scale and the value of...external commerce." (Miller and Hatcher)</i>
William's main economic impact on England was to bleed the country dry. Those actions that we often look at as seminal, such as <i>Domesday Book</i> or the increased use of <i>Sheriffs</i> , were resented by ordinary people and used to line the pockets of the wealthy.	The Domesday Book must be considered one of William's greatest achievements. Never before had such a detailed level of property ownership been collated in a central 'database'. It allowed for a greater level of taxation and accountability in amongst the people of England.

Don't forget to check out Dr Elliott L. Watson's free website: www.thecourseworkclub.com and follow him at @thelibrarian6 on Twitter.

Don't forget to check out Patrick O'Shaughnessy's free website: www.historychappy.com and follow him at @historychappy on Twitter.

Don't forget to follow Conal Smith at @prohistoricman on Twitter.