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THE AMERICAN HISTORIOGRAPHY OF KING GEORGE III:  
THE MONARCH AS MIRROR

A Thesis  
Presented for the  
Master of Arts  
Degree  
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DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF

GALEN W. BROEKER

I wish he were here to see this work completed.

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To the only wise God our Savior,  
be glory and majesty, dominion and power,  
both now and ever. Amen.

Jude 25 (KJV)

## ABSTRACT

The dramatic confrontation between King George III and United States Ambassador John Adams after the Revolution draws attention to one of the great ironies in the writing of American history: we have said many things about the monarch, but we never knew him.

The function of King George III in American historiography has been both obvious and subtle. Since he stood against the Revolution, he has been used to heighten the effect of whatever "good" things historians have felt were being accomplished by the struggle. For the Whig and Neo-Whig historians, George III was an opponent of liberty. For the Imperial School he was one cog in a very large imperial wheel. For the Progressive historians he epitomized an obstacle to reform. Lastly, for the historians of the so-called "New Departures," the King was a dyed-in-the-wool Whig, a military meddler and a focus for conspiratorial suspicion. Those things are obvious.

The King's more subtle function, however, has been to clearly mirror some of the more personal historical values and purposes held by the historians themselves. For patriotic historians Bancroft, Fiske and Morgan, the monarch mirrors their concern with the providential spread of republican values, the containment of political corruption, and the discovery of an "American" principle in a world of conflicting ideals. Diminishing, defending or condemning George III in turn, Imperial historians Andrews, Gipson and Kammen have evidenced their interest in Anglo-American harmony, creating empathy for the British cause and finding credibility in governmental officials. Although George III

has not uniformly mirrored the accepted unifying themes of the Progressive School--economic and class conflict--he has accurately reflected their individual approach to the shared value of social reform: the monarchical mirror in the histories of Becker, Beard and Jensen has provided insight into those historians' concern for comforting and changing "Mr. Everyman," for recognizing the existence of economic self-interest in human arrangements, and for appreciating the complexities of life behind human triumph and failure. Finally, for Palmer Shy and Bailyn (each of whom selected his own "New Departure" from an older methodology to improve on what they all felt were deficiencies in the Progressive School interpretation), King George III mirrors their endorsement of the perspective gained from comparative history, from considering the impact of the military in great human events, and from properly appreciating the causative power of ideology.

Behind each of these personal reflections can be detected something deeper still: the shifting moods of the American public over the past one hundred fifty years, and their painful inability to adopt an objective view of George III, himself. The man we have portrayed is not King George III, although we may have thought he was. What American historians have written about King George III has been the product of our need and the mirror of our common aspirations.

When first we come to the American historiography of King George III, what we expect to see is something resembling a colorfully detailed portrait, or series of portraits, of a man we never knew; but this is an illusion. The image that we find where we thought the monarch ought to be amazes us. Instead of a royal portrait of George III, we have created a reflection of ourselves.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION: THE MAN WE NEVER KNEW

. . . whenever God of his infinite goodness shall call me out of this world, the tongue of malice may not paint my good intentions in those colours she admires, nor the sycophant extoll me beyond what I deserve. I do not pretend to any superior abilities, but will give place to no one in meaning to preserve the freedom, happiness and glory of my dominions and all their inhabitants, and to fulfill the duty to my God and my neighbour in the most extended sense.

--King George III

This misguided sovereign. . . .

--Mercy Otis Warren

Last Thursday after hearing a very Good Sermon I went with the Multitude into Kings Street to hear the proclamation for independance read and proclaimed. . . . 3 cheers . . . rended the air, the Bells rang, the privateers fired, the forts and Batteries, the cannon were discharged, the platoons followed and every face appeared joyfull. . . . the kings arms were taken down from the State House and every vestage of him from every place in which it appeared and burnt in King Street. Thus ends royall Authority in this State, and all the people shall say Amen.

--Abigail Adams<sup>1</sup>

#### A Meeting of Old Enemies

June 1, 1785. The King's Closet. John Adams, the new United States' first minister plenipotentiary to his Majesty King George III,

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<sup>1</sup>John Brooke, King George III (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1972), quote located between front end paper and frontispiece; Mercy (Otis) Warren, History of the Rise, Progress and Termination of the American Revolution, I (Boston: Manning and Loring, 1805), 23; Abigail to John Adams, July 21, 1776, in L. H. Butterfield, et al., eds., The Book of Abigail and John: Selected Letters of the Adams Family, 1762-1784 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975), 148.

heard the door close behind him. He was alone with the secretary of state and the King whom he had helped to overthrow.

Adams had planned just to present his credentials and retire, but friends in England had convinced him it would be better to deliver a "harangue" to the King--preferably one "as complimentary as possible." He may have been going over in his mind the words he had carefully memorized as he accompanied the Marquis of Carmarthen through the levee room and approached the door of the King's Closet.

In a well-rehearsed speech that probably lasted less than two minutes, Adams assured his Majesty of the United States' "unanimous disposition . . . to cultivate the most friendly and liberal intercourse" between Britons and Americans, and extended his nation's "best wishes" for George III's "health and happiness, and for that of your royal family."<sup>2</sup> The American Ambassador said he would be "the happiest of men" if he could become instrumental in "restoring an entire esteem, confidence, and affection," or what he would prefer to call

The old good nature and the old good humor between people, who, though separated by an ocean, and under different governments, have the same language, a similar religion, and kindred blood.<sup>3</sup>

Adams wrote Jay that the King listened "to every word . . . with dignity, but with an apparent emotion." When he answered, Adams commented, it was with "pronunciation . . . as distinct as I ever heard." But it was clear that the occasion was profoundly moving.

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<sup>2</sup>John Adams to Secretary (John) Jay, May 30, 1785, in Charles Francis Adams, ed., The Works of John Adams, VIII (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1853), 256.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 256-57.

Adams recognized that both he and George III were "much affected"; he therefore made no claim to have recorded the King's "precise words" but believed he had captured "his Majesty's meaning as I then understood it, and his own words" as nearly as he could recollect them.<sup>4</sup>

With more "tremor" in his speech than Adams remembered being in his own, King George said to the representative of the people who had broken the imperial bond:

Sir,--The circumstances of this audience are so extraordinary, the language you have now held is so extremely proper, . . . that I must say that I not only receive with pleasure the assurance of the friendly dispositions of the United States, but that I am very glad the choice has fallen upon you to be their minister. I wish you, sir, to believe, and that it may be understood in America, that I have done nothing in the late contest but what I thought myself indispensably bound to do. . . . I will be very frank with you. I was the last to consent to the separation; but the separation having been made, and having become inevitable, I have always said, as I say now, that I would be the first to meet the friendship of the United States as an independent power. The moment I see such sentiments and language as yours prevail, and a disposition to give to this country the preference, that moment I shall say, let the circumstances of language, religion, and blood have their natural and full effect.<sup>5</sup>

After this, the King surprised Adams by relaxing the formalities and inquiring lightly whether Adams' morality were not a bit at variance with the "manner of France" where he had last been posted. Adams wanted neither to compromise his standards by denying them nor to phrase his answer in such a way that the King would infer that Americans were overeager to reattach themselves to the country from which they had fought to be free. His phrasing evoked the real sense of

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 257-58.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 257.

grief and betrayal that had etched itself so deeply upon the King's spirit. Admitting the aptness of the King's observation, Adams then added, "I must avow to your Majesty, I have no attachment but to my own country." Suddenly sobered, the King replied, "as quick as lightning, 'An honest man will never have any other.'"

The King then said a word or two to the secretary of state, which, being between them, I did not hear, and then turned and bowed to me, as is customary with all kings and princes when they give the signal to retire. I retreated, stepping backward, (wrote Adams) . . . and, making my last reverence at the door of the chamber, I went my way.<sup>6</sup>

The interview was over, but American historiographical impressions of George III had only just begun.

#### The Monarch as Mirror

Much has been written about George III by American historians exploring the meaning of the Revolution. The impression lingers, however, once these comments have been accumulated, that George III has never been a real person for most Americans at all, but only a symbol. The historical literature that mentions the monarch "has a refractive quality: it mirrors both the time about which it was written and the time in which it was written."<sup>7</sup>

Mercy Otis Warren, in her History of the Rise, Progress and Termination of the American Revolution, exemplifies this refractive quality. Early in her History, which was published in 1805, Mrs. Warren

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 258.

<sup>7</sup>Lawrence H. Leder, "The Loyalist Historians: An Introduction," in L. H. Leder, ed., The Colonial Legacy, Volume I: Loyalist Historians (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 1.

referred to George III as an "arbitrary prince of the house of Brunswick." The context accurately reflects American fears during the gathering storm of the early 1770s of a Stuart-style scheme of tyranny, and the widespread resentment unleashed by Common Sense and intensified by the Declaration of Independence over George III's unwavering support of Parliament. (Although her three-volume work was not published until more than twenty years after the War had ended, Mercy Warren had been recording her impressions of events as they happened. She may have written this somewhat critical description of the King as the tide of incipient revolution was cresting in America, since she called him a "tyrant" in one of her poems published as early as 1774.)<sup>8</sup>

Then later she described King George III more compassionately as a "misguided sovereign, dazzled with the acquisition of empire, in the morning of youth, and in the zenith of national prosperity," someone "more obstinate than cruel, rather weak than remarkably wicked."<sup>9</sup> It could well be that Adams' revised impression of the King, once he had come to know him personally, influenced his old friend the historian to soften her own earlier judgment of George III. Though it is hardly a trumpet of royal praise, this second description of George III as young and "misguided" is certainly a more empathetic, more reasoned

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<sup>8</sup>Mercy Otis Warren, "A Political Reverie," Poems, Dramatic & Miscellaneous (Boston: I. Thomas & E. T. Andrews, 1790), 189, 194. Mrs. Warren pointedly said that the lines about justice rescuing freedom "from a tyrant's hand" were "first publish'd, January, 1774, previous to the breaking out of the Civil War, while America was oscillating between a Resistance by Arms & her ancient Love & Loyalty to Britain."

<sup>9</sup>Warren, History, 1, 2 and 23.

attempt to explain the King's behavior than the earlier one was.

Even so, Mrs. Warren's focus on the triumph of republican values forced her (just as their own perceptions of the Revolution would force future generations of American historians) to entomb King George III in his role as opponent of the Revolution, rather than to portray him more graciously as a former foe whose likeable traits, such as those only Adams had come to know, could help us appreciate if not to agree with him.

This is what is meant when it is said that George III is a mirror, in the historiography of the Revolution, of American historical values, rather than a portrait of the man, himself--a symbol, rather than the early rising head of household, patron of Handel, and captivating conversationalist whom Adams came to know.

It will be the purpose of the remainder of this thesis to investigate that "refractive" phenomenon by which King George III mirrors the values held by representative historians from several major schools of American historiography, beginning with Bancroft during the age of Jacksonian democracy and ending with Bailyn's study on the impact of ideology.

## CHAPTER II

### WHIGS AND NEO-WHIGS

#### The Patriotic Bent

Before examining what George Bancroft, John Fiske and Edmund Morgan have said about George III--and therefore about their own historical values--it would be profitable to explain the commonalities that make these historians "Whigs" and "Neo-Whigs." During the American Revolution, "Whigs" were those who opposed continued allegiance to Great Britain by the colonies and who supported the movement for American independence. The same sense of patriotism that infused the Revolution infuses the writings of Bancroft, Fiske and Morgan.

There are distinctive differences among them as well. Bancroft's brand of patriotism reflects his pride in Jacksonian democracy. Fiske's branch of patriotism takes the form of concern over the political corruption he saw in America before the turn of the century. Morgan's brand of patriotism evidences his concern that Americans rally around their common heritage as a response to the threat of worldwide communism. The comments all three historians make about King George III mirror both their shared patriotism and their distinctive differences.

#### Bancroft's George III: The Instrument of Heaven

Born in 1800, George Bancroft was a man whose faith in Jacksonian democracy was evident throughout his writings on the American Revolution. Undergirding Bancroft's pride in the victory of the common man--which he felt the election of Jackson represented--was a firm conviction

that what had happened in America was part of a much larger plan for all humanity.

How, then, did Bancroft portray King George III? The strongly deterministic, strongly democratic context within which Bancroft painted the King becomes profoundly evident in the quotation that follows. By Christmastime of 1760, wrote Bancroft, it was clear that the influence of the people had become

the movement of the age, which could as little be repressed as Providence dethroned; and George, who hated it almost to madness, was the instrument chosen by Heaven to accelerate that movement, till it proceeded with a force which involved the whole human race, and could not be checked by all the weight of ancient authority.<sup>1</sup>

Bancroft's George III is thus a man raised up by a supreme Creator for the (ironically) benign task of bringing humanity closer to the hope of a new worldwide liberty by provoking American independence.

Bancroft said that it was his object, since

the fortunes of a nation are not under the control of blind destiny, to follow the steps by which a favoring Providence, calling our institutions into being, has conducted the country to its present happiness and glory.<sup>2</sup>

This is a personal form of determinism; the fact that God is here credited with "calling forth" institutions and with "conducting the country" into a position of prosperity and strength implies that He is both Creator and Guide.

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<sup>1</sup>George Bancroft, History of the United States, From the Discovery of the American Continent (10 vols.: Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1834-1874), IV, 389.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., I, 4.

Bancroft further asserted in his History that the "sovereignty of the people" was a "conceded axiom"; indulging a sincere patriotism which appears to border upon a smug nationalism, Bancroft said that "While the nations of Europe aspire after change, our constitution engages the fond admiration" of a people who support it with "faithful patriotism."<sup>3</sup> It is apparent, then, that George III will be used by Bancroft to heighten the effect of the victory of popular sovereignty by the King's staunch opposition to it.

The device that Bancroft chose was to contrast the upbringing of George III with that of George Washington, "nature's son," who is said to have mingled with the "savages" and to have considered a bear-skin a "splendid couch":

This stripling surveyor in the woods, with no companion but his unlettered associates, and no implements of science but his compass and chain, contrasted strangely with the imperial magnificence of the congress of Aix la Chapelle.

Despite his rude surroundings--or more probably because of them--

Washington and not George III enjoyed a favored part in a larger plan:

God has selected, not Kaunitz, nor Newcastle, not a monarch of the house of . . . Hanover, but the Virginia stripling, to give an impulse to human affairs.<sup>4</sup>

Despite his position of leadership of the world's greatest empire at that time, George III was excluded from preeminence among the political leaders on the face of the earth because

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., III, 468. The implications of portraying George III as a symbol of imperial decadence versus George Washington as a symbol of frontier vitality are more fully explored in David Levin, History as Romantic Art: Bancroft, Prescott, Motley, and Parkman (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1959), 49-50, 73, and 51-55.

As far as events can depend on an individual, [The Lord of Hosts] had placed the rights and the destinies of countless millions in the keeping of the widow's son.<sup>5</sup>

The contrast is more poignant because the future King of England, like George Washington, was also a widow's son. But his role model would be a Stuart, the Scottish Earl of Bute; and his upbringing in the royal nursery would bring far different influences into his life for the shaping of his views and personality than those experienced an ocean away by Washington, sheltered by the Virginia woods from the luxury of the English court.

Bancroft introduced George III as a "boy of fourteen" in 1752, of whose education "royalists and the more liberal aristocracy were disputing the charge." Beyond the tension of conflicting influences and ideologies that complicated George's formation of his concept of how a King should rule, the young heir to the throne may have suffered other disadvantages that would handicap his effectiveness in the years ahead. Bancroft suggests that George was "probably premature," since he was born within ten months of his older sister, and places that observation in the same paragraph with a comment that George III displayed a lifetime predisposition to "nervous irritability."<sup>6</sup>

Bancroft then echoes Waldegrave, one of George III's childhood tutors, by mentioning that the young George was honest, but shy and retiring, a child who tended to be sulky or melancholy rather than exhibit outbursts of anger: he reportedly would hide "his passion

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<sup>5</sup>Bancroft, History, III, 468.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., IV, 98.

[when upset] in the solitude of his chamber." Childhood laziness and an aversion to study were offset by early evidences of "sobriety" and the "constitutional fondness" he would exhibit throughout his life for domestic enjoyments.<sup>7</sup>

The contrast between the growing boys that would pave the way for the spread of that popular sovereignty which Bancroft held dear is thus a vivid one: on the one hand, a dull moody, though commendably pure and honest Prince George; and on the other, lurking like his primitive playmates in the dappled forests, the young Washington--keen, bright, and sharp as a Virginia woodsman's blade, hidden for polishing in the shadow of God's hand until the right moment for release into the sunlight of world renown. Bancroft's George III emerges as an honest but unimaginative heir to the throne who is unfitted by either nature or nurture to exercise authority over his rude but vigorous American subjects. He was perfectly designed, however, to act the part of a monarch whose authority in America deserved to be overthrown.

Despite the contested orientation of Prince George's education, one thing became clear at a tender age: the child knew his own mind. His arbitrary behavior in the nursery proved it was the old ideas that were taking hold. Though George's mother said she knew nothing of "the Jacobitism [that some people said was] attempted to be instilled into the child," unfortunately for him and for England, the young heir was showing signs of being raised in the Stuart tradition. Bancroft discounts the protest of innocence by George's mother; she might not have been the best judge of the constitutional tenor of her child's

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 99.

education, because to a "German princess the supremacy of regal authority seemed a tenet very proper to be inculcated."<sup>8</sup> The real heir to the Glorious Revolution which had toppled the Stuarts from power was curiously not this royal child at all--he was being raised in the dangerous doctrines of sovereign power--but the "Virginia stripling," whose promise had been heralded by Bancroft before he introduced George III into his narrative. It was because George III had been made a royal throwback to notions of Stuart tyranny that his American subjects, who were in the vanguard of progress, must reject him.

Though King George II was too old to end his own "thralldom to the aristocracy," wrote Bancroft of George III's childhood, "the first political lessons which his grandson, Prince George, received at Leicester House" taught him how he might later use the British constitution to "emancipate the royal authority from its humiliating dependence on a few great families."<sup>9</sup> (This "humiliating dependence" had resulted from George II's emulation of his father's disdain for everything not German. This disgust had been used to advantage by the Whig oligarchs, who were very happy to handle the details--and with

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid. The conservative--but not Jacobite--nature of Prince George's education is very capably illuminated by one of Sir Lewis Namier's best disciples in Romney Sedgwick, ed., Letters from George III to Lord Bute, 1756-1766 (London: Macmillan and Company, Ltd., 1939).

<sup>9</sup>Bancroft, History, IV, 162. For development of the notion that George III's opposition to his grandfather's aged ministers--the "dead above ground"--typified the struggle of the heir against any vestiges of the old monarch's power, see Sir Lewis Namier, England in the Age of the American Revolution, (London: Macmillan and Company, Ltd., 1961), 54, and 61-62.

them, the substance--of English political management that proved so distasteful, perhaps even cordially incomprehensible, to their invited Hanoverian monarchs.)

The problem with British government, in an age when more far-sightedness and sensible leadership would have helped, was that the Whigs whom Prince George wanted to subdue--influential men like Cumberland, Newcastle, Devonshire, Bedford, Halifax, the Marquis of Rockingham, the Townshends, Grenville, and young Lord North--had no more "systematic opinions" of what constituted the "vital elements of civil liberty" than did their monarch-to-be. Their families had rid England of the Stuarts; now America would have to "amalgamate the cause of royalty and oligarchy, and create parties in England on questions which the Revolution of 1688 had not even considered."<sup>10</sup> Liberty for the common man, in Bancroft's history, was swelling to flood; power was beginning to flow from the hands of the privileged few into the hands of the people. Neither George III nor a hierarchy mired in a struggle to maintain its privileges could stop the flow of democratic concepts from America to the waiting world.

The flow of power to the people was accelerated by the temporary and ineffectual restraints of a monarch tied to his mother's apron strings:

In June, 1756, Prince George, being eighteen, became of age, and Newcastle, with the concurrence of the king, would have separated his (household) from that of his mother. They were both opposed to the separation.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Bancroft, History, IV, 163-64.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 244.

The apparently insecure Prince George shared with his mother something besides a common residence and much more serious in its consequences for the future of America and the First British Empire: confidence in a "fine, showy man, such as would make an excellent ambassador in a court where there was no business," a man small in learning but large in pretensions, a "consistent and . . . obsequious royalist" who, though lacking practical experience in the affairs of state, would instruct the "future sovereign of England in the theory of the British constitution." The man was a Scot, and a Stuart--the much-maligned Earl of Bute.<sup>12</sup>

Having chosen Bute as his tutor, the young monarch later tried to make him his first minister. Bancroft says that Prince George's first conspicuous display of stubbornness was his insistence on the "free choice of his servants," which meant securing Lord Bute in his service. Old King George II replied by storming at Fox, who had not prevented it, "You have made me make that puppy, Bute, groom of the stole."<sup>13</sup>

Prince George was out riding with the Earl of Bute when, "on the morning of the twenty-fifth day of October, 1760," the "pupil of Leicester House" was overtaken "by a secret message that he was king."<sup>14</sup> (The "Leicester House" reference was almost certainly intended to evoke memories of the Prince's studies to prepare him to recapture the kingly initiative.) Full of the drama of the moment,

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 244-45.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 245.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 381.

Bancroft relates that immediately upon returning to his mother's residence at Carleton House, "the king, so young and so determined to rule," secured first of all a promise of loyalty from the "veteran courtier," Newcastle. (The way that Bancroft says "veteran courtier" makes it sound ominously like the contemporary connotation of the word "politician.")

"Before the ashes of the late king were cold," continues the consummate American Whig, "the faithless duke was conspiring" with the young George III to "subvert the system, by which Pitt had not only restored but exalted his country."<sup>15</sup> The betrayal that was about to occur involved the rights of the English people as well as the American; a royal tree fertilized with Stuart dogma, in an England inching toward popular sovereignty under the leadership of Pitt, bore the bitter fruit of treachery.

The subversive speech to the council which followed the new King's secret meeting with Newcastle denounced the war, which the British people under Pitt were winning, as "bloody" and expensive; it also cut adrift Britain's Continental ally, the King of Prussia. Bancroft alleges that the speech was drafted by Bute but then delivered with the King's consent by Newcastle, who mumbled at the embarrassing parts so they would arouse no opposition.<sup>16</sup>

Bancroft's treatment of the speech that so incensed Pitt underscores the deterministic nature of Bancroft's narrative. The attempted Stuart counter-coup from inside the system of British government was to

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 383.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

Bancroft the manifestation of a deeper spiritual warfare. Beneath the stratum of human conflict, Bancroft saw the war of two kingdoms, the Kingdom of Darkness and the Kingdom of Light--one headed by Satan-through-the-sovereign, giving ground grudgingly to the forces of freedom, the other by God-in-the-people, taking the Land of Promise gradually. Having failed to rush the people's liberty with frontal assaults by the Stuart monarchs (and this would include risings such as the Scottish "Forty-Five"), mankind's great enemy, Satan, was now trying to subvert that liberty secretly, from inside, by placing the Stuart Bute near the throne. This is a classic Whig perspective.

Bancroft's teleological outlook in no way dulled the edge of his German-honed scholarship when he wondered about the ways in which American independence had been secured.<sup>17</sup> What it did decide was that underneath his mounds of skillfully arranged historical detail, for

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<sup>17</sup>One reviewer in 1891 did express concern, however, about the method of citation that has been prevalent throughout the century:

When [Bancroft] quotes a contemporary document or letter, it is impossible to tell without careful verifying, whether what he gives us between the quotation marks is precisely what should be there, or whether it is a compilation, rearrangement, [or] selection.

Sampling Bancroft's citations and comparing them to the correspondence of George III, for example, that has been published in this century affirms the truth of that objection. But it will also reassure the conscientious scholar that Bancroft faithfully conveyed the sense of the original with a minimum change of wording. See, for example, the King's letters of December 26, 1781, and September 16, 1782, to Lords North and Shelburne, respectively, in Sir John Fortescue, ed., The Correspondence of King George the Third From 1760 to December 1783 (6 vols.: London: Macmillan and Company, Ltd., 1927-28), V, 236, and VI, 129, and the corresponding renderings in Bancroft, History, X, 525 and 578-79.

Bancroft the struggle for popular liberty would always be at its core a spiritual struggle. Since that was true, it must have a spiritual conclusion: America must win when the clash occurred, because The People must win for the Kingdom to come.

George III was a man standing stubbornly in the way of progress. Nothing in the flourish which accompanied his coronation could distract him from his primary goal: "The ruling idea of his mind, early developed and indelibly branded in, was the restoration of the prerogative." This was the very prerogative, explained Bancroft, that the provincial assemblies for years in America had "resisted and defied."<sup>18</sup>

Despite Bancroft's conviction that the Revolutionary struggle had to end in triumph for the popular will, the future for his American heirs of promise in August 1774 may not have seemed so certain. George III, said Bancroft, had "trampled under foot the affections, customs, . . . and privileges of the people of Massachusetts" by his assent to the Regulating Act; and by wintertime in early 1775, the monarch's heart had become "hardened," a descriptive term which no Bible-reading community could fail to associate in their minds with the attitude of Pharaoh toward the Israelites' decision to leave Egypt.

King George III's apparent ruthlessness after 1774 in setting his "special impress" to a plan that involved arming black slaves against their masters and raising the Six Nations to set the frontier aflame, if that were necessary, emphasized the King's determination to regain the obedience of his American subjects as quickly as possible

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<sup>18</sup>Bancroft, History, IV, 386.

by using the strongest means available.<sup>19</sup> It also revealed that his esteem for people who were willing to step outside the established legal channels to gain redress for their grievances was low:

In [the] eyes [of George III], the colonists who pleaded their rights against the unlimited supremacy of the king in parliament were false to the crown and the constitution; . . . to crush their spirit and punish their disobedience was a duty and a merit.<sup>20</sup>

Bancroft also attributes courage to the King, despite his commitment to the wrong things, by commenting: "He always bore adversity with a courage that would have become a righteous cause." (Note the implication that Bancroft did not consider restoring the prerogative to be such a cause.) "Others might quail," continued Bancroft, but King George III just "scoffed at the thought of an insurrection." His was the courage of a man who really thought he was right. Within the boundaries of Bancroft's determinism, there was room to commend a man who was sincere but wrong.

George III again suffered rebuff when fellow-monarch Catherine of Russia refused him the help of her troops with his customary

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., VII, 96, 227 and 349.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., VIII, 131. For samples of comments by the King that reveal his abhorrence for any kind of civil disorder, see Fortescue's Correspondence of King George the Third, III, 130-31 and 175; also Stanley Ayling's references to the King's reaction to the Spitalfields silk weavers' riots, that "Any kind of mob violence, any overturning of the principles of order and proper subordination, . . . roused in him the strongest reactions," Stanley Ayling, George The Third (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1972), 127. Ayling gained his insight on the King's attitude toward civil disorder--or had his insight sharpened--by the King's comments on the subject in his letters to Lord North dated September 11, 1774, and February 15, 1775.

"firmness," says Bancroft.<sup>21</sup> This pale accolade does not mean that Bancroft sympathized with the request for foreign arms to quell the rebellion in America--merely that the New England Democrat was willing to recognize manly qualities even in an enemy who suffered adversity.

When George III said in October 1775 that he was "fighting the battle of the legislature," and expected an almost "unanimous support," Bancroft suggests that despite the King's apparent sincerity, "the good sense of the English people reasoned very differently."<sup>22</sup> No matter what admirable qualities he evidenced, King George could not be the hero in Bancroft's scheme of history--the King opposed the People.

George III ultimately represented the privileged few, not the mass of the citizenry. Being part of the "wave of the future" simply was not his predestined role. The real role which for Bancroft had been marked out for King George III in countless, starless eons past in the mind of God shone clearly through in October 1775: when the King rallied parliamentary support by misrepresenting the desires of most Americans--except, perhaps, those of Samuel Adams and a few other firebrands--as the establishment of an independent nation, he precipitated that very movement. The actual American consensus in the fall of 1775, even among men of vision like Jefferson and John Adams, was a desire to affirm their "love and admiration" for the customary monarchy--provided it did not harry them incessantly.<sup>23</sup> From the tone of the King's speech, however, it appeared that this one would.

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<sup>21</sup>Bancroft, History, VIII, 145 and 157.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 159.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 160-61.

The next device by which Bancroft chose to heighten the difference between the direction of George III and that of the sensible English populace is his commentary on the King's appointment of Germain. Note the disparity between the twisted vision of submission or destruction that gripped the King's minister and the promise of the "real" English people:

At night, on coming home to his supper and his claret, the friendless man, unloving and unloved, could, with cold, vengeful malice, plan to lay America in ashes, if he could not have the glory of reducing her to submission.

. . . .  
The England that the world revered, the England that kept alive in Europe the vestal fire of freedom, was at this time outside of the government, though steadily gaining political strength.<sup>24</sup>

Bancroft thus pictured George III as a man jarringly out of step with his people as the war progressed--a man whose policy toward America was not in harmony with "the England of the Revolution, nor with that of the eighteenth century, nor with that of the nineteenth."<sup>25</sup> George III was a man marching increasingly alone.

After the British public had been informed of Cornwallis' defeat at Yorktown, there were fervent pleas from the people of London to end what they had come to believe was an "unnatural and unfortunate" war. Bancroft confides that despite these prudent pleas, scarcely had

the chimes of the Christmas bells . . . died away when the King wrote as stubbornly as ever: "No difficulties can get me to consent to the getting of peace at the expense of a separation from America."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 168.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 167.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., IX, 525.

Though George III was adamant in his refusal to allow a separation from America, he could no longer save Germain from being toppled in Yorktown's wake by the triumphant popular will:

[Germain] was compelled to retire ingloriously from the cabinet. . . . As he crossed the threshold of the house of lords, he was met by the unsparing reprobation of his career of cowardice, and blindly selfish incapacity.<sup>27</sup>

The symbol of George III's increasing desperation had been discarded. It was only a matter of time until his royal master was forced to capitulate under a kindred rejection. In March, 1782,

The king kept his sorrows as well as he could pent up in his own breast, but his mind was "truly torn to pieces" by the inflexible resolve of the house of commons to stop the war in America.<sup>28</sup>

The King thought it was Parliament's fault that the people no longer supported his war in America. "Moreover, he felt keenly 'the cruel usage of all the powers of Europe'" who had hindered his war effort through their League of Armed Neutrality. George III, in Bancroft's closing pages, felt abandoned in his quest to enforce a dying principle.

With his stress on progress, Bancroft declared that George III had unwisely tried not so much to turn back the hands of the clock as to stop them. Like all leaders who try to act without sufficient sensitivity to the changing temper of their followers, however, the King had eventually--and incredibly, to him--found himself alone. It was with "bitterness of spirit" that George III in the springtime of 1782 promised not to veto a motion for granting independence to

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 533.

America. He only hoped he would not be held accountable in the eyes of posterity for "the downfall of this once respectable empire."<sup>29</sup> Ironically, he has.

The picture we have of George III from Bancroft reflects the historian's Jacksonian ideals. When Bancroft said that "from the day of his accession George the Third displayed an innate love of authority," the historian was revealing his conviction that the people's will ought to be more important to a head of state than his own will. It was George III's decision to assert his own will that "doomed him in a universe of change to oppose reform, and struggle . . . hopelessly, against the slow but resistless [sic] approaches of popular power."<sup>30</sup> King George III mirrors Bancroft's pride in the advancement of republicanism precisely because he was overwhelmed trying to resist it.

#### Fiske's George III: The Corrupt Political Wirepuller

Like Bancroft before him, John Fiske wrote about the Revolution with a sense that it was part of some larger movement in human history, before this assumption had been seriously challenged by the scholars of the Imperial and Progressive Schools. For Bancroft it had been a movement toward popular sovereignty; for Fiske it was a movement toward pure government.

The first impression one receives, however, when Fiske introduces his version of George III is "blame." The main body of his

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 534, and 578-79.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., IV, 386.

material on George III follows Fiske's plaudits to Gladstone for having the courage to admit that the British government had been wrong in its handling of the Boers:

All honour to the Christian statesman who dares to leave England's military prestige to be vindicated by the glorious records of a thousand years, and even in the hour of well-merited defeat sets higher value on political justice than on a reputation for dealing hard blows.<sup>31</sup>

George III never made such an admission of guilt, so he never earned from Fiske the same commendation for candor that was conferred on Gladstone.

Fiske absolved George III from blame for "wantonly throwing the apple of discord" that triggered the Revolution, because that dubious honor belonged to Charles Townshend; but the King shared Townshend's guilt for the effects of his policy because he so "zealously adopted and cherished" his minister's measures once they had been proposed.

Fiske suggests that the proposals for an American revenue may have been designed by Townshend to "curry favor" with his King, and to get "the lion's share" of that patronage which Fiske calls, the "king's ample corruption." Although George III in his own correspondence had singled out the earlier controversy over John Wilkes' criticism of the government in the newspapers (and the subsequent denial of his seat in Parliament) as the issue "upon which almost my whole crown depends," Fiske portrays the Townshend program, instead,

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<sup>31</sup> John Fiske, The American Revolution, 2 vols. in 1 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1891), I, 37.

as the power play upon whose success George III "staked his whole political career as a monarch."<sup>32</sup>

The reason for the variant Wilkes-Townshend emphasis may at first seem puzzling; but it becomes clearer why Fiske selected the Townshend focus when he says that George III need not have worried about the Wilkes affair--the "Old Whigs," who "could not be made to understand the iniquity of it," bucked the popular will and took care of Wilkes' disqualification by themselves. When Fiske said that such seasoned though patriotic men as Rockingham could no more be shown the immorality of such practices "then an old cut-and-dried American politician in our time can be made to understand the iniquity of the 'spoils system,'"<sup>33</sup> he opened a window on the soul of America at the time of his writing. He also provided a clue to what his King George III would mirror: Fiske's concern with the reestablishment of that political purity which he felt the Revolution was fought to secure.

Fiske's comments about George III typically are not aglow with kindness. One example of their tenor is his description of George III's support for the Townshend measures as that "fatal legacy which the brighter political charlatan left to the duller political fanatic."<sup>34</sup>

Fiske continues by saying that the "fierce persistence" with which George III sought to ram the Townshend measures down American throats cannot be excused. It can, however, be understood when one realizes that George III was trying to use the political conflict that arose over the American measures to recapture the royal initiative

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 41-42.

that had been eclipsed by emerging cabinet government under the first two Georges.<sup>35</sup>

It was not George's intention, Fiske contends, to settle for the mere "shadow of sovereignty." Impressed by his mother "from earliest babyhood" with the precept, "George be king!" the young Hanoverian was determined to pattern his political career upon the absolute monarchies of France and Spain. Since the simple lesson to "Be king!" had constituted "pretty much the whole of his education," Fiske's George III had a hunger for power that was made more dangerous by his abysmal ignorance. In fact, the "popular tradition" which regarded George III as "the most ignorant king that ever sat upon the English throne," commented Fiske, was "undoubtedly correct."

He used to wonder what people could find to admire in such a wretched driveller as Shakespeare, and he never was capable of understanding any problem which required the slightest trace of imagination.<sup>36</sup>

Despite the King's alleged cultural limitations, Fiske warned his popular readership of the danger in American tradition of over-exaggerating George III's "stupidity": it diverted attention from the more cunning side of his character.

Perhaps out of remorse for having so deftly put the monarch in his place, Fiske suddenly and without warning became absolutely saccharine:

In an age when some of the noblest English statesmen drank their gallon of strong wine daily, or sat late at the gambling-table, or lived in scarcely hidden concubinage, George III, was decorous in personal habits

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 37-38.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 38-39.

and pure in domestic relations, and no banker's clerk in London applied himself to the details of business more industriously than he.<sup>37</sup>

Fiske only narrowly avoided having to revise his previous condemnation of George III by assuring his readers that the King's "genuine talent for administration" was "devoted . . . most assiduously to selfish ends."

Fiske then continued by describing a George III who was insincere, unsympathetic, boorishly stiff," and Machiavellian in his manipulation of subordinates.

Any one who dared to disagree with him upon even the slightest point of policy he straightway regarded as a natural enemy, and pursued him ever afterward with vindictive hatred.<sup>38</sup>

The implications for America were obvious: resistance to imperial policy was courting royal hatred. The impact of such an attitude at home made the overseas conflict inevitable; the King's lack of genuine warmth or of responsible governmental vision guaranteed that he would surround himself with sycophants who could not help provoking it. Toward "statesmen of broad views and independent character" George III nursed the bitterest rancor. Morosely, perversely Calvinistic in his disenchantment with human nature, Fiske's King George III was not a man to be "deterred by scruples" while he busied himself with selfish goals.<sup>39</sup>

With a skill that would have "aroused the envy of Tammany," says Fiske, George played off the conflicting interests of the Old Whigs, the New Whigs under William Pitt, and the recrudescing old

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 39-40.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

Tories who, shorn of their "idle, romantic love for the Stuarts," were putting their ideas of high kingly prerogative to more practical use in the King's Drawing-Room. George III "displayed in the highest degree the cunning and craft of a self-seeking politician."<sup>40</sup> And here is a clue to the heart of Fiske's turn-of-the-century interpretation.

George III thought Parliamentary reform such as that advocated by Pitt and the New Whigs to be the most serious threat to that "machinery of corruption upon which he relied" for his influence. This meant that Pitt, the only statesman who might have had sufficient vision to have avoided the confrontation with America, early became identified as the King's bitterest political enemy.

Such had been his eagerness to . . . discredit . . . Pitt's policy that [the King] had utterly lost sight of the imperial interests of England, which indeed his narrow intelligence was incapable of comprehending.<sup>41</sup>

Fiske's George III was no more the friend or champion of his own countrymen than he was of Americans abroad. However, the American problem was merely a diversion in the King's behind-the-scenes jockeying for undisputed political control of the Sceptred Isle.

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 40-42, passim.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 42. Most American work on George III has been derivative. The seminal slants and initiatives for modification of the King's image have in the main been British. If Fiske's comments concerning George III seem harsh, it should be noted that the condemnation of the King by such noted British historians as Sir George Otto Trevelyan has only recently undergone revision. For further information on the reorientation that has occurred in British scholarship, see Jack P. Greene, "The Plunge of Lemmings: A Consideration of Recent Writings on British Politics and the American Revolution," South Atlantic Quarterly, LXVII (Winter, 1963), 141-75.

By forcing the issue of sovereignty in far-off America rather than in England, George III showed himself a "cunning politician" but an "ignoble statesman," who obscured the "real nature of the issue" by focusing public disapproval on the American rebels.<sup>42</sup> Fiske suggests that the American victory saved the British people the trouble of ousting George III themselves, as they had James II a century earlier, when he called home his "well-trained army of victorious mercenaries" to enforce in England that personal power the monarch had striven to solidify in America:

While George III lost the fairest portion of the British Empire, it was the sturdy Americans who, fighting the battle of freedom at once for the Old World and for the New, ended by overwhelming his paltry schemes for personal aggrandizement in hopeless ruin, leaving him for posterity to contemplate as one of the most instructive examples of short-sighted folly that modern history affords.<sup>43</sup>

This makes an interesting contrast with George's hope that the "down-fall of this once respectable empire" would not be laid at his door. But it points up the impression by Fiske, as "one of the nation's most indefatigable popularizers of American history,"<sup>44</sup> that Americans through their Revolution saved Britain from absolute monarchy or civil war.

From the outset, George III's conduct toward America was colored by the fear that the cause of Massachusetts Bay and Virginia might because

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<sup>42</sup>Fiske, American Revolution, I, 43.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>Jacob E. Cooke, "The Federalist Age: A Reappraisal," in George Athan Billias and Gerald N. Grob, eds., American History: Retrospect and Prospect (New York: The Free Press, 1971), 104.

the cause of Birmingham and Leeds. Old Sarum, population zero, and all it represented might be called into serious question.

The system of rotten boroughs would be swept away; the chief engine of kingly corruption would thus be destroyed; a reformed House of Commons, with the people at its back, would curb forever the pretensions of the Crown; and the detested Lord Chatham would become the real ruler of a renovated England, in which George III would be a personage of very little political importance.<sup>45</sup>

This, says Fiske, is why King George III precipitated the American Revolution--any concession to the Americans' demand for "no taxation without representation" would have heralded the need for Parliamentary reform in England itself. This commitment by the King to the corrupt status quo is why Fiske contends it is justifiable to regard George III as the person "chiefly responsible" for the quarrel that arose with the American colonies.

Most of the action swirling around George III in Fiske's narrative of the American Revolution merely illustrates this basic principle: that George III chose America as the theatre to test out his pretensions to solitary power. Apparently because it was perceived to have challenged his sovereignty, the Massachusetts Circular Letter was said to have thrown the King into a rage. Fiske accentuated the idea that George III had determined to handle the situation himself from the beginning of Lord North's prime ministership, saying that five weeks before the Boston Massacre, George III surrounded himself with "friends of arbitrary government," and served, "for all intents and purposes, [as] his own prime minister." This arrangement

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<sup>45</sup>Fiske, American Revolution, I, 42-43.

continued until Yorktown. It was the King's fault that the British government decided, "with the rare genius for blundering which had possessed it ever since the accession of George III," to push the point on sovereignty through the tea tax, which was sure to rally colonial resistance. In every circumstance, it was the "selfish Tory policy" of George III which prompted the "strange, the humiliating, the self-contradictory attitude" of England against all those principles of liberty whose "staunch defender" she had been before the eyes of the world.<sup>46</sup> Fiske's George III was polluting the pure springs of English liberty.

Fiske further emphasized the personal and elitist nature of the conflict with America in his discussion of the hiring of troops. The British populace, says Fiske, declined to support George III in "bringing to condign punishment the authors and abettors" of the Americans' "foul treason." Because the King failed to rally sufficient support at home, he tried to hire Russian troops to complement the existing British troop strength. Fiske said Czarina Catherine had "improved the occasion--as sovereigns and others will sometimes do--by asking George, sarcastically, if he thought it quite compatible with his dignity to employ foreign troops against his own subjects; as for Russian soldiers, she had none to spare for such a purpose." George III then had no recourse but to apply to several "mercenary princes" on the Continent who "shamelessly sold their subjects into slavery."

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 47, 72, 80, 97.

Because Fiske was one of those people in the nineteenth century who believed in the Teutonic origins of liberty, the employment of German soldiers against the American people, who were fighting to confirm their own liberty, was a dilemma which Fiske felt forced to confront.

He did this by explaining that it was "with a heavy heart that these honest men took up their arms to go beyond sea and fight for a cause in which they felt no . . . interest." Although George III was of Teutonic stock, as were the Princes of Waldeck and Anhalt-Zerbst, the Duke of Brunswick, the Landgrave of Hesse-Cassel, the Margrave of Anspach-Bayreuth and the Count of Hesse-Hanau, who hired out their troops for his purposes, Fiske makes it very plain that the rest of Germany was highly offended by the immoral transaction.<sup>47</sup>

George III's inborn love of liberty had been corrupted by his personal lust for power. The German princes who sold him their soldiers were morally weak specimens whom the King drew after him. Having in his own mind dealt satisfactorily with these exceptions to the Teutonic love for liberty, Fiske selected a well-known but strongly biased Whig source for the fountain head of his impressions about George III--the rancorous Memoirs of the Reign of King George III by Horace Walpole. This was certain to create a negative impression of the monarch, because although Walpole had liked George III at his accession, he had later developed some grudges against the King that poisoned the subsequent revision of his original Memoris.

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 168, 170-71.

Fiske selected the Walpole anecdote about the receipt in England of news of a "death-dealing blow to the American cause" to illuminate King George's childish delight in the apparent success of his political scheming. When he heard they had won at Ticonderoga, "the king rushed into the queen's apartment, clapping his hands and shouting, 'I have beat them! I have beat all the Americans!'" Such a thought would naturally have brought joy in the apartments of a monarch who had been plotting to demonstrate his sovereignty in the American theatre; Fiske says it also produced a great deal of speculation about how best to reestablish royal government in the "colonies."<sup>48</sup>

When the news was later received of the surrender at Yorktown, however, the King merely forgot to date the letter with his thoughts about the reversal in their fortunes to Lord George Germain--"a thing which had never happened before."<sup>49</sup> The evenness of mind with which King George confronted such an obvious setback could have invited a passing comment about the royal courage (which in Bancroft's history it had); but to Fiske the King's apparent intrepidity was merely a mask for his obsession with the advancement of his personal goals.

Fiske closes his consideration of King George III in the American Revolution by suggesting that the "personal government of George III" has constituted the only serious threat to English liberties "since the expulsion of the Stuarts." He credits the "lofty genius" of American leadership and the courage displayed by the American soldier with the frustration of the King's design, and

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 282.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 300.

says that the scheme died so quietly with American independence and the Parliamentary election of 1784, that the English people never fully realized how ominously their own liberties had been threatened.<sup>50</sup>

In The Critical Period of American History, Fiske's chronological sequel to his American Revolution which he actually published three years before it, he deftly distilled the conclusions he had reached about King George III that later appeared in greater detail in his Revolutionary volumes. Fiske, like Bancroft before him, felt that America's revolutionary ideals were stunningly embodied in the United States Constitution. Explaining how the American victory that made the Constitution possible had also advanced English liberties, Fiske wrote:

From 1760 to 1784, by means of the rotten borough system of elections and the peculiar attitude of political parties, the king contrived to make his will felt in the House of Commons to such an extent that it became possible to speak of the personal government of George III. The work of the Revolution of 1688 was not really completed till the election of 1784 which made Pitt the ruler of England, and its fruits cannot be said to have been fully secured till 1832.<sup>51</sup>

The resounding victory of Pitt in the general election of 1784 "completed the political revolution in England which was set on foot by the American victory at Yorktown."

George III's "ingenious system of weak and divided ministries," for whom the King himself had been the "balance wheel," was destroyed.

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 305, and I, 43.

<sup>51</sup> John Fiske, The Critical Period of American History, 1783-1789 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1899), 296-97.

Echoing Bancroft's earlier populism, Fiske concluded that

The system which George III, had sought to fasten upon America, in order that he might fasten it upon England, was shaken off and shattered by the good people of both countries at almost the same moment of time.<sup>52</sup>

The defeat of a George III whom Fiske described as a "mere political wirepuller," a man whose "short-sighted shrewdness" Fiske thought "few modern politicians have excelled," made political improvement possible. Cornwallis' defeat and the election of 1784 had thwarted the monarch's attempt to "make the forms of the constitution subservient to his selfish purposes."<sup>53</sup>

In capturing the liberating essence of this "good omen for men of English race on both sides of the Atlantic," Fiske managed humorously to capture for all time the royal pout. After the conclusion of peace, relates Fiske, King George said he hoped that the Americans "would not suffer from the evils which in history had always followed the throwing off of monarchial government: which meant, of course. that he hoped they would suffer" from precisely such "evils."<sup>54</sup>

From Fiske's old Whig perspective, the war against America was a very personal one by a King who, if he could make his point there, intended then to bring it home to Britain. ("I have beat them.") By the abuse of his power, however, George III drew down disfavor upon himself and his nation:

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<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 48-49.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 1, 3.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 58.

The earlier part of the reign of George III is that period of English history of which an enlightened Englishman must feel most ashamed, as an enlightened Frenchman must feel ashamed of the reigns of Louis XIV and the two Bonapartes. All these were periods of wholesale political corruption, of oppression at home and unrighteous warfare abroad, and all invited SWIFT RETRIBUTION in the shape of diminished empire and temporary lowering of the national prestige. It was not until after the downfall of the personal government of George III that England began to resume her natural place in the foremost rank of liberal and progressive powers.<sup>55</sup>

The success of the American Revolution, in contending for liberty, had "contributed much" to the "purification of English political life."<sup>56</sup> Fiske's George III thus mirrors the historian's concern that the political corruption he saw in America before the turn of the twentieth century be unmasked and purged. Only then, he felt, could genuine reform be set in motion to benefit the public at large.

#### Morgan's George III: The Principled Parochialist

Edmund S. Morgan has been classified as a "Neo-Whig" because his work, though it was done much later than Bancroft's or Fiske's, like theirs has been patriotic in tenor. It has tended to focus on the search for principle in the American Revolution, and in doing so, Morgan has adhered to the old Whig tradition of contrasting principle with corruption, dynamic idealism with brittle convention. He is a Neo-Whig, however, because his work incorporates the findings of

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<sup>55</sup> Fiske, American Revolution, II, 167.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

newer scholarship which reveal some of the political complexities that may not have been as fully appreciated by the original Whig historians, some of whom were guilty of oversimplification in their portrayals of George III and the American revolutionary experience. That experience was, in fact, very complex, which is partly why it remains so interesting a field for scholarly reconsideration.<sup>57</sup>

Morgan's presentation of King George III, while it still hinges on adherence to a principle, incorporates the findings of the Namier school. In old Whig tradition George III was a power-hungry throw-back to Stuart tyranny, either God-ordained or simply selfishly motivated. Morgan, on the other hand, has set George III in the context of the Revolution of 1688. This "new" George III was conscientious, principled, and a stickler for maintaining the constitutional order set up under the arrangements of the Glorious Revolution. Morgan called him a "conscientious farmer" who "never failed to acknowledge the supremacy of his Parliament".<sup>58</sup>

If this new George III obstructed American liberties, he did so not because of "Jacobite" ideas instilled in his childhood or because he would rather fight the battle of kingly prerogative in America before bringing it home to Britain, but because he felt he must uphold the authority of Parliament.

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<sup>57</sup>Edmund S. Morgan, The Birth of the Republic, 1763-89 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), ix, xi.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., 11-12.

American hopes that "it might be possible to maintain loyalty and subordination to the King" were "forlorn" because Americans failed to recognize that George III, who conceded he was "an Englishman of only moderate abilities," also had "a vision that reached no farther than that of his ministers and his Parliament."<sup>59</sup>

Another part of the "new" royal portraiture was Morgan's connection of family ties to Parliamentary policy that affected America. Bancroft had mentioned that the King was attached to his mother, but this presumably was to heighten the impression that he had been sheltered from the political realities of life prior to his reign and that he was unfit to resolve the problems with America because he was still immature in his judgment when he ascended the throne. Fiske paid little attention to George III's family life at all; perhaps he thought the private life of a political "boss" should best be left at home.

Morgan, on the other hand, mentioned that George III's withdrawal of support from Grenville and offer of support to Rockingham, instead, in 1765 was basically a family matter:

Grenville had displeased the King by introducing a regency bill that excluded the King's mother from the government (in case the King should become incapacitated from ill health), and George III was very sensitive about his mother.<sup>60</sup>

In consequence, although the switch from Grenville to Rockingham had nothing immediately to do with the Stamp Act, the changeover triggered

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 29.

by filial loyalty had tremendous repercussions for America; the Marquis of Rockingham was known to oppose nearly anything George Grenville would propose in general, and increasingly he came to oppose the Stamp Act in particular.

Morgan's approach further reflected the findings of recent British scholarship because his George III was no longer shown actively involving himself in policy formation that would polarize colonial resistance, or playing off the Old Whigs, New Whigs, and Tories for his own benefit. The King's fault instead was committing himself to support a group of men who from the outset of his reign had demonstrated both their parochialism and their provincialism. From the American standpoint, George III regrettably was a poor judge of governmental talent.

As was expected, said Morgan, George III kept the wheels of government turning by managing to form marginally workable majorities. The problems with America continued to worsen, however, because the monarch had no broader vision for repairing them than the men "wedded to their local interests" whom he selected. Ironically, if George III had stood above Parliament and granted the American colonial assemblies parity with that body, as Americans apparently hoped that he would, even the so-called "friends of America" in Parliament would probably have denounced the King for attempting to reestablish the Stuart tyranny. His role was to support the acts of Parliament, and King George evidenced no other inclinations.<sup>61</sup>

The idea of principle also underwent a metamorphosis in Morgan's work. Bancroft had suggested that George III spurred the spread of the

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 69-70.

democratic principle by opposing it; Fiske contended that George III was merely an unprincipled politician. Morgan by contrast, said that George III was as much a man of principle as his American subjects, but that their notions of proper government were at loggerheads. This is why the King treated the Olive Branch Petition "with contempt" and declared his unruly colonists in rebellion.<sup>62</sup>

Rather than write about Americans' disaffection with the Crown as something inherent or consciously messianic, Morgan says that Americans showed a marked reluctance to disavow their allegiance to the monarch until Thomas Paine's Common Sense convinced them that the King would probably support Parliament at any cost.

The ruler Paine described [as the author of all the colonies's recent troubles] may not have been the real George III. It may be . . . that George was playing the only role a responsible monarch could play in the existing situation of politics in Great Britain. . . . [But] if Paine misconstrued the motives of the King, he did not misconstrue the facts: there was simply no room in the existing British Empire for a people who wanted the rights that Americans demanded.<sup>63</sup>

This was the crux of the matter: no amount of reevaluation can make King George a friend of America once he perceived that American demands presented a serious threat to civil order. New research may shed more light on the King's true motives; they may engender more empathy for him as a person. What they cannot change is the fact that he set himself unreservedly to suppress the American rebellion.

When the combined French-American siege of Yorktown, under the care of a superintending Providence in the Bancroftian framework,

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 70-71.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 71.

finally brought about the capitulation of Cornwallis in October, 1781, "everyone but George III," according to Morgan, was willing to acknowledge that the game was about up. Morgan's George III was one who, because of his attachment to a principle--albeit one which conflicted with the American perspective--"doggedly" prolonged the War of the American Rebellion past Saratoga, when Lord North would have resigned, and past Yorktown, when nearly everyone else would have conceded American success.<sup>64</sup>

Morgan logically ended his Birth of the Republic with the formulation of the Constitution of the United States. His whole thesis was that Americans in fighting the Revolution had been searching for "a principle of human equality" upon which they could agree to rally. In the Constitution they had a good beginning, although the "exploration" for the best expression of the principle in government "still goes on. As long as any man remains less free than another, it cannot honorably cease."<sup>65</sup> With the sincerest of intentions, George III had opposed the movement which eventually ensconced that principle in the living Constitution.

One other note must be made of Morgan's Neo-Whig interpretation of King George III. This arises from his earlier collaborative monograph with his wife, Helen, entitled The Stamp Act Crisis: Prologue to Revolution. They very sensibly and accurately left George III out of that account except for the Regency Bill incident which "broke the

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<sup>64</sup>Ibid., 86.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., xi, and 154-55.

camel's back," so to speak (where the King's toleration of Grenville was concerned), and the occasion of the King's vacillating leadership on Stamp Act repeal.

Originally published some twenty years before the Bicentennial biographies of George III emerged, and a number of years before the very careful work on the King's medical records by British Drs. Ida MacAlpine and Richard Hunter, The Stamp Act Crisis mentioned a George III troubled by "fits of insanity which were to cloud his later life."<sup>66</sup> Freudian explanations of the King's alleged mental disorder may have been the only ones available at that time, but the work by Hunter and MacAlpine has since then convincingly identified the King's trouble as a rare genetic disorder called porphyria. Unlike the older idea of a general personality disorder, porphyria would not have clouded the King's judgment nor impaired his ability to govern sensibly when he was not actually bedridden with fever, and this diagnosis agrees with the historical record. When George III supported his ministers' American measures, he did so clear-headedly, and in a manner consistent with his own ideological convictions.

Morgan's monographs conspicuously lack the descriptive character analyses and colorful adjectives that are present in Bancroft's George III, and sometimes luridly so in the popularized work of John Fiske.

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<sup>66</sup> Edmund S. and Helen M. Morgan, The Stamp Act Crisis: Prologue to Revolution (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1953), 261. H. R. H. Prince Charles of Great Britain has taken a personal interest in the conclusions of MacAlpine and Hunter about the "royal malady," and discusses these in his Foreword to the Brooke biography of King George III cited earlier.

Morgan's approach is more detached, if not more exact, and the King is presented almost indirectly.

For example, Morgan said that one reason Grenville attempted to exclude Caroline from the Regency Bill may have been her reputed affair with Bute; although they were probably not true, such rumors linked the King's mother to "perhaps the most cordially hated man in British politics," and therefore cast a shadow upon her own fitness to rule should George III die. Regardless of Grenville's real motives, Morgan maintains, his regency maneuvers were "a direct affront" to both the new monarch and his mother, whom he respected. The King enjoyed sufficient support in the Commons to have his mother's name inserted over Grenville's objection, and the perceived affront plus Grenville's increasing dependence on the Duke of Bedford, rather than the King, for direction, sealed Grenville's fate. With his removal, British policy toward the Stamp Act took a turn to the benefit of America that postponed the Revolution for a decade.<sup>67</sup> This is in some ways a much more satisfying approach than the older Whig treatments, but the King's personality is glimpsed more by the reflection of what he did than by pure personal description.

Morgan alluded to the King's barely concealed discontent with the way the Stamp Act crisis was being handled without citing any of the King's memoranda which so aptly summarized the rationale for his conduct. The King at a critical juncture informed the Rockingham ministry that he approved of repeal, but rather than letting the matter die he

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 261-62.

confided privately to someone of opposite convictions what could not long remain in private--that his deepest personal preference was for enforcement, even at a lower rate, so the principle of parliamentary sovereignty could be emphasized in America.<sup>68</sup>

All things considered, clashing constitutional doctrines far outweighed the King's personal importance in Morgan's work.<sup>69</sup> George III was dwarfed in Morgan's analysis of the coming of revolution by the ideological incompatibility illuminated by the Stamp Act crisis. This incompatibility of principle all but guaranteed that future flare-ups would occur--and Morgan's disclaimer of inevitability was strongly overshadowed by the evidence he had already presented for the likelihood of serious future confrontations.

George III as he was presented by Morgan could have done little if anything to prevent the crystallization of ideological differences on both sides of the Atlantic from ruining the reputations of moderate statesmen who supported the Stamp Act--unless he had had sufficient reason to override his ministers' suggestion of the tax in the first place. He had seen no fault in the measure, nor had anyone else around him:

The program that seemed so conventional and so reasonable from the standpoint of Whitehall appeared to the Americans as a threat to the power that enabled them to direct their own lives. . . . It was consensus on this point that enabled the colonies to unite so suddenly and so successfully against parliamentary taxation. The American reaction to parliamentary

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 280-81.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 290-91 and 295.

taxation seemed to England too hysterical and wicked to be genuine, and her statesmen failed to deal with it adequately.<sup>70</sup>

George III failed to appreciate another thing about his American subjects besides the importance they attached to their personal property as a vital ingredient of their liberty--that was his failure to realize how many Americans had guns and knew how to use them.<sup>71</sup> That would not become significant for a decade after the Stamp Act repeal, but it was the failure of the King and his ministers to comprehend the threat their simple taxes represented to people's sense of well-being in America that made the second error--failing to appreciate the colonists' capacity for self-defense--significant.

The clearest, most concise statement that Morgan has ever made about the perplexity we have had in shaping our attitudes toward George III appeared in an article he originally published in the William and Mary Quarterly in January 1957. Criticizing the followers of Sir Lewis Namier because they seemed "fond of beating the Whigs in order--one suspects--to displease the Whig historians," Morgan detected a problem with the Namierist revision of King George's reputation that occurred some thirty years after the publication of Fiske's rather critical comments:

The righteousness of the Americans is somewhat diminished through the loss of the principal villain in the contest. George III is no longer the foe of liberty, seeking to subvert

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<sup>70</sup> Edmund S. Morgan, "Conflict and Consensus in the American Revolution," in Stephen G. Kurtz and James H. Hutson, eds., Essays on the American Revolution (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1973), 304.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 305.

the British constitution; but an earnest and responsible monarch, doing his job to the best of his abilities. And those abilities, we are told, while not of the highest order, were not small either. George, in fact, becomes a sympathetic figure, and one can scarcely escape the feeling that the Americans were rather beastly to have made things so hard for him.<sup>72</sup>

When he thought about the onset of the Revolution though, Morgan said he found himself wondering "whether the new judgment of George III has not raised that monarch's reputation" a bit "too high":

Granted that George was neither the fool nor the knave he has hitherto been thought. . . . it is nevertheless true that under his leadership England lost . . . the most important part of her empire. The loss was not inevitable.<sup>73</sup>

Morgan believed all the Americans' demands before 1776 "could have been attained within the empire, and would have cost the mother country little or nothing."<sup>74</sup> He acknowledged that George III probably had all the unskilled help he needed from his ministers and Parliament in bungling colonial affairs into an impassible confrontation; but he contended that if the King still shouldered significant governmental responsibility in the 1760's and 70's, as the Namierists insisted that he did, then he also must answer for it:

If he was responsible then he must be held responsible. [George III] must bear most of the praise or blame for the series of measures that alienated and lost the colonies,

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<sup>72</sup>Edmund S. Morgan, "Revisions in Need of Revising," in E. S. Morgan, The Challenge of the American Revolution (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1976), 47-48.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 56.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., 56-57.

and it is hard to see how there can be much praise. . . . What I would suggest in conclusion is that the Whig interpretation of the American Revolution may not be as dead as some historians would have us believe, that George Bancroft may not have been so far from the mark as we have often assumed.<sup>75</sup>

Morgan's George III, a man of contrasting principle and narrow vision, mirrors Morgan's quest to explain the "breadth of vision and the attachment to principle" that appeared in America between 1763 and 1789. The Cold War threat from Communism during the 1950's, in the wake of the Korean War, must have made such questions important to historians like Morgan. Dissatisfied with the Progressives' emphasis on internal disunity, they wanted to find a unifying principle to which their countrymen could rally in the face of competing ideologies and the continuing danger of Soviet encroachments on a global scale.<sup>76</sup> Morgan was searching for a principle that would explain how, "While English politicians remained parochial and the empire was dissolving for lack of vision" during the reign of George III, the Americans had generated "the forces that carried them into a new nationality and a new human liberty." Morgan's monarch mirrors the historian's desire to tap into "the ideas that enabled men of that age to stand as the architects of modern liberty."<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup>Ibid., 57.

<sup>76</sup>George Athan Billias, "The Revolutionary Era: Reinterpretations and Revisions," in George Athan Billias and Gerald N. Grob, eds., American History: Retrospect and Prospect (New York: The Free Press, 1971), 55, 58-61.

<sup>77</sup>Morgan, "Revisions," 58.

### Republicanism, Purity and Liberty

It is useful by way of background to note that their common "patriotic bent" is what makes all three historians--Bancroft, Fiske and Morgan--"Whigs" or "Neo-Whigs." Their common patriotism, however, is not what their imagery of George III reflects. One does not read the comments Bancroft made about King George--or Fiske's, or Morgan's--and immediately exclaim, "This man is a patriot." Their imagery of George III is a more sensitive instrument than that.

What sets Bancroft apart among the Whig historians is his pride in a God-ordained form of Jacksonian republicanism. George III, as an instrument of Heaven who helped the spread of republican values by resisting them, reflects that vision.

What sets Fiske apart among the Whig historians is his concern that political corruption be recognized as more typical of the tyrant George III than of the freedom-loving British or American people, and that the kind of short-sighted political scheming that occupied George III--or the bosses of Tammany Hall--be purged from the American system. King George III, portrayed as a corrupt political wirepuller, mirrors Fiske's concern for the political purity of his nation.

The distinctive feature of Morgan's form of patriotism is his search for some guiding principle that would explain how widely divergent colonial loyalties could suddenly have jelled into a consensus for independence. (By absolving George III of Stuart-style tyranny but insisting he still be held accountable for his actions, Morgan demonstrated the improvement in George III's image brought

about by the Namierist revision of Walpole's old Whig views, yet he confirmed the Whig commitment to moral judgments that flavored the earlier histories of Bancroft and Fiske as well.)

Morgan's monarch, cast as a parochial King who clung to the wrong conviction, mirrors Morgan's quest for that unifying principle he felt his country needed.

## CHAPTER III

### MEN OF EMPIRE, MEN OF CHANGE: THE IMPERIAL AND PROGRESSIVE HISTORIANS

#### Breaking Away

As the nineteenth century drew to a close, not everyone was content that Bancroft had said all there was to say about America's beginnings. Bancroft's magnum opus was imposing--it ran to ten volumes and more in its various revisions.

A growing number of historians, however, found themselves fascinated with emerging technologies and the doctrines of Darwin. Fiske was one of these, though he retained the patriotic bent that flavored all of Bancroft's writings. Others felt that history should be more objective than Bancroft's had been--less "visionary" and less emotional in its presentation. They therefore set about with "scientific zeal" to undo what they considered "a century and more of filiopietistic exaggeration."<sup>1</sup>

Two main schools of historical thought developed in reaction to Bancroft's style of history. The first and "most fruitful" of these arose at the same time that Fiske was alerting Americans to the spread of political corruption with his treatment of the Revolution. Later called the "Imperial School," these new scholars agreed that American colonial history, if it were to be properly understood, "must be seen in the setting of the British Empire as a whole."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Morgan, "Revisions in Need of Revising," 43.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 44.

The second group of scholars thought the clue to understanding America's past lay in examining the social and economic divisions that may have motivated people to act, and they came to be referred to as the "Progressive School."

There is typically less information about George III in the writings of any of these men than there had been in the earlier writings of the Whig historians, because the new focus was institutional and deliberately less personal. Even the comparative scarcity of information about George III, however, accurately mirrors this reorientation in the values shared by American historians.

Since the Imperial historians believed the key to understanding America's past lay not in her "great men," nor in those across the sea who opposed them, they worked to reconstruct from the documents those systems of administration, those governmental and commercial arrangements, which they felt, in the context of the entire Old British Empire, would shed more light on America's patterns of development than previous views which they thought parochial. Whereas Bancroft and Fiske sought to discover the origins of the Republic in the colonial period--an objective possible only through hindsight--the Imperial historians traced the development of institutions in the colonies as integral components within the larger British Empire. The nationalistic Whig viewpoint tended to yield an impression of American uniqueness; the Imperialists, with their feet planted firmly

in England instead of America, created an impression of an America already set in a larger world context.<sup>3</sup>

In the histories of Charles Andrews, Lawrence Gipson (his disciple), and Michael Kammen (their reviser), King George III mirrored these historians' concern for Anglo-American harmony, for an empathetic understanding of the British viewpoint, and for governmental credibility.

Only Charles McLean Andrews, among the founders of the Imperial School, made more than passing reference to King George III. (Herbert L. Osgood confined himself to the growth of institutions prior to the Revolution, viewing them almost as living organisms; George Louis Beer concerned himself with Pan-Anglicanism and the benefits of the British mercantilist system.<sup>4</sup> Because of their self-imposed chronological and topical limitations, neither had much to say about King George III.)

Among the three, only Andrews wrote a book length work on the American Revolution itself. By confining themselves to the period before the outbreak of hostilities, and focusing on impersonal forces, Osgood and Beer avoided the thorny issue of George III's guilt; but Andrews did what neither Osgood nor Beer had been able to do; he described the "internal institutional developments" within both the

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<sup>3</sup>Max Savelle, "The Imperial School of American Colonial Historians," Indiana Magazine of History, XLV (1949), 123. For further information on the Imperial School, see Lawrence H. Gipson, "Charles McLean Andrews and the Reorientation of the Study of American Colonial History," Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography, LIX (1935), 209-222.

<sup>4</sup>Billias, "Revolutionary Era," Retrospect and Prospect, 42-44.

"colonies and the British institutions of colonial administration," and explained "the relationships between them, all . . . in . . . one great work"--his four volume Colonial Period of American History.<sup>5</sup>

Then in his The Colonial Background of the American Revolution, Andrews attacked the problem of George III directly.

#### Andrews' George III: The Imperial Scapegoat

Andrews presented George III very much as a man on retrial, having served a prison term of over one hundred years because, to the disgruntlement of the Americans, he had not overruled Parliament in favor of his colonies, and to the dissatisfaction of British Whig historians like Sir George Otto Trevelyan, he had challenged the authority of the old aristocracy and then lost the American colonies. Andrews was the dignified barrister.

Andrews was forced to wrestle with the problem of the monarch's guilt because in his mind the cause of Anglo-American harmony was at stake. By removing an unpleasant personification in both people's minds of America's breach with Britain, the decision to dismiss the case against George III would be an important one in fortifying the accord that the First World War had occasioned.

In his "General Reflections" on the colonial background of the American Revolution, Andrews cautioned against the "panegyric of abuse"

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<sup>5</sup>Savelle, "Imperial School," 128. For his focus on policy-making and institutions, see Charles M. Andrews, The Colonial Period of American History, Vol. IV: England's Commercial and Colonial Policy (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1938), x.

that stemmed "almost invariably" from "excessive devotion to biography."<sup>6</sup> This does not mean that Andrews had no appreciation of personal details at all. With his wife, Evangeline, Andrews edited a journal whose "account of a trip to the West Indies and North Carolina by an educated Scottish woman [Janet Schaw], on the eve of the Revolution," afforded a unique, refreshingly "intimate . . . glimpse of life on a West Indian sugar plantation and in aristocratic circles of the Cape Fear region at the close of our colonial period"--social history, commented one scholar, "in very nearly its most rewarding form."<sup>7</sup> Andrews must especially have enjoyed editing the Journal of a Lady of Quality because of his own Scottish ancestry and because the West Indies portion of the book expressed views that agreed with his conviction that events unfolding on the North American continent should not be presented apart from the context of the entire British Empire.<sup>8</sup> It was the overdevotion to biography alone against which Andrews was warning.

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<sup>6</sup> Andrews, Colonial Background of the American Revolution (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1924, 1931), 179.

<sup>7</sup> A. S. Eisenstadt, Charles McLean Andrews: A Study in American Historical Writing (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956), 9. The full title of the journal of Janet Schaw to which Eisenstadt referred is The Journal of a Lady of Quality: Being the Narrative of a Journey from Scotland to the West Indies, North Carolina and Portugal in the Years 1774-1776. In 1971 a reprint of the 1939 edition was published.

<sup>8</sup> See, in addition, Savelle, "Imperial School," 127, and C. M. Andrews, The Colonial Period (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1912), vi-vii, for more on Andrews' determination not to sever American developments from Canada and the West Indies since "no distinction existed between them in colonial times."

Andrews said he had read school children's essays in which George III was "pictured as a monster of wickedness, responsible for the Revolution and the loss to Great Britain of her colonies."<sup>9</sup> This, he believed, was preposterous. "To charge a single man or even a group of men with responsibility for a great uprising like the American Revolution" would be to accept a "trivial explanation for what in reality" was a "mighty cosmic event." Andrews wondered whether "even a child might not be taught that single individuals, no matter how important, do not create or stop revolutions at will."<sup>10</sup>

Foreshadowing Bailyn, Andrews commented that the real causes of the American Revolution must be sought "deep down in the hearts and minds" of the American and British people.<sup>11</sup> Andrews' notion of what history should be--which his King George III reflects--dictated that the "dean of Imperial historians" direct the attention of his colleagues--and of the general public--away from their traditional fixation on the King and toward a broader view of the institutional inflexibility that prompted the rift.

Andrews' defense of King George III therefore rested on a curious premise: not the guiltlessness, but the insignificance of his client. His was a plea for dismissal of charges based on "better things to do," not a campaign for acquittal--"In fixing the responsibility for the Revolution we must attribute much," admitted Andrews,

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<sup>9</sup>Andrews, Colonial Background of the American Revolution, 181.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

"to the obstinacy, prejudice, and personal government of George III;" but of far greater importance, he argued, in bringing on the breach between Britain and her North American colonies was the "inability of British officials and lawyers" to abandon their rigid interpretation of the constitution. "The official and legal mind of England was dangerously near that state of immobility which courts either degeneration or revolution."<sup>12</sup> Andrews thus argued that the deeds or misdeeds of even a reigning monarch paled into insignificance when compared to the mental ossification that was crippling the officialdom of an empire.

Andrews' George III mirrored his disdain for caricature and his concern for Anglo-American harmony. Andrews' brief comments about the place of the monarch in history comprised a clinical, unemotional case analysis whose purpose was to lead Andrews' generation away from rhetoric about an overblamed King and toward the reality of a great separation in the minds of two peoples. It was not intended to exonerate George III, because there was at that time no broadly accepted scholarship in Britain or America that even remotely argued for the King's innocence. Although Andrews was appalled that after so many years people would still execrate George III as the scapegoat for the Revolution, what he wanted was not to remove the "sins" from the monarch's wooly head, but to send him trotting off into the oblivion of the historical wilderness like a good scapegoat. It was an appeal not so much to charity as to pragmatism. Writing between

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 209.

the World Wars, Andrews tried to help Americans graduate from the issue of the King's personal guilt so the real causes of the rupture between Britain and her North American colonies could be sought and the roots of their commonalities reemphasized.

Charles McLean Andrews died in the year that Britons and Americans met in Teheran to parcel out a world that soon would be at peace. This would have pleased Andrews, because in the way he had handled George III in his histories, Andrews had consistently championed Anglo-American harmony. It has been said that the "Grand Tours of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries which began in Andrews' New Haven seminar almost always ended in the Public Record Office."<sup>13</sup> One of those tours to the PRO launched the career of Lawrence H. Gipson.

Gipson's George III: "Good King George"

Gipson became Andrews' most prolific student. He applied "to a smaller segment of the colonial period those premises which his master had applied to all of it."<sup>14</sup> Between 1936 and 1970 Gipson produced his multi-volume work, The British Empire before the American Revolution, which proved that "the faith of a great master is often consummated" in the fine work of his students: "Scaled to the breadth of an empire, skillfully cast in both institutional and narrative forms, Gipson's history carried much further that understanding of the

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<sup>13</sup> Eisenstadt, Andrews, 154.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 156.

British cause for which Andrews had so much argued."<sup>15</sup> This is true also of Gipson's George III. "About no other figure in the eighteenth century have there arisen so many and so sharply divergent views as about King George III," says Gipson. "If one were to accept the verdict passed upon him by the Second Continental Congress in its Declaration of Independence," he was "both a brutal and tyrannical King, seeking for his own . . . satisfaction and glory the sadistic triumph of enslaving his subjects in the American colonies."<sup>16</sup> Andrews handled the dilemma of an overdrawn George III by seeking to diminish him; Gipson strove to tap the springs of sympathy.

Softening the personalization of guilt focused on George III in the Declaration, Gipson wrote,

If . . . one were to accept a common verdict passed upon him after his death by the people of Great Britain, he was entitled to be called, not without affection, "good King George" or "farmer George"--a man whose manifold virtues fairly glowed in comparison with those of his immediate predecessor [George II] or immediate successor [George IV]."<sup>17</sup>

Gipson cited George III's "lonely and unhappy boyhood." He mentioned the tensions within the royal family stemming from King George II's hatred of George III's father, Frederick, Prince of Wales, and the consolation young George received from his tutor, the Earl of

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 154.

<sup>16</sup>L. H. Gipson, The British Empire Before the American Revolution, Vol. VIII, The Great War for the Empire: The Culmination, 1760-1763 (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953), 49-50.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

Bute, after his father's untimely death. Gipson shed light on the climate of childrearing in eighteenth century British royal and aristocratic circles when, noting its rarity, he compared Bute's devotion to his royal pupil to the kind of relationship "only seldom met with in England, but . . . traditional in his own country . . . between clansman and chieftain."<sup>18</sup> Gipson may have been the first major American historian to have cited young George's requirement to write essays on theoretical and practical constitutionality as prima facie proof that Bute did not raise him, as many historians had thought, in the mold of "Stuart tyranny."

Gipson characterized George III at his accession to the throne as "lucid" and "extraordinarily conscientious," but "fixed in his judgments once he had formed them, temperate in his habits, domestic in his tastes, and deeply religious."<sup>19</sup> George was not, however, without his flaws, which Gipson was quick to admit.

When he took the throne, George III "found the Old British Empire at the height of its glory" but the failure of policies which he later strongly supported cost the Empire her American colonies. This was a "colossal reverse" which caused the King "a great and permanent loss of personal prestige."

The American War for Independence became a source of national humiliation for the British, much as the ordeal in Vietnam became a source of humiliation for the American people some two hundred years

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 51.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 52.

later. Few Britons probably foresaw the benefits of their ordeal (which culminated a dozen years after the death of George III in the more widely democratic Reform Bill of 1832), but Gipson maintained that "there was no widespread feeling" in the wake of the Revolutionary defeat either that George III "had betrayed the nation or that he was unfit to occupy the throne. Indeed," added Gipson, "before his death in 1820 it may be said that his people, as a group, held him in greater affection and respect than they had done during the earlier years of his reign."<sup>20</sup>

To elicit more sympathy for the British viewpoint, a move that typifies the Imperial School tradition, Gipson compared George III's decision to use coercion against rebellious Boston with Abraham Lincoln's decision to use force against those American states which later claimed their sovereignty at the peril of the Union. "In the face of this challenge," said Gipson, "George III and Lord North, whether wisely or not, did not hesitate to act--any more than did Lincoln."<sup>21</sup> Gipson succeeded by this comparison in somewhat dulling any immediate impulse the reader might have had to criticize the King or his cabinet for resorting to force. The issue here was not the wisdom of the decision--the Crown could not be fairly criticized for its lack of omniscience. Gipson's goal was empathy--to build a bridge for understanding and good will.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., VIII, 53.

<sup>21</sup> Gipson, The Coming of The Revolution (New York: Harper and Row, 1954), 223.

George III believed and acted as though "sovereignty rested not in his person but in the King in Parliament." This was exactly the proper attitude for a constitutional monarch, and Gipson said that George III's feelings toward the deepening American crisis mirrored those of his people: regret, by 1774, that conceding the Stamp Act question some eight years before seemed to have encouraged the American impulse toward independence--"pretensions" which were "quite subversive of the obedience . . . a Colony owes to its Mother Country."<sup>22</sup>

Aligned with the sentiments of his countrymen, and sharing his countrymen's horror of anarchy, the King supported the Coercive Acts of 1774 that were passed by Parliament on the motion of Lord North. Even in "fighting this battle of the legislature," however, George III was merely acting with the "firmness that honesty and attachment to the Constitution will support." Because he felt so strongly that initiatives to curb the American resistance should come from Parliament and not himself, George III did not consider the trans-Atlantic tensions as part of a "contest . . . he himself had brought on."<sup>23</sup>

Not that George III was uninvolved: he encouraged the use of the "secret service" fund to help guarantee a steady majority in the Commons which believed in the sovereignty of Parliament throughout the Empire. This made the King

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<sup>22</sup> Gipson, The British Empire before The Revolution, XIII, 210.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 210-11, The King to Lord North, Sept. 10, 1775. in Fortescue ed., Correspondence of King George III, 256-57.

a party to the failure of British statesmanship at this most crucial period in the life of the . . . Empire; for under the constitution his influence upon . . . policy was great. But if he was blind to certain political realities, so was Burke and so was Chatham. . . .<sup>24</sup>

This comparison continued Gipson's pattern of likening George III to traditional American heroes in order to mitigate the King's guilt--Lincoln, in the closing pages of The Coming of the Revolution, and the "Friends of America," Burke and Chatham, here. At the worst, in Gipson's view, George III can be criticized for failing to know how to handle a crisis of beliefs that no other British statesman of his time knew how to handle either. This is not nearly so serious an indictment as that found in the Whig histories or the Declaration of Independence.

Since Gipson threw a wider net than even his mentor, Andrews, selecting for close scrutiny the decade before the Revolution instead of the whole colonial period, he was said to have "carried the position of the Imperial School to its logical conclusion." Where the founders of the school were mainly "scientific" historians of institution and structure, Gipson became for his breadth of vision essentially a social historian.<sup>25</sup>

Like his mentor, however, Gipson tried to free himself and his readers to search for deeper causes of the American War for Independence. He attempted this by spreading, not denying, the attachment of moral responsibility. He had newer scholarship on English political

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Savelle, "Imperial School," 129.

patterns in the eighteenth century at his fingertips, the results of the Namierist revision, and some of the reaction to it. So he succeeded in "weaving a richer fabric" than those who taught him the craft.

Since he continued, like his predecessors, to justify the formal institutions of empire, Gipson was compelled to return to that albatross of the Imperial approach: the question of who should bear the guilt, if the administration had been so equitable, for alienating the American colonists. Gipson was reluctant to blame George III, as America for many generations had done. The rupture of the old empire, said Gipson, was not caused by the machinations of "wicked men"; and he discussed George III's personal background to advance a fuller and more compassionate image of the King than had previously been available.

Gipson broke new ground for an American historian by mentioning the King's increasingly favorable public image with the British populace after the war had ended. This was an observation that probably would have meant less to Americans in the past, because they were striving to fashion a favorable national image and would not have been interested in examining, for empathy's sake, the world-view of their former enemy. Gipson also shattered the myth of unconscionable "King's Friends" which had accompanied the old notions of a Stuart style tyranny during the reign of George III.

Gipson's portrayal of George III thus showed improvement in helping us understand what the King had been raised to believe and why he acted as he did toward America, over the earlier treatment of the monarch by Bancroft and Fiske. Gipson's monarch mirrored that

historian's desire to gain empathy for the entire British cause.

The respite from criticism enjoyed by George III under Andrews and Gipson was only temporary. A revisionist of the earlier Imperial view was about to single out the King for special dishonor again.

#### Kammen's George III: Dissolver of the Bond

The ground of King George's dishonor had shifted since Bancroft from Stuart-style tyranny and political manipulation to a vision that was no more blighted than that of the people around him. Although Michael Kammen's George III mirrored an institutional focus, just as had the diminished and forgiven monarch of Andrews and Gipson, Kammen chose to evaluate George III on the basis of his relations with the colonial agents. The information these men offered at Whitehall about the colonial attitudes comprised the "informal ligaments of empire"--and Kammen believed that investigating the deterioration of their agency would provide a more sensitive indication of the breakdown of communications between Old World and New than any examination of the more formal institutions that had traditionally preoccupied the Imperial historians. In Kammen's words,

The North American agents felt the effects of British politics personally and as paid lobbyists. They formed the core of the "American interest" in Britain. The deterioration of their institution after 1766 is an extraordinary manifestation of what helped to . . . precipitate the disruption of Anglo-American government.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Michael G. Kammen, A Rope of Sand: The Colonial Agents, British Politics, and the American Revolution (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1968), vii.

This began the decline of colonial influence "at home."

When British officials stopped listening to the agents, who functioned as the "voice of the colonies," communication was severed and rebellion was assured. The train of events that produced this "deafness" on the part of the British officials began, explained Kammen, with the accession of George III. Once the King came to power, "instability became the dominant fact of public life." The turnover of ministries during the first decade of George III's reign--precipitated in part by the King's naive opposition to the whole notion of "connexion"--made it very difficult for agents to function. This was what had exasperated Franklin when in 1766 he wrote: "'Tis a kind of Labour in vain to attempt making Impressions on such moveable Materials; 'tis like writing on the Sand in a windy Day."<sup>27</sup>

Kammen thus blamed the King for fomenting irremediable instability while trying to inject his own idealism into the political bloodstream. That was a new theme in the historiography of King George III. Bancroft never accused him of it. Fiske certainly never did. Neither did Andrews, Gipson or Morgan. But Kammen contended that the King's "principled abrasiveness" in the early years--the crucial decade of the 1760's--made lasting political arrangements difficult to cement. In the course of his research, Kammen discovered that "The permutations of British ministries can be seen quite clearly through the eyes of frustrated agents whose lobbying haphazardly

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<sup>27</sup>Quoted in *ibid.*, 100.

stopped and started again at the mercy of destructive political conflicts."<sup>28</sup> Though the King was not entirely to blame, his influence was less than salutary.

Kammen certainly was not oversympathetic to George III's personal feelings or family ties when he said the King "dismissed Grenville in a fit of pique over a regency bill" while agents were waiting for important instructions from America in the summer of 1765.<sup>29</sup> The King also forced the resignation of Dr. John Pringle as royal physician, during the Great Debate that electrified all London, because Pringle favored pointed lightning rods as did Benjamin Franklin, instead of the round ones favored by the King. Pringle's dismissal meant one fewer influential contact for agent Franklin, but Kammen was not too hard on the King for this. It seems Pringle had become "disillusioned" with colonial misbehavior anyway by the time the "shot heard 'round the world" was fired at Lexington.<sup>30</sup> His willingness to cooperate with Franklin on anything beyond the lightning rod issue was diminishing.

George III was also guilty of dashing the agents' hopes during the "winter of discontents" in 1774-75, when he buried the petition from the Continental Congress--the one the colonial secretary assured the agents His Majesty had "graciously" received and "would lay before Parliament when next they met"--beneath a "heap of Letters" sent to Westminster with no special advice whatsoever from the Crown.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 251.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 117.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 301.

The "Olive Branch Petition" was therefore never read. Kammen suggested the King's disdain for this carefully worded conciliatory gesture destroyed Dartmouth's credibility with the American agents and quashed the hopes of the Continental Congress for peace. The King apparently was blinded by the cataracts of pride and local interest at a time when clear-sighted use of the agents might have saved the sinews of empire.

Kammen noted that the King who did so much to disrupt the rapport with his colonies by spurning their agents, and who made the agents' task infinitely more difficult by failing to construct a stable government with which they could have worked in the 1760s, when trouble was brewing with America, ironically wanted the agency back when the war had ended:

As to the question whether I wish to have a Minister accredited from America, I certainly can never say that it will be agreeable to me, and I should think it wisest for both parties if only Agents were appointed.<sup>32</sup>

When it had mattered, King George III had appointed to office men like Hillsborough, whom he knew lacked the tact to deal effectively with the colonial agents.<sup>33</sup> Kammen therefore interpreted the King's preference for reestablishing the agency after the War, when the damage had already been done, as just another expression of royal scorn, or perhaps of grief. Stung by the defeat he had helped to insure, Kammen's undiplomatic George III had no desire to see an Adams striding toward his closet as Ambassador from the new United States.

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<sup>32</sup>Quoted in *ibid.*, 319.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, 314.

Writing when Americans were beginning to criticize "big" government for losing its credibility over Vietnam, Michael Kammen illuminated a facet of George III's performance in which the King again was found wanting. Like many in the British government at that time, George III grew increasingly impatient with the colonies--and deaf to their agents--as the 1770s rolled on. He could have saved his credibility, insisted Kammen, and that of his government in America, had he really listened to what was being said.

Since Kammen's scope was narrower than the traditional Imperialist view, though still institutional in a slightly different way, the King's failure in the one area Kammen sought to examine painted George III a villain again. Considering Andrews' exhortation that

A nation's attitude toward its . . . history is like a window into its own soul and the men and women of such a nation cannot be expected to meet the obligations of the present if they refuse to exhibit honesty, charity, open mindedness, and a free and growing intelligence toward the past that made them what they are.<sup>34</sup>

one wonders whether Kammen's treatment of George III was not in some ways a major retreat in interpretation.

#### The Impulse for Reform

"Now that I am old," wrote Progressive historian Carl Becker, the most intriguing aspect of history turns out to be neither the study of history nor history itself, but rather the study of the history of historical study. The

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<sup>34</sup> Andrews, Colonial Background, 220.

name given to this aspect of history is the unlovely one, as Mr. Barnes says, of historiography.<sup>35</sup>

It is within the storehouse of that "unlovely" but fascinating discipline that King George III mirrors the unique contributions to the Progressive viewpoint made by historians Carl Becker, Charles Beard and Merrill Jensen. All three were committed to revising Bancroft's style of history. They agreed that the key to understanding the events in America's past was to search out the social or economic conflicts that moved men to action, and this is why all three have been classified within the Progressive School; but each of them--Becker, Beard and Jensen--went about his task of re-writing the American past in a distinctively different way. George III as they presented him in their writings reflects their different styles.

#### Becker's George III: The Patriot King

The older he became, the more Becker came to advocate the "subordination of material" to the more enduring "spiritual values." He wanted to present history so that normal people--Becker's "Mr. Everyman"--could find in historical writing what he called an anchor for the soul amid "perishing occasions."<sup>36</sup> He wanted to present history in a way that would change people's lives.

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<sup>35</sup>Phil L. Synder, ed., Detachment and the Writing of History: Essays and Letters of Carl L. Becker (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1958), 65.

<sup>36</sup>Charlotte Watkins Smith, Carl Becker: On History and the Climate of Opinion (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1956), 209-10 and 212.

Becker's George III, like Beard's and Jensen's, mirrored his response to the challenge of Frederick Jackson Turner to look "behind" the institutions and constitutional forms that engaged the attention of the Imperial historians, and to explore the "vital forms that call these organs into life." For Becker, "one of Turner's most brilliant students,"<sup>37</sup> these vital forms were the impulses of socio-economic ferment.

Becker wanted to show his readers the effects of social and economic conflict in the Revolution. He wanted them to understand that the people who fought in that Revolution felt themselves being caught up, just as people did in his own time, in a current of events that often seemed beyond their power to control; Becker believed such a realization would help his readers to "live more humanely in the present."

"If Mr. Everyman thinks bad things happen because bad men with bad motives conspire to make them happen," then he seeks simple remedies," which "in politics are apt to be violent ones." Becker's conviction that oversimplified analyses create "more problems than they solve," seemed to suggest that George III in Becker's writings would receive something more than the standard Whig treatment. If not more favorable, Becker's imagery of George III should at least have been less simplistic.

Becker's George III was presented so that Mr. Everyman could better grasp his historical present; and Becker's disagreement with

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<sup>37</sup>Billias, "Revolutionary Era," in Retrospect and Prospect, 48-50.

a notion like Andrews' (or Maitland's) that history must be written for its own sake--free from what they would call the "distortions of the present"<sup>38</sup> was nowhere more evident than in his preface to The Eve of the Revolution.

Becker conceded in his prefatory remarks that the history he had prepared was a bit unorthodox in its literary freedoms; but he hoped by paraphrasing at crucial moments what "some imagined spectator . . . might have thought or said," to help the reader experience for himself the quality of the thought and feelings of those days." To the extent that Becker tried not so much to record "what men did" on the eve of the Revolution but to convey a sense of what they were thinking about what they were doing,<sup>39</sup> The Eve of the Revolution was a special kind of intellectual history that narrowly avoided being regarded as a historical novel.

Becker opened his first chapter with an optimistic quote by Benjamin Franklin from about 1763 that proved ironic in the light of history, that "His Majesty's reign . . . I predict will be happy and truly glorious."<sup>40</sup> Becker explained that George III actually cared very little to be the "Restorer of Liberty" that New Yorkers wanted to think he was when they erected an equestrian statue in his honor

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<sup>38</sup>Smith, *ibid.*, 209; and Herman Ausubel, Historians and Their Craft: A Study of the Presidential Addresses of the American Historical Association, 1884-1945 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1950), 90-91, 110.

<sup>39</sup>Carl Becker, The Eve of the Revolution: A Chronicle of the Breach with England (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1918), vii-viii.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, 1.

to commemorate the repeal of the Stamp Act.<sup>41</sup> "In reality," said Becker, the King was "extremely sulky in his silent, stubborn way over the repeal, and was vexed "most particularly" at the part he had been "forced to play in it." Repeal, for George III, had been an economic concession and not a royal decision.

Becker's concept of George III sprang from his notion that people play the role that they want to play or have been taught to accept. Becker was also a determinist: he believed that George III and the New Yorkers, just like people in Becker's own Progressive era, were often carried along by events that were "beyond their control." The royal sulk over repeal, said Becker, was therefore inevitable; the concept of a "Patriot King, conceived by Lord Bolingbroke (once a Jacobite exile)" had been "instilled into the mind of the young Hanoverian" by his "ambitious mother." George's carefully constructed self-image as a monarch had "little to do with liberty, either British or colonial," but "much to do with authority."<sup>42</sup> Stamp Act repeal was a political expedient that flew in the face of that authority.

George III saw his real role as "Patriot King" to mean a "destroyer of factions": He desired a ministry that would do his

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<sup>41</sup>For an extended discussion about the subtle recurrence of Becker's celebrated "Home rule versus who should rule at home" struggle within The Eve of the Revolution, see Burleigh Taylor Wilkins, Carl Becker: A Biographical Study in American Intellectual History (Cambridge, Mass.: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1961), 113.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 112; and Becker, Eve of the Revolution, 99-100.

bidding."<sup>43</sup> What really annoyed the King, even more than the "high talk" in 1765 "of his subjects in Virginia" over the Stamp Act, was something more immediate: the tendency of Mr. Grenville, unmasking his "outward air of humility . . . to be very firm with His Majesty" about "ministerial prerogative, reading him from time to time carefully prepared pedantic little curtain lectures on the customs of the Constitution and the duties of kings." Bored, infuriated and "unable to endure Mr. Grenville longer," the King asked William Pitt to form a government. Pitt, it is explained, "though domineering in the House, was much subdued in the presence of his sovereign." The "Great Commoner" was also known to share a ground of common footing with the King: he, too, wanted to "destroy the factions,"<sup>44</sup> though for reasons of his own.

When Pitt through age and illness proved impotent, a "harassed young King, rather than submit again to Mr. Grenville's lectures, surrendered himself, temporarily," to his rivals, the "old line Whigs" under the Marquis of Rockingham. In all the negotiations that completed this unpromising arrangement of the King's business, noted Becker, the focus was strictly on local conflicts: the Stamp Act apparently had not been mentioned since Grenville's uncommonly short "parting homily."<sup>45</sup>

The Stamp Act was repealed, despite the King's reluctance, because of widespread irritation among the merchant class like that

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<sup>43</sup> Becker, Eve of the Revolution, 100.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

so succinctly expressed by Sir George Seville to Lord Rockingham:

Our trade is hurt; what the devil have you been doing? For our part, we don't pretend to understand your politics and American matters, but our trade is hurt: pray remedy it, and a plague on you if you won't.<sup>46</sup>

Though the King at first "unsettled the opinions of some honorable members" of Parliament by letting it be known that he disliked repeal, he withdrew his objection when Rockingham and Shelburne pointed out to him the "manifest irregularity of such a procedure"; for reasons Becker only hinted at, George III yielded up his preference and signed the bill for total repeal.<sup>47</sup> (To have suggested anything but reluctance on the part of the King--such as a genuine desire to help his American subjects--would not have agreed with Becker's characterization of the "Patriot King." It would also not have agreed with the historical record, and would have blurred the battle lines of Becker's narrative.)

Had George III not been so intent on breaking up the factions in Parliament, the peace that followed the Stamp Act repeal might have lasted. But Becker's "unwise king, stubbornly bent on having his own way," rekindled the fires of controversy because he had become preoccupied with finding the "opportune moment" to reverse his "humiliating defeat" on the retention of the Stamp Act. The indiscretion of Charles Townshend in the late 1760s was overshadowed only by the unwisdom of his King.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>Quoted in *ibid.*, 104.      <sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, 107-108.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, 115 and following; and Carl Lotus Becker, Beginnings of the American People (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1915), 225.

Becker brought out what may have been the monarch's object all along when he said that King George III "effectively controlled the government" for the first time only when the average Briton became offended by the waste and seeming pointlessness of the Boston Tea Party. He lost control again when Cornwallis surrendered at Yorktown, because "Mr. Everyman" in England had by that time grown tired of the King's efforts to impose upon the public his "personal government."<sup>49</sup> Becker concluded that George III did America a favor of sorts by supporting the notion that undergirded the Coercive Acts--namely, in Becker's words, that an "olive branch was more likely to be accepted if the shining sword was presented at the same time as the only alternative." George III frustrated the die-hard moderates and elicited of Jefferson "those fundamental principles of a political faith," embodied in the Declaration of Independence, that were "destined, in the course of a hundred years, to win the allegiance of the greater part of the western world."<sup>50</sup>

Becker's George III was a man preoccupied with squelching organized opposition and with affirming his own authority because that was what he had been taught a "Patriot King" should do. The King could not have understood or identified with the impulse for liberty that stirred his American colonists, because their concept of popular sovereignty had no place in his carefully constructed, authoritarian value system. Indifferent to its needs, the King provoked the New World into fighting for its freedom.

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 233, 270.

<sup>50</sup> Becker, Eve of the Revolution, 223-24, 242, 255.

From that conflict, however, emerged a philosophy of liberation to which the "minds of men" were again turning in Becker's day: people needed a refuge from the "Shining Sword and the Almighty Dollar," from the "lengthening shadow of Imperialism and the soporific haze of Historic Rights and the Survival of the Fittest."<sup>51</sup> Becker's George III mirrored his concern that history be presented in a way that would help everyday Americans recapture a sense of the values that made their country great. The life of George III was an example of human error that Becker hoped would sensitize his readers to the pitfalls of selfish ambition. It was to Becker's credit that his representation of George III possessed more substance, more definition and more objectivity than was common in the years from 1915 to 1920.

Becker was more reserved in his criticism of King George III than the Whig historians--particularly Fiske--had been, because he was aware of his sources: Becker knew that Britain's defeat in the War for Independence has spurred Sir Horace Walpole to reverse his originally favorable impression of the monarch during the revision of his Memoirs, and that it was upon that altered impression that most Whig histories were based.<sup>52</sup> Another Progressive historian whose comments about King George III bore the stamp of the traditional Whig view was Charles Austin Beard.

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 256.

<sup>52</sup> Carl Becker, "Horace Walpole's Memoirs of the Reign of George the Third," American Historical Review XVI, (1911), 255-56, 272, 496 and 507.

Beard's George III: Spokesman for the Elite

Beard's Introduction to the English Historians was his second published work. It serves as a reminder that Beard's early interests were in the field of European--not American--history. This background softens the charge sometimes levelled at Progressive historians that their interests were too parochial. Beard's early European grounding, while it enhanced his breadth of vision on American domestic issues, strongly suggests that his understanding of King George III was shaped by the English Whigs.<sup>53</sup>

Beard prefaced his Introduction to the English Historians by saying he hoped to stimulate college students to develop their critical faculties by examining for themselves the "footnotes and citations of evidence"<sup>54</sup> upon which the following view of King George III by historians such as Lecky, May and Stanhope was based:

During the early years of his reign, George III demonstrated clearly the immense power the crown could still wield in government by . . . personal influence, bribery, appointments to governmental positions, and elevation to the peerage.<sup>55</sup>

The English Whig interpretation of the reign and personality of George III was shaping Beard's work in the formative stages of his career.

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<sup>53</sup>Howard K. Beale, "Beard's Historical Writings," in H. K. Beale, ed., Charles A. Beard: An Appraisal (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1954), 255.

<sup>54</sup>Charles A. Beard, An Introduction to the English Historians (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1906), vi-vii.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*, 492.

George III, said Beard, was a king who "resented control by ministers depending for their authority upon the House of Commons and not upon him"; he "narrowly watched the conduct of debates in Parliament, and though compelled for a time to accept ministers whom he disliked, . . . steadily worked to increase his control in the Commons."<sup>56</sup> This early impression that George III was a man who manipulated to the maximum the corrupt tools available to him, underwent remarkably little change in the remaining twenty-seven years of Beard's life. In this fixity of opinion, Beard seems to have shared the bent of theologian William Barclay, who said that his mind was not a "bed, to be made and unmade."

The correspondence between George III and Lord North, said Beard, not only supplied "remarkable insight" into the King's relations with that minister, but also confirmed the Whig opinion that "All of his directions were peremptory: Louis the Great himself could not have been more royal." Britain's monarch "enjoyed the consciousness of power," explained Beard, "and felt himself 'every inch a king.'"<sup>57</sup>

Two years before he published his Introduction to the English Historians for the college market, Beard with William Bagley had produced a textbook whose target was the school age children of America. Beard's "one great motive" was to prepare their minds for citizenship by fairly presenting the "deep-flowing and powerful

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 503-504.

currents" in American life that had an obvious effect on the present.<sup>58</sup> Apparently there was a deep-flowing and powerful current of hatred toward George III that was a prerequisite for loyal citizenship, because Beard told the children that in George III, they could see a king who was "willful and arbitrary in his government, and stubborn in his views." He was a man to whom forging his far-flung dominions into a more centrally obedient empire seemed child's play after the resounding victories scored by his country in the Seven Years' War. What he had not "reckoned" with when he made his plan of empire, Beard reassured the youngsters, was the strength of the self-reliant, freedom-loving people of the North American colonies.<sup>59</sup>

There was a "small but powerful party of imperialists in England," explained Beard, who wanted to bind the American colonies to the mother country so their commerce could be used to "benefit . . . British manufacturers and merchants." George III was their spokesman. "By bribery and other means," Beard observed, the King "was always able to get a majority in Parliament" to enforce this deliberate program of economic dependency.<sup>60</sup>

It would not have been prudent for Beard to have condemned George III simply because he was British--World War I had ended only the year before Beard's History of the American People was published, and the British were our allies. But to say that he was the spokesman

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<sup>58</sup> Charles A. Beard and William C. Bagley, The History of the American People (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1919), v.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 120-21 and 98.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 120-21.

for a very "small but powerful" group of men who wanted to exploit America was acceptable, particularly since it carried with it connotations of the class conflict and economic self-interest Beard thought was so central to explaining why things happened as they had. It was easy to criticize King George III in the wake of World War I, however, because not only was he a willful, arbitrary representative of the British privileged class--he was also German.

It was George III, Beard reminded his impressionable young readers, who had hired the German soldiers whom Washington captured at Trenton. So "deeply angered" were many American patriots at "those who remained loyal to George III," that they "seized their property, imprisoned many, and drove hundreds out of the country."<sup>61</sup> In a sense, then, because he divided the American people, George III was also partly responsible for making the American Revolution a civil war, as well as a war of national defense. Beard's next mention of King George III came eight years later.

In The Rise of American Civilization, which was first published in 1927, Beard barely mentioned Britain's hated King. Inside what one scholar has called "one of the most highly praised books of the century and probably the most successful large-scale synthesis in American historical writing,"<sup>62</sup> Beard conjured up that old American bugaboo of European decadence that underlay, by implication, King George III's defeat.

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<sup>61</sup>Ibid., 146 and 160.

<sup>62</sup>Beale, Beard: An Appraisal, 263.

It was pioneers who had been freed from the constraints of European peasantry and "fired by the passion" to acquire their own "plot of ground" who led the vanguard of settlers through the "narrow valleys," the "deep forests" and the "piedmont" of the Great American West. These frontiersmen were not well suited to mingle "with gentlemen in court dress or lawn sleeves jostling for favor, preferment, and place at a levee of George III. Nothing in their lives," he continued, "made them a part of the system of privilege and class rule that constituted the government of England in the eighteenth century." Because this was so, Beard continued, the "bonds that united the people of the interior to the English government were as light as gossamer . . . shaken off like dew after the first crack of the rifle at Concord."<sup>63</sup> Beard's readers, presumably, were the descendants of those hardy frontiersmen.

Beard later nodded to the reassessment of eighteenth century British politics which had been begun by Sir Lewis Namier in the 1930s, but it did not substantially alter the judgment he had reached about King George III "after more than forty years' devoted study"; although "George himself, upon whom much of the blame . . . was later thrown, had little to do with initiating the program" that threatened America's liberties, Beard conceded, "in general he approved it."<sup>64</sup> "Besides," said Beard,

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<sup>63</sup> Charles A. and Mary R. Beard, The Rise of American Civilization (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1935), 88-89.

<sup>64</sup> Charles A. and Mary R. Beard, A Basic History of the United States (New York: Doubleday, Doran and Company, 1944), 93.

by bribery and corruption, he helped to support the ministers who formulated [the unpleasant policies] in the Parliament: and he had high notions about his royal prerogatives at home as well as over the "farms," as he referred to the colonies.

"In no way," Beard concluded, "did the new programs run counter to his conceptions of government."<sup>65</sup>

King George III is therefore seen to have mirrored Beard's English Whig training, particularly his distrust of privileged elites and his conviction that the struggle for economic advantage lay at the heart of our Revolutionary conflict. Old Whig views die hard, and Beard appears to have taken with him to the grave some four years later the unfavorable impressions he had formed of George III in his youth.

Just as Charles Andrews and his co-founders of the Imperial School were succeeded by a second generation of Imperial scholars headed by Gipson, Progressive historians Becker and Beard were succeeded by a new group of scholars who shared their view of the American Revolution as a process of social and economic ferment. Merrill Jensen was the most prominent among them.

#### Jensen's George III: The Power-Broker

Much of Jensen's work was devoted to overturning Fiske's conception of the Confederation period as "critical" in American growth; when it did discuss the Revolutionary War, it was so consciously focused on affairs inside the colonies that it made virtually no

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

mention of King George III at all.<sup>66</sup> In the one major work where Jensen did discuss the monarch, however, two things were immediately evident--Jensen's tone when he built George III into the material seemed objective, and he had obviously drawn upon the latest British scholarship concerning eighteenth century British politics.

Jensen's editorial work on the Revolutionary tracts may have sparked his interest in the social and political struggles on the English side during the Revolution--the span of thirteen years from 1763-1776 which he covered in The Founding of a Nation coincided exactly with the span of the original tract literature he had edited the year before.<sup>67</sup> Although his coverage included political events on both sides of the Atlantic, the heartbeat of Jensen's Progressive interpretation could most clearly be discerned in his introduction to The Founding:

The history of the period is . . . one of extraordinary intricacy. It is not the history of a united American people marching inexorably along the road to independence and the creation of a new nation. It is instead the history of a divided people, many of whom, if they had been free to choose, would have remained within the British Empire rather than risk their lives and fortunes in a struggle for independence. . . .<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup>See, for example, Jensen's Articles of Confederation: An Interpretation of the Social-Constitutional History of the American Revolution, 1774-1781 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1940), vi and 54-107, passim; or survey the thought behind The American Revolution Within America (New York: New York University Press, 1974) in its Introduction.

<sup>67</sup>Merrill Jensen, ed., Tracts of the American Revolution, 1763-1776 (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1967); and Merrill Jensen, The Founding of a Nation: A History of the American Revolution, 1763-1776 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968).

<sup>68</sup>Jensen, Founding, xiii.

Jensen chose a simile by John Adams to set the tone for his work. The American union, said Adams, when you reflected that local political squabbles were sometimes so intense they obscured even the question of opposition to Britain, was so miraculous a junction that it resembled "Thirteen clocks" being "made to strike together--a perfection of mechanism . . . no artist had ever before effected."<sup>69</sup>

British readers of The Founding would have appreciated at the emotional level the reminder that the American people had not rejected their British ties wholesale. Those who accepted the view of eighteenth century British politics set in motion by Sir Lewis Namier--who presented King George III as one of many political leaders at that time who were vying for the satisfaction of local interests<sup>70</sup>--would have appreciated Jensen's admission that parochialism existed in their victorious American cousins, as well. No one who watched the telecasts of race riots and anti-war demonstrations in the streets of America during the Vietnam era in which The Founding was published would have been surprised at the notion of a time-hallowed, long-entrenched American right to demur. It was perhaps his appreciation of diverse opinions and his awareness that a natural prevalence toward parochialism existed in most human beings that helped Jensen set aside the old Whig stereotype of King George III as a power-grabbing tyrant; many of Jensen's British contemporaries had learned from Namier to do the same.

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<sup>69</sup>Ibid., xii.

<sup>70</sup>See footnote 2 in *ibid.*, 36.

The often short-sighted squabbles that reverberated through the halls of Parliament, wrote Jensen, may have had a good deal to do with the difficulty Britons had in hearing the warning rumbles of serious trouble brewing in America. The King George III whom Jensen chose to portray was one who, while the "real Revolution," to echo Adams again, was occurring in the hearts and the "minds of the [American] people . . . in the course of fifteen years before a drop of blood was shed at Lexington," was searching desperately for a stable and acceptable combination of personalities to govern Great Britain.

The King, explained Jensen, shared political sway with four major factions led by the old Whig elite. He was off to a troubled start at the opening of his reign because his tutor, whom he initially retained out of gratitude for his friendship as the influential Groom of the Stole, was a much disliked Scot. Until Lord Bute had arrived to win the heir's affection, young George had been a "retarded child," said Jensen, who had stubbornly resisted the efforts of his instructors to teach him much of anything: his educational future had at first seemed grim. But Bute had won the child's confidence and, not being one of the old elite, had taught him, among other things, "to dislike and distrust every politician of the age." Once crowned, young King George found his opponents making political hay by stirring popular mistrust of all things Scottish among the London populace--after all, the Scottish Rebellion of 'Forty-Five was fresh in people's memory at the time of George's accession. Lord Bute became the special focus for the jealousy of the Old Whig

families, who had become accustomed to running the government before George III mounted the throne; and their jealousy became the fountain-head for the initial political infighting from which poured rumors of "Stuart despotism" perching close to the throne.

Although Lord Bute lacked many of the qualities necessary for holding public office, young George had become "utterly and pathetically dependent upon him." Jensen goes on to cite the very respectable work by British historian Romney Sedgwick to suggest from the early letters of the reign that George III was "not the ogre his American subjects thought him to be by 1776"; he more closely resembled "a frightened child in a grown-up world he did not understand."<sup>71</sup>

Naive at first, George III began to improve his grasp of the realities of political bargaining by the time the Treaty of Paris had been negotiated, in February 1763, to halt, for a season, the perennial hostilities between Britain and its Continental foes. He did not subvert the British constitution, as has popularly been taught, but learned to handle political questions in the conventional way. He raised the ire of his opponents, whose views were propounded in history, by taking back "into his own hands the power and patronage his grandfather and great-grandfather had delegated to the Whig politicians." In time the King became a "highly skillful practical politician" with a following in Parliament he could count upon; his primary goal

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<sup>71</sup>Ibid., 38-39; Sedgwick, ed., Letters from George III to Lord Bute.

became the creation of a "stable administration, a workable executive." The instability of that first critical decade of George III's reign, while relations with America were crumbling, ironically was rooted in the King's "increasingly desperate" search for a combination of ministers who could get along well among themselves and work together with him to ensure the "stability" he sought--a combination George finally found in 1770 in the government of Lord North.<sup>72</sup>

The King George III presented by Merrill Jensen was in some ways a moderate man. Despite his long-lived enthusiasm for things military, George quashed a proposal in the summer of 1765 that British troops be forcibly quartered, if necessary, in American residences. When Grenville and Townshend in the spring of 1767 used Pitt's incapacity and the unrest generated by news of resistance in America to launch a "campaign which for sheer irresponsibility has seldom been matched" in legislative history, the King was "furious." "Whatever his limitations," said Jensen, "George III was the only person in power" at that moment who was "thinking like a statesman."<sup>73</sup> This is pretty high praise for a man traditionally pictured as a martinet.

Summer of that same year, 1767, found George III "desperate for stable government after years of administrative chaos," but the

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<sup>72</sup>Jensen, Founding, 40-41.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 66-67; 223-24.

aging Lord Chatham, painfully crippled with gout, could no longer give the necessary leadership. Pitt's "mental balance" was described as "uncertain at best," and though he was needed to unclog the stalled mechanisms of government he "refused to see either the king or his colleagues." With Pitt (and the promise of stability which had been embodied in his prestige and experience) gone, George III still acted objectively by vetoing Hillsborough's plans in 1768 to enact more of what the King considered meaningless gestures of sovereignty over the colonial legislatures, while debate kept raging in Parliament on the Wilkes issue--a matter which was not without its emotional content for the King himself.<sup>74</sup>

The third major component of Jensen's George III, which complemented his drive for a stable ministry and his moderation in most matters of American policy in the 1760s, was the King's firmness. Jensen had George III "stiffening the spine" of his minister when Lord North wavered about bringing the powerful but fiscally troubled East India Company under regulation to curtail the corruption that was sapping its life. George "stiffened North's spine" again when he felt that the American policies in 1774 must be more firm, a shift in royal attitude that had been brewed in Boston harbor.

Lone survivor of the Townshend Acts, the tea duty had come to symbolize Parliament's sovereignty over the American colonies. Had Lord North moved to repeal it, as some suggested would be more expedient to do, Jensen said the proposal would have started a fight

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<sup>74</sup>Ibid., 315; 317-20, and 322-23.

which the ministry "might well have lost--and George III would have led the opposition."<sup>75</sup> Angered though he was by the waste of "reasonably" priced tea whose consumption in Boston would at one stroke have helped the ailing East India Company and affirmed his subjects' loyalty, George III was able partially to dismiss the "Boston Tea Party" as an incident perpetrated among a normally sober citizenry by a band of hotheaded hoodlums. By September 1774, however, General Gage's letters had forced him to a different conclusion. When he read that the people opposing the British Army were "numerous, worked up to a fury, and not a Boston rabble but the freeholders and farmers of the country," while speculation raged in other quarters of government on what should be done, "George III, at least, had made up his mind."

"A line of conduct seems now chalked out," wrote the King. He seemed relieved that the "die" had been "cast." Since New England clearly had entered a "state of rebellion, blows must decide whether they are to be subject to this country or independent." In December 1774 the King took the ministry to task for their disorganization; he suggested they formulate a "general plan" for restoring order to the American colonies and stop reacting "by detail."<sup>76</sup>

The next year, when recruitment ran far below the needed levels, George III deliberately refused to expand Britain's forces by giving commissions to "every young man that pretends he can soon complete

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 436-37.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 570, 572-73.

them." The King chose instead to fill the ranks of the regulars with professional soldiers from Germany or Russia, if need be; he was "indignant" at the baffling snub he received from Catherine the Great.<sup>77</sup>

With the cherished myth of a "rebellious rabble" now blasted, the King in his speech to Parliament in October 1775 asserted that "the rebellious war now levied is become more general and is manifestly carried on for the purpose of establishing an independent empire." (That contention, said Jensen, became self-fulfilling partially because people who had not pushed themselves to the logical conclusion of their resistance, when they read the reprints of the King's comment in colonial newspapers, began to feel there might no longer be another option.) Strengthened land and naval forces would speedily, and it was hoped decisively, be brought to bear. When the "unhappy and deluded multitude" against whom the might of an Empire was to be directed, "shall become sensible of their error," the King stood ready to receive the "misled with tenderness and mercy."

The Prohibitory Act the King signed into law just before Christmas in 1775 was yet another expression of his firmness which, instead of helping to quell the rebellion, exacerbated it. When the

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 646. For an idealist explanation of how Catherine's views of the American conflict were shaded by Continental opinions of Britain and shaped by the comments of William Pitt, see David M. Griffiths, "Catherine the Great, The British Opposition and the American Revolution," in Lawrence S. Kaplan, The American Revolution and "A Candid World" (Kent, Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 1977), 85-110.

King and his ministers decided by this policy that all vessels and cargoes belonging to Americans, should be forfeited to the crown as if they were the "ships and effects of open enemies," the breach was widened. By this measure, quipped a disaffected Fox, George III and his ministers helped carry "more effectively into execution the resolves of the (Continental) Congress."<sup>78</sup>

The incendiary promulgation of the Prohibitory Act and the hiring of foreign troops to quell disturbances in the King's American dominions both prepared many Americans to give a more serious reading, in January 1776, to Thomas Paine's description of George III as a "sullen-tempered Pharoah" whose conduct more aptly befit the "Royal Brute of Great Britain" than that of a loving father. It confirmed his place as just one more tyrant ungracing the ranks of "all the crowned ruffians that ever lived."<sup>79</sup> Such blatant disrespect, so widely accepted throughout the colonies, suggested the extent to which the alienation of affections and rejection of royal authority had spread by 1776.

The pulling down of King George III in people's minds paved the way for more overt acts: on the night of 10 July 1776, after the newly penned Declaration of Independence with its scorching indictment of George III had been read to the American troops then in New York, the gilded equestrian statue erected a decade before to honor George III's part in the Stamp Act Repeal was, "by the Sons of Freedom . . . laid

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<sup>78</sup>Ibid., 649-50.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., 668.

prostrate in the dirt." The lead from which the statue had been molded was then made into bullets which many Americans hoped would "assimilate the brains of our infatuated adversaries, who to gain a peppercorn, have lost an empire."<sup>80</sup>

The visible leader of those "infatuated" adversaries was King George III. For a substantial number of Americans by 1776, the rejection of George III's royal authority was complete.

Jensen's spurned but hard-working George III mirrored that historian's view that the world in which we live is a complex place; the difficulty experienced by the King in forming a stable government exemplified the diversity of opinion with which we all must live, and emphasized the miraculous nature of the fact that an American consensus for independence among the thirteen colonies could have existed at all.

#### A Plea for Good Will, and the Tendency to Disagree

The common denominator among the Imperial and Progressive historians was their desire to break away from Bancroft's heroic view of the American past. Each group of historians had its own ideas about how this past should be rewritten--some from the standpoint of Whitehall, others from an understanding of the social and economic conflict that moved men to action.

It would be a mistake, however, to expect their imagery of King George III to consistently mirror these larger common beliefs. Once

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<sup>80</sup>Ibid., 702.

again, the monarch is a mirror of more personal values held by each historian.

Among the writers of the Imperial School, the most distinctive aspect of Andrews' mention of King George III was its brevity and its insistence that no one man could be held responsible for an event as profound as the American Revolution. Cast as an Imperial scapegoat whose blame for beginning the Revolution was obscuring more significant developments in the life of two peoples, Andrews' monarch mirrors both the historian's institutional focus and his underlying desire to promote Anglo-American harmony.

Like Andrews, Gipson wanted to soften the lines of George III's image as a brutal tyrant; but instead of arguing that the King should be allowed graciously to disappear, Gipson chose to supply new information about George III that had become available because of Namier's revisions. Cast in his later years as "good King George," and compared with Lincoln in his use of force, Gipson's George III reflects the historian's commitment to creating empathy among his American readers for the British point of view.

George III in Kammen's case reflects the institutional focus that Kammen shared with Andrews and Gipson. Kammen's judgment of George III is harsher, however, because his focus, though institutional, is narrower than theirs and he is not concerned with cementing good will between England and America. Kammen's monarch mirrors his concern for integrity and credibility in government.

Becker's "Patriot King" mirrors nothing of Becker's celebrated thesis of "home rule versus who should rule at home." Instead, his

monarch mirrors very accurately a more sensitive aspect of Becker's values--his desire to provide "Mr. Everyman" with a clearcut example of moral failure that might aid his readers in curbing their own less generous impulses.

Beard's George III is refreshingly villainous. Beard tells us what we expected to hear. There probably is no purer recapitulation of Horace Walpole's complaints about King George III in American historiography than in the works of Charles Beard. This should not be surprising, since Beard's method of proving class conflict in his Economic Interpretation of the Constitution had been to diminish the reputations of America's "Great Men" by documenting their alleged self-interest. Beard's monarch mirrors his background in European history before Namier, and his belief that economic self-interest lay at the heart of the Revolutionary struggle.

Jensen's George III is shown preoccupied with his attempts to establish a workable system of government in Britain. Cast as a sober but locally preoccupied power-broker, Jensen's monarch mirrors the complexity of life in the Revolutionary era and the historian's sense of wonder that the colonies could have acted together at all.

## CHAPTER IV

### WHIG, WARRIOR AND CONSPIRATOR: THE GEORGE OF THE "NEW DEPARTURES"

#### Old Paths, New Methods

Just as historians of the Imperial and Progressive Schools had reacted in their own ways to Bancroft's and Fiske's "Whig" or "Patriotic" School interpretation of America's past, the turning wheel of time produced reactions to the Imperial and Progressive views as well.

Diverse as the culture that spawned them, these reactions took forms like the "New-Whiggism" (or anti-Progressivism) of Edmund Morgan, who stressed the continuity instead of the cleavages in American history, and the Imperial School revision by scholars like Michael Kammen, who examined the informal rather than the formal ligaments of empire to probe deeper into the heart of the Revolutionary experience.

But an America jarred back into global responsibility by the onslaughts of Fascism in World War II, and by Cold War tensions with the Communist Bloc in the post-war period--a nation freshly awakened to the enslaving or liberating power of ideologies--produced a number of other refinements to older historical approaches, as well. Their treatment of George III mirrors the distinctive values held by the examples of three such "new departures"--the comparative, military and "new" intellectual histories of Palmer, Shy and Bailyn.

Palmer's George III: The Consummate Whig

Robert Palmer's The Age of the Democratic Revolution, a comparison of constitutional developments throughout Western civilization in the era of the American and the French Revolutions, was a significant work of historical synthesis. It differed from conventional notions that stressed America's role as a "recipient of European ideas and influences," proposing instead that the ideas formulated during the approach to and the conduct of the American Revolution had themselves "helped to usher in a new age of democratic revolutions throughout much of Europe that continued well on into the 19th century."

"Uniquely" qualified by his "mastery of both European and American history," Palmer embodied one of the "new departures" that arose after World War II from an existing older approach--in this case, from older comparative histories such as Crane Brinton's Anatomy of Revolution of the 1930's.<sup>1</sup> By comparing George III with the other crowned heads of Europe, Palmer revealed his belief that making intercultural comparisons helps reduce the distortions that may result from too parochial a view of history.

Palmer introduced King George III as a rival of Parliamentary power: "The most ardent devotees of the Houses of Parliament," he observed, "found Parliamentary independence being undermined by the King, in the person of George III"; but he quickly mentioned that DeLolme, whose Constitution of England "figured as a British political

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<sup>1</sup>Billias, "Revolutionary Era," 63, 68-69 and 92.

Bible" from 1775 until "after the First Reform Bill" of 1832, rejoiced that in England "a strong King served as a barrier" against the governing oligarchs.<sup>2</sup>

Palmer set the stage for his treatment of George III by contrasting the ideas espoused by DeLolme with those of Montesquieu and Burke. Fearing royal ambition, Montesquieu and Burke had argued for the nobility to exercise a check on monarchy. DeLolme reversed the notion. He was imbued with an "intense dislike" of government by "coterie, or self-perpetuating aristocracy," and believed the ambitions of the aristocracy presented a greater danger to the well-being of the people than did the plans of any king. DeLolme was glad the King of England "enjoyed the confidence" of his subjects.<sup>3</sup>

When George III resolved to fulfill the constitutional responsibilities of monarchy that his predecessors had abandoned to the great Whig families, he did not offend the numerous body of Parliamentary back-benchers, whom Palmer contends would as soon have been called "King's Friends" as anyone else's. Instead, he offended that small group of really active politicians who had grown accustomed to exercising their influence in the default of royal interest. This "collision with the Whig magnates" by the "first native-born male sovereign of

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<sup>2</sup>Robert R. Palmer, The Age of the Democratic Revolution: A Political History of Europe and America, 1760-1800 (2 vols., Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959-1964, I, 143, 145 and 147.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 146-67.

England since the Revolution" some seventy years before, had a very unsettling effect on leadership in government from 1760 on.<sup>4</sup>

The most distinctive feature of Palmer's work was his conscious comparison of George III with the "enlightened despots" of Europe. Palmer said that in his "clash with the Whig aristocracy" and humbling of the old leadership in Parliament, George III resembled Maria Theresa in her conflict with the Hungarian and Bohemian diets, Louis XV in his opposition to the French parlements and their union des classes, and Gustavus III, who soon would "humble the nobility of Sweden." With his challenge to the Whig aristocracy, however, George III's superficial resemblance to the "enlightened despots" ended. Although the King's sponsorship of imperial measures showed he was "enlightened" enough to be in step with the times, Palmer said his lack of premeditated conflict with the church or landowners proved that George III really was not an enlightened "despot" at all, but a thoroughgoing Whig.<sup>5</sup>

In Palmer's view, the problem was not that George III wrested back from Newcastle and the Whig oligarchs the management of government they had so long enjoyed; the problem--for America--was that the King and the backbenchers got along so well together within a system of patronage that opponents of the King could use it to arouse mistrust in America.<sup>6</sup> Normally viewed as "Friends of America," the Burke and Rockingham Whigs represented the old elite whom George III offended, and they chose for their own reasons to fan the coals of American discontents:

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 151-153.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 152.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 152-53.

By their harping on the sinister designs of the King, by their hints of a . . . ministerial conspiracy to pervert Parliament, they did more than any other group in England to inculcate in America a hatred for British practices of government, and to undermine in America that respect for Parliament which it was the great Whig principle to uphold. When the Whigs said that Parliament was the proper seat of sovereignty for the whole empire, the Americans paid little attention. When they said that Parliament was corrupt, the Americans took them at their word.<sup>7</sup>

George III represented the concerted feeling among almost all classes of Britons when, reacting to the Boston Tea Party, he said this "new outrage" proved that "political rowdyism" in America had gone far enough. George was correct, observed Palmer, who he said, "The die is now cast; the colonies must now submit or triumph."

Parliament brought the issue of its own raw power to a head by persistently tinkering with American precedent. There was nothing George III could do to close the gulf which for decades had quietly been widening between Britons and Americans over the meaning of the British constitution.<sup>8</sup>

Comparing George III's entire administration to that of the other heads of state in Europe, Palmer concluded that apart from the American disturbance, which he was equipped to handle no better than his contemporaries throughout the length and breadth of Britain, George III was a successful monarch according to his original goals: he preserved King and Parliament in a "separate" yet "balanced" relationship, oiled as one would expect, by "influence"; he restrained the aristocracy; he

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 173.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 174-75.

preserved for his people the notions of constitutional balance that he had cherished at his coronation; in short, George III had consistently played the part of a consummate Whig.<sup>9</sup> By standing in contrast to the "enlightened despots" of Europe, Palmer's George III mirrored that scholar's commitment to the value of comparative history.

### Shy's George III: The Hanoverian Warrior-King

Another of the "new departures" from an old historical track was the military history written by John Shy during the Vietnam War. In his book Toward Lexington, Shy asked how the confusion about using the British Army may have helped bring on the American Revolution. What he learned about George III helped supply the answer.

"Inability to solve the problem of colonial defense," said Shy, "eventually raised fundamental issues of political organization." The "failure to resolve these issues by force," he contended, "brought about the disruption of the first British empire."<sup>10</sup> By examining how the British Army's purpose in America changed from border security to its deployment as an instrument for "keeping the peace," Shy hoped to elucidate "one aspect of the breakdown" of that empire.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 308.

<sup>10</sup> John Shy, Toward Lexington: The Role of the British Army in the Coming of the American Revolution (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), vii. For comments on the war, itself, as a political education that turned "uneasy" but "potentially loyal subjects of the Crown" into "sceptical, wary citizens of the United States," see John Shy, "The American Revolution: The Military Conflict Considered as a Revolutionary War," in Stephen G. Kurtz and James H. Hutson, eds., Essays on the American Revolution (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1973), 121-56.

<sup>11</sup> Shy, Toward Lexington, viii.

One of the Army's worst problems was King George III's preoccupation with the details of its management. George III, whose toppling of the Whig oligarchy was made by Palmer to sound heroic, was described at the onset of that contest by Shy as "immature," a young man of "no more than average intelligence," but whose mind was crammed "full of carefully nursed grievances against those who had served his grandfather."<sup>12</sup> Inexperience, wed to a zeal for political reform in the young monarch, soon produced a political chaos which, despite the difficulty historians have had in sorting it out, was "real, and not an illusion born of complexity."<sup>13</sup>

"However much he may have tried to reverse the political habits of his predecessors," however, George III remained a "typical Hanoverian warrior-king, delighting in the mastery of military minutiae." This was the key to Shy's characterization of King George III, and he found it by reading "between the lines" of a letter from George to Bute in the autumn of '62.

In that letter the young Hanoverian said that for "some days" he had been absorbed in "drawing up a state of the troops for the peace."<sup>14</sup> That, suggested Shy, should have been someone else's job. Gerald Howson corroborated the King's primacy in military matters when he said that in 1764, John Burgoyne acted on the knowledge that "the best guarantee of

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 68-69.

survival [for his unit of light horse in peacetime--and therefore for his living] was not glamour, but catching the eye of the King."<sup>15</sup> That they succeeded in doing so netted his unit the honor of redesignation as "The Queen's Own" and guaranteed for Burgoyne a place in America's Revolutionary chronicles. George III's preoccupation with military management, Shy contended, contained the "clues to the riddle of how the British government took . . . its first step toward Lexington."<sup>16</sup>

After creating an atmosphere of instability by his own politically unorthodox behavior, George III injected into that highly charged climate a plan to reorganize the Army. He gladly abandoned the notion of raising the Irish establishment from 12,000 to 20,000 in peacetime if he could keep the desired troop depositions in America. (It was there he could send the young officers who showed talent but had small "means," so they would have a chance to start their careers on a good footing.) Once George III had conceded the point of the Irish establishment and, by doing so, allayed the fears of the country squires of a larger local standing army that they might have to feed, they had "in the handsomest manner yielded" to the remainder of the plan.<sup>17</sup>

"The North American Army was not originally established. . .to defend colonial society or to control it," said Shy, but to suppress "banditti," "squatters" and "smugglers."<sup>18</sup> As late as the fall of 1773,

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<sup>15</sup>Gerald Howson, Burgoyne of Saratoga: A Biography (New York: Times Books, 1979), 47.

<sup>16</sup>Shy, Toward Lexington, 68.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 50, 76-77.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 83.

the King insisted that "his Troops" should in no case be "drawn out, without His Majesty's express command," to aid the "Civil Magistracy in the Colonies, unless in cases of absolute and unavoidable necessity," when all other means of maintaining civil order had been spent.<sup>19</sup> But George III's self-image, said Shy, underwent a subtle change as conditions grew worse in Boston, from "George the well-beloved," respecter of the citizenry, to "George the strong, first soldier of the Empire," whose army faced disgrace at the hands of an armed rabble.<sup>20</sup>

Like his two Hanoverian predecessors, George III had worked hard, and with only partial success, to remove at least regimental positions from the political plum basket. He had labored "against the grain of politics" to make merit "the basis for officer selection and promotion." With his Secretary at War, the King had diligently striven to protect those "vulnerable men" who lacked "means" but had risen through the ranks by talent and courage, and he frowned upon "extensions of leave" for wealthy officers who sought to avoid joining their units which were stationed overseas.<sup>21</sup> To see the Army he had worked so hard to upgrade being embarrassed by a people he was being taught to despise, was more than the King could endure. Having bantered in May that he "had as lief fight . . . Bostonians as the French," George was writing grimly in November 1774 that "Blows must decide" whether they will be "subject to

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 408.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 415.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 235, 346, 348 and 364.

this country" or not.<sup>22</sup> Shy's George III, drawn as America found herself increasingly entangled in the controversial and confusing war in Southeast Asia, mirrored that historian's concern with the impact of the military in larger social movements.

#### Bailyn's George III: The Conspirator

A third trend among the "new departures" that followed World War II has been the "new" intellectual history capped by the work of Harvard scholar Bernard Bailyn. Whereas Progressive scholars like Beard had thought "ideas" were less important than "hard" economic facts. Bailyn emphasized the analysis instead of the mere description of ideas and stressed the force of these popularly held notions as "causative agents in history."<sup>23</sup> Bailyn contended that people's perception of reality was much more important than any "empirical reality" in bringing about the conflict with Britain, because their acts were the children of their thoughts. In Bailyn's Ideological Origins of the American Revolution, King George III was a focus of conspiratorial suspicion.

Jefferson wrote what most Americans, not knowing the King personally, had probably been taught to believe: "The Tory education" they assumed George III had received was the "first preparation" for changing the British government. "At the moment he came to the throne and cleared his hands of his enemies by the Peace of Paris, the assumptions of unwarrantable right over America commenced."<sup>24</sup> George III's alleged

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 416.

<sup>23</sup> Billias, "Revolutionary Era," 64.

<sup>24</sup> Bernard Bailyn, The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1967), 124 (footnote 31).

Tory indoctrination by the Stuart Earl of Bute had prepared him to be the visible front for a clique of "ministers and favorites" whose "overruling arbitrary power, which absolutely controls the King, Lords, and Commons," caused "all the distresses and complaints of the people in England or in America."<sup>25</sup> Bailyn captured the flavor of this suspicion by quoting from contemporary pamphlets:

This "junto of courtiers and state jobbers," these "court locusts," whispering in the royal ear, "instill in the King's mind a divine right of authority to command his subjects."

Bailyn's citation continued: "If the King can do no wrong, his Ministers may."<sup>26</sup>

American fears of intrigue at Court were fed by Burke and his patron, the Marquis of Rockingham, who observed in a speech to the House of Lords that there had been a "total change in the old system of English government" beginning with the accession of George III. In fact, noted Bailyn, rumors of some kind of conspiratorial cabal in government were rife not only in America, but also in England--and not just in the "circles of the Duke of Newcastle and others, who might be inclined to identify the eclipse of their own public authority with that of the national interest."<sup>27</sup>

Setting the tone for much future writing about George III, Horace Walpole felt the "canker" of secret government had begun when the Pelhams

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 134, 145-46.

had the Princess Dowager "inspire arbitrary principles into her son," the future George III, and taught him how to go about establishing "a despotism that may end in tyranny in his descendants." Walpole blamed Lord Bute, who suffered from the "triple disability" of being "unknown, ungracious, and a Scot," for steering his charge awry.<sup>28</sup>

Ironically, George III, the target of much speculation about conspiracy, was himself concerned about being the victim of a conspiracy--in America. Addressing Parliament in October 1775, George III said:

The authors and promoters of this desperate conspiracy have in the conduct of it derived great advantage from the difference of our intentions and theirs. They meant only to amuse, by vague expressions of attachment to the parent state and the strongest protestations of loyalty to me, whilst they were preparing for a general revolt.<sup>29</sup>

This statement by George III, and the "elaborate refutation of the King's accusation" which some members of the Continental Congress felt they must publish in February 1776, evidenced the "escalating mutuality of conspiratorial fears."<sup>30</sup> That Bailyn chose to cast King George III as a man with his own suspicions, and as an object of American conspiratorial fears rather than a flesh-and-blood personality, mirrors his thesis that it was what people thought they knew about George III and the conspiracy to subvert their freedom that mattered in bringing on the war.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>29</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, 153.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

### Comparison, Military Provocation and the Force of Ideology

Palmer seems to have been responding to America's re-emergence on the world stage when he wrote his comparative history, Shy to the role of her military, and Bailyn to the force of ideologies when they did their "new departures" from older approaches to history.

It was Palmer's comparison of King George III with the "enlightened despots" of Europe that convinced him that George III was the consummate Whig. His monarch therefore mirrors Palmer's commitment to the value of cross-cultural comparison in gaining a balanced historical perspective.

Shy's Hanoverian warrior-king mirrors his interest in examining the role of the military in provoking the Revolution, and his conviction that the perception of military power is an essential ingredient in the decision-making that enforces national policy.

Bailyn's George III emerges as a focus for American fears of conspiracy. Since Bailyn is convinced that people's perceptions of reality--right or wrong--determined what they did, King George III serves as a monarchical mirror of Bailyn's conviction about the force of ideology in shaping historical events.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION: OURSELVES IN THE MIRROR

John Adams met George III face-to-face. No major American historian was ever afforded a similar opportunity to know the King personally, so George III has remained, in the passages of American historiography, a stereotypical symbol of whatever historians thought was bad or dangerous for America.

The real importance of King George III in American historiography is that he reflects, sometimes with startling clarity, the values that are significant to each historian, more than the notions that draw the school together. Sometimes these are very personal values.

Yet in a larger sense, because no historian writes in a vacuum, George III also mirrors the moods of Americans in successive generations. The basic mold from which George III has been cast in the American mind has not varied much; but what variations do exist reflect the changing needs and expectations of their countrymen at the time the historians wrote.

George Bancroft's George III appeared in a series of volumes whose preparation and publication spanned the better part of a century. The monarch mirrors Bancroft's faith in Jacksonian democracy, but in doing so he reflects the expansionist mood of nineteenth-century America, as well. Bancroft's history was thoroughly researched, visionary in nature and theological in its underlying premises. The historian presented George III as an "instrument of Heaven" who, by resisting the

American Revolution, merely added to its force. The values this imagery communicated were well received by Americans in the early to mid-nineteenth century. The country was expanding westward, many of Bancroft's countrymen were pleased to read such a resounding affirmation that God had a special role for them to play in the worldwide movement toward popular sovereignty.

Theology spawned, then was eclipsed by, rationalistic morality in the works of John Fiske in the 1890s, and those of Carl Becker through the end of World War I. Fiske's presentation of George III as a "corrupt political wirepuller," and Becker's observations on the pitfalls of becoming a "Patriot King," suggest what the election of 1896 and the later progressive movement confirmed--that Americans at the turn of the century were less religious in their outlook than their forebears, but they still responded to moral instruction and the need to distinguish right from wrong in the realm of public life. Behind the reflection of Fiske's and Becker's private values may again be glimpsed the mood of their countrymen. The pietism that had guided earlier generations of Americans (and that continued to thrive in the South) had become less acceptable in the crowded, multi-national cities of the North Atlantic coast.

Charles Beard's portrayal of King George III as a "spokesman for the economic elite" appeared in the wake of World War I. Beard's monarch mirrored his pride in America's frontier spirit, blended with a twist of cynicism about human nature--a warning about the dangers posed to liberty by economic self-interest. Beard's method of conveying these concepts was to contrast the rough-hewn, hardy immigrants

tracking the frontier forests of America, with the perfumed courtiers of George III who dressed in lace and silk.

The real reflection in the Georgian mirror, however, is that of an American public whose mood had been changed by the First World War. The idealism with which Americans had entered the war, and which President Wilson tried to carry forward in his Fourteen Points, was cracked if not shattered by the horrors of modern trench warfare and the unforgiving attitude with which the European allies approached the peace. Americans after the war felt more self-confident because they had helped to win it; but they also had become more cynical, because the realities of the experience were much different than anything they might have imagined in advance.

Charles M. Andrews dispensed with moral judgments entirely, believing that these clouded the issues of real causation. The result was a George III much diminished in importance. Americans in the mid-1920s were more receptive to strengthening the ties with Britain that had been formed in the First World War, and which the shrinking of George III in the popular mind might help. Andrews' plea to move beyond the constraints of individual guilt also agreed with the mood of the times. Dismissing King George III as an "imperial scapegoat" signalled a break with an earlier age of moral judgments and a burgeoning emphasis on the benefits of materialism.

The Beardian view of American frontier spunk seems to have dominated Americans' perception of themselves until a jarring confrontation with Chinese and Korean communism in the early 1950s brought that courage into question. It seems that piety in the Plymouth founders had become

idealism in their descendants, which then had degenerated into materialism. The inadequacy of being preoccupied with the accumulation of creature comforts should have been unmasked by the Depression, but the 1950s found historian Edmund Morgan speaking to the ideological dryrot that the Korean War exposed. Employing his "principled but parochial" King George III as a counterpoint, Morgan sought to identify some contrasting "principle of liberty" that had enabled Americans of an earlier generation to resist the coercion of the mighty British Empire.

The extent of America's declension from her founding values was suggested by the disappointing conduct of some of her servicemen whose naivete, as prisoners-of-war, was shockingly exploited by their Korean and Communist Chinese captors. Morgan's George III mirrors a nation groping to recapture the vision of what had made it great in the first place.

Lawrence Gipson's "good King George" burst on the American scene after Great Britain and the United States had twice defeated a powerful common foe, and now faced another in Soviet expansionism. Gipson's compassionate view of George III mirrors a significant change in America's moods, because it probably would not have been accepted by the reading public one hundred years before.

The dynamic nature of Soviet policy had another effect on the American people which has been accurately mirrored in the American historiography of King George III. Robert Palmer's casting of King George III as a "consummate Whig" heightens the effect of his comparative approach to history. It also reflects an America nudged away from its anticipated return to isolationism after a major world conflict, and forced to embrace a more international frame-of-reference.

Grouping the values behind John Shy's "warrior King," Bernard Bailyn's "conspirator," Michael Kammen's "dissolver of the bond" and Merrill Jensen's "power broker" graphically suggests an America gripped by schizophrenia during the Vietnam War and the era of racial unrest. The issues George III mirrors in these books--questions about the proper role of America's military, the impact of a people's outlook on their decision-making process, the fragile nature of governmental credibility, and the complexity of acting in concert--all underscore the notion that the successive images of King George III over the last one hundred fifty years do reflect the mood of Americans at the time of writing, as well as the personal values of each historian.

The same is probably true of the progression of images presented by American historians of someone like George Washington or Thomas Jefferson. The changes in Americans' moods, and the sophistication of their views, suggested by a contrast of statements by Parson Weems and James T. Flexner prompts almost immediate comment. The only major difference would be that Washington or Jefferson would mirror cherished American virtues instead of their opposites, as George III has done.

As a final note, although it is not part of the main thrust of this thesis, the question naturally arises whether American historians have misjudged George III or not. In the main, they have not. They have correctly assessed his stance regarding the struggle for American independence: he was against it. They have shared the perplexity and meanderings of the British historians about the intensity and character of his influence. It is in the private garden of his motives that they have gone astray.

King George III was an inveterate enemy of civil disorder. He perceived the American Revolution to be a circumstance of serious civil disorder that could most mercifully and efficiently be halted by the application of military force. He thought it was impossible that the previously factious state governments could establish a viable new nation founded on the principle of popular sovereignty. The King was, therefore, as he later told John Adams, an inveterate enemy of American independence until it was impossible to prevent it. Once he had done all that duty required to prevent the dissolution of his empire, George III resigned himself to the inevitable and learned to deal with America as a sovereign nation.

Empathy requires that we ask ourselves whether, if we had been the King of Great Britain, we would have responded any differently than George III did. Probably we would not. Even genuine empathy, however, cannot change the side he chose. We have rightly assessed his role.

If the writers of American history have misjudged anything, it has been the King's motives. For years we accepted the appraisal of the British Whig historians that King George III acted from personal ambition, or was applying the notions of Stuart tyranny allegedly taught him in childhood. It has only recently been acknowledged on both sides of the Atlantic that George III's strongest motivation probably was the pursuit of a deep and honest sense of duty. This was, after all, what King George III said he hoped posterity would remember: that he had meant to preserve the integrity of the empire that had been entrusted to him at his coronation, and that he tried to fulfill "the duty to my God and my neighbor" the best that he could.

The humbled sovereign's only hope was that in days to come the "tongue of malice" would not misrepresent his intentions "in those colours she admires, nor the sycophant extoll" him beyond what he deserved. American historians certainly have not flattered George III. Whether they have been as objective or as complimentary to an honest foe as they might have been is another question.

Professional restraint has masked much of the distaste that American historians may have felt toward George III. Among those who have come closest to an objective portraiture, however, Lawrence Gipson's is the best. That he more aptly handled the human side of America's old enemy is both a tribute to Gipson's skill as a historian and a natural consequence of his pro-British orientation. It should be noted that Gipson wrote in an era when Sir Lewis Namier's revisions had overturned earlier misunderstandings about the nature of King George III's role in government.

If for no other reason than to teach our children that there are at least two sides to a matter, American historians should consider following Gipson's lead, and try to develop empathy for King George III when they discuss the American Revolution. Sincerely differing viewpoints and the failure between rational people to reach an acceptable compromise are adequate bases for beginning to explain America's breach with Great Britain. There is no need to distort the character of the King.

George III was what Adams found him: a devoted family man and a Christian gentleman in more than title. He was not perfect, though, nor did his more agreeable personal qualities help him empathize

with what he perceived to be some pretty riotous behavior in parts of his colonies. He shared with many of his contemporaries a deep-seated fear that civil disorder, left unchecked, would lead to anarchy and would usher in widespread or indiscriminate violence. Although he was wrong in the case of America, the French Revolution later vindicated his original concern. He was therefore as troubled by the rioting of the Spitalfield silk weavers in England as he was disturbed by events in Boston, and he used the same martial methods in both cases to try to restore order. In one case they worked, in the other they did not.

What could be said about King George III to portray him as a person whose views differed from those of many of his subjects in America, but whose perspective is still worth understanding, instead of relegating him to his usual role as a symbol of tyranny? It could be mentioned that George III enjoyed a quiet evening at home more than formal social engagements. He found it relaxing to play the flute while his wife accompanied him on the harpsichord, and was most comfortable in the role of a country squire: he rose before daylight, kindled his own fire in the hearth, then spent an hour in his study before breakfast. Morning prayers in the chapel preceded the twenty mile ride he made every day on horseback from his residence at Windsor to transact the day's business in London, and the King enjoyed talking with his subjects along the way.

George III promoted the now-famous works of Handel, preserved over 65,000 irreplaceable volumes in what came to be called the King's Library, and caused the largest telescope of its time to be built for Herschell the astronomer, who discovered the planet Uranus.

Although he felt awkward at the levees that custom required when he ascended the throne as a young man in 1760, by the end of the American Revolution King George III was much more at ease with people and consequently was able to help them relax as well. Perhaps the war had mellowed him. For a while King George III was lampooned in the British press for his austerity and the simplicity of his lifestyle, but by the 1780s or the 1790s his own people in England had come to appreciate his better qualities.

On the other hand, the character of King George III in American historical writing has taken on a life of its own. It is symbolic, and not real, because the King's opposition to the fragmentation of his empire has made it difficult, if not impossible, for Americans to adopt a view of King George III as a person who exhibited some traits we might admire.

Like John Adams, we could discover the positive things about George III only in the context of the years after American independence had been achieved, and by then he was no longer significant. King George III is seldom mentioned by name in American historical writings about the Early National Period, although his effective reign continued past the presidency of Thomas Jefferson. The poignant confrontation between King George III and John Adams has remained a mere postscript to the Treaty of Paris.

Several fine portraits were done of George III during the six decades of his reign. These would make a fascinating sequential study in themselves. Considered within the context of the King's experiences, these portraits yield valuable insights into the reorientation of King

George III's own value system through the course of his reign. The paintings, however stiff and formal they may be, were based on confrontation with a living man. Certainly the King had some control over how he was to be portrayed--the outfit he wore, whether he posed alone or in a group, and in what surroundings--so the changes in this artistic imagery mean something. They accurately reflect changes in the King's own attitudes.

The progression from coronation robes in one portrait to a military uniform in another, to a portrait of the King when slightly older with his family surrounding him in a pastoral setting, for example, suggests a reorientation of his priorities. The glories of his office probably awed and impressed the young King George III at first. During the American Revolution, to which he sought a military solution, he may have liked to think of himself as the commander-in-chief of Britain's previously unvanquished military and the portrait in uniform reflects that. The setbacks of his American experiences, however, may have impressed King George III with the more enduring importance of the simple comforts of hearth and home.

Whatever message these portraits convey, they all have one thing in common: they bear an actual resemblance to the man who is their subject because they were done in person. By contrast, not one of the literary "portraits" of King George III created by American historians is based on personal acquaintance with the King. Every one of them is a second-hand reflection of his opposition to the American struggle for self-government.

We might have expected that by assembling the facets of the King's character presented by a succession of American historians, we

should be able to derive as clear a picture of his personality and values as if we viewed the whole sequence of his royal portraits at a gallery. It should now be apparent, however, that this is not quite true. Unlike John Adams--or the artists who painted his portraits--we have never known the man at all. Nor have we meant to. Once King George III had sided with Parliament, only his stance was considered significant.

That is why the American historiography of King George III is such a fruitful field for introspection. The inhabitant of our recollection's gilded frame is a phantom of our own making, not a royal portraiture. What should have been a likeness of the King has proven instead to be a mirror of American moods and values. It is as though we have stood, as a people, staring at the spot where the royal portrait ought to be. The frame is right, and the title is right, but the real King George III never has been there. We never have portrayed King George III as he was to those who knew him. Close inspection of what American historians have written about King George III over the last one hundred fifty years reveals that instead of a royal portrait, we have created a reflection of ourselves.

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Immediately after graduating from high school, Mr. Mooney entered Basic Cadet Training at the United States Air Force Academy in Colorado. In June 1970 he received a Bachelor of Science degree in Asian Studies, with a concentration in the Mandarin Chinese language.

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