

## Petition No More Save The King of Kings

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Had our Creator been pleased to give us existence in a land of slavery, the sense of our condition might have been mitigated by ignorance and habit; but thanks to his adorable goodness, we were born the heirs of freedom, and ever enjoyed our rights under the auspices of your royal ancestors, whose family was seated on the British throne to rescue and secure a pious and gallant nation from the popery and despotism of a superstitious and inexorable tyrant. Your Majesty, we are confident, justly rejoices that your title to the crown is thus founded on the title of your people to liberty. — Petition of the Continental Congress to the King, January, 1775.<sup>1</sup>

No man was a warmer wisher for reconciliation than myself, before the fatal nineteenth of April 1775, but the moment the event of that day was made known, I rejected the hardened, sullen tempered Pharaoh of England for ever; and disdain the wretch, that with the pretended title of father of his people can unfeelingly hear of their slaughter, and composedly sleep with their blood upon his soul. —Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*.<sup>2</sup>

On a late Spring morning in May 1766, some Bostonians awakened to the sounds of hammers, saws, and the voices of workmen busy at their tasks. When they looked out on the Common, they saw a great four storey structure, a “magnificent Pyramid,” growing there.<sup>3</sup> At dusk the festivities began when twenty-four rockets were sent skyward. After that opening volley, revelers lit hundreds of lamps, brightly illuminating the figures in the windows of the pyramid, “making a beautiful appearance.”<sup>4</sup> Prominently displayed in the windows of the four upper stories of the edifice were the symbolic guests of honor—the richly dressed effigies of King George III, the Queen, and members of the royal family.<sup>5</sup> From dusk until nearly midnight, candles, rockets, and pinwheels illuminated the city of Boston.<sup>6</sup> To keep the festivities jolly, John Hancock treated the townsfolk to a pipe of Madeira wine, and “Mr. Otis, and some other Gentlemen who lived near the Common, kept open house the whole evening, which was very pleasant.”<sup>7</sup> Bostonians were on their best behavior and, apparently, in their best dress, as a “multitude of Gentlemen and Ladies who were continually passing from one place to another, added much to the brilliancy of the

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1 *Pennsylvania Magazine, or American Monthly Museum*, January, 1775, 49-50.

2 Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*, in *Common Sense, The Rights of Man, and Other Essential Writings of Thomas Paine*, Sidney Hook, ed. (New York: The New American Library, 1969), 44.

3 “Boston, May 22,” *Maryland Gazette*, June 12, 1766.

4 “Boston, May 22. Account of the Rejoicings last Monday, on the Repeal of the Stamp Act,” *Virginia Gazette*, June 20, 1766.

5 “Boston, May 22,” *Maryland Gazette*, June 12, 1766.

6 “Boston, May 22,” *Virginia Gazette*, June 20, 1766.

7 *Ibid*.

night.”<sup>8</sup> The Boston Sons of Liberty hosted the whole affair. The occasion of the celebration was the repeal of the Stamp Act.<sup>9</sup>

The repeal elicited joyous responses from all of the colonies. The evening after the Sons of Liberty held their popular celebration, the governor and council of Massachusetts met, dined, and drank toasts to the repeal. They likewise toasted William Pitt and King George III, whom they considered the principal supporters of the Stamp Act repeal in England.<sup>10</sup> At Annapolis on 5 June, to cap the day long celebrations held there for the King’s birthday, the governor of Maryland publicly read the Act that repealed the hated Stamp Act.<sup>11</sup> In Queen-Anne’s County, Maryland, the Sons of Liberty held a solemn funeral for “Discord” and placed a plaque on the site of the mock burial that stated “in Memory of the Restoration of Union, mutual Affection, and Tranquility to *Great-Britain* and her Colonies under the Auspices of George the Third.”<sup>12</sup> On 30 June, the General Assembly of New York resolved to erect an equestrian statue of George III in New York City in order “to perpetuate to the latest Posterity, the deep Sense this Colony has of the eminent and singular Blessings received from His Majesty during his Auspicious Reign.”<sup>13</sup> The Virginia House of Burgesses considered a similar bill to erect a statue to the King “as a grateful Acknowledgement for repealing the Stamp Act, and thereby restoring the Rights and Privileges of his *American Subjects*.”<sup>14</sup>

Throughout the colonies Americans, for so they now often called themselves, celebrated the repeal with as much vigor and enthusiasm as they had resisted the Stamp Act. Often the Sons of Liberty organized and led the festivities. On 4 June, for instance, several hundred members of the Sons of Liberty of Woodbridge, New Jersey, gathered at the Liberty Oak to celebrate the King’s birthday “and publicly to testify their Joy” at the repeal.

The Morning was ushered in with the Beat of Drum and the Sound of Trumpet, by which the Sons of Liberty were soon assembled. A large Ox was roasted whole, and Liquor of different Kinds in great Plenty provided for the Company. His Majesty’s Colours were displayed in different Parts of the Square, and the Liberty Oak was handsomely decorated.<sup>15</sup> In the evening the assembled citizenry drank many toasts, the first of which were to King George III, the Queen, the Royal family, and to the glorious memory of the Duke of Cumberland.<sup>16</sup> An observer announced that “his Majesty has no loyaler Subjects either in Europe or America, as the most firm loyalty seemed to glow in every Breast, and each endeavored to excell in honouring the Day.”<sup>17</sup>

Colonial assemblies framed addresses to their governors and to London in which they pledged their loyalty to the King, and expressed their thanks for his intervention to restore the liberty of his American subjects. The Maryland House of Delegates expressed its deep sense of gratitude to the king for the “paternal Regard and Attention to the Interests” of his subjects that he displayed in assenting to the repeal

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8 *Ibid.*

9 The best general work on the Stamp Act and its significance is Edmund S. and Helen M. Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis: Prologue to Revolution* (New York: MacMillan, 1962). As the Morgans note, the Sons of Liberty were also undoubtedly celebrating their own part in bringing about the repeal of the Stamp Act (356), but it is significant that even the Sons of Liberty were effusive in giving thanks to the king and royal family for supporting the colonists.

10 “Boston, May 22,” *Maryland Gazette*, June 12, 1766.

11 *Maryland Gazette*, June 5, 1766.

12 “Celebrations in Queen-Anne’s County,” *Maryland Gazette*, June 12, 1766.

13 “New York, June 30,” *Maryland Gazette*, June 30, 1766.

14 “Annapolis, December 18,” *Maryland Gazette*, December 18, 1766.

15 “Supplement to the *New York Gazette or Weekly Post Boy*, June 19, 1766,” *N.J.C.D.*, 25: 143-144.

16 *Ibid.*, 145.

17 *Ibid.*

of the odious Stamp Act.<sup>18</sup> The Assembly confessed an “invincible Attachment” to the King’s “sacred Person and Government.”<sup>19</sup> The Virginia Burgesses pledged their thanks for the “tender regard shown by his Majesty to the Rights and Liberties of his People” and acknowledged “that benign Virtue so distinguishable in him, that of protecting the Constitutional Privileges of his Subjects, even in the most distant part of his Realm, the American Dominions.”<sup>20</sup>

Neither were American divines tardy in giving thanks to their God and their king for restoring to the colonies their just liberties. Jonathan Mayhew announced to his congregation at the Boston West Church that “I now partake no less in your common joy, on account of the repeal of that act; whereby these colonies are emancipated from a slavish, inglorious bondage; are re-instated in the enjoyment of their ancient rights and privileges.”<sup>21</sup> Mayhew blamed Britain’s enemies for the creation of the Stamp Act. The originators of the Act were “evil minded individuals,” who, according to Mayhew, served the interests not of the king and good Britons wherever they might reside but were instead in league with “the houses of Bourbon, and the pretender,” and sought to “bring about an open rupture between Great Britain and her colonies.”<sup>22</sup> The Boston minister gave credit to God, King George, and William Pitt for the repeal. Mayhew observed:

I am persuaded it would rejoice the generous heart of his majesty, if he knew that by a single turn of his scepter, when he assented to the repeal, he had given more pleasure to three million good subjects, than ever he and his royal grandfather gave them by all the triumphs of their arms, from Lake Superior to the Isles of Manilla.<sup>23</sup>

He warned his listeners that they should not be too hasty in placing blame on their king for giving his assent to the Stamp Act. After all, even “natural parents, thro’ human frailty, and mistakes about facts, and circumstances, sometimes *provoke their children to wrath*, tho’ they tenderly love them.”<sup>24</sup> But, Mayhew noted, the king was quick to redress his subjects’ grievances once he became aware of his error, and this fact ought to give his American subjects “a new spring, an additional vigor to their loyalty and obedience.”<sup>25</sup> Completing the familial analogy, Mayhew reminded his congregation that “British kings are the political fathers of their people; the former are not tyrants, or even masters; the latter are not slaves, or even servants.”<sup>26</sup>

The repeal of the Stamp Act represented something of another revolution, a return to first principles, for the American colonies. Americans perceived that they had been oppressed, their

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18 “Humble Address of the House of Delegates of Maryland, St. James, Feb. 7, 1767,” *Maryland Gazette*, May 21, 1767. For similar sentiments see “A Message to the Governor from the Assembly [of Pennsylvania], June 3, 1766,” *Minutes of the Provincial Council of Pennsylvania, From the Organization to the Termination of the Proprietary Government* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Theo. Fenn & Co., 1852. Rep. New York: AMS Press, 1968), 9:312-313.

19 “Humble Address of the House of Delegates of Maryland, St. James, Feb. 7, 1767,” *Maryland Gazette*, May 21, 1767.

20 “Address to his Honour the Governor, November 12, 7 Geo. III, 1766,” *Journals of the House of Burgesses of Virginia, 1766-1769*, John Pendleton Kennedy, ed. (Richmond: Virginia State Library, 1906), 23.

21 Jonathan Mayhew, *The Snare Broken, A Thanksgiving Discourse, Preached at the Desire of the West Church, in Boston, N.E. Friday, May 23, 1766. Occasioned by the Repeal of the Stamp Act . . .* (Boston: R. & S. Draper, 1766), in Sandoz, 239.

22 *Ibid.*, 242-243.

23 *Ibid.*, 246.

24 *Ibid.*, 252.

25 *Ibid.*

26 *Ibid.*, 252-253.

constitutional rights as Englishmen violated, and their liberties and property threatened. Yet, their resistance and their complaints had been noted by the king, who recognized their plight, redressed their grievances, and, in his paternal wisdom, repealed the “unconstitutional, oppressive, grievous, or ruinous” Stamp Act, thus restoring to Americans their ancient rights and privileges as Englishmen.<sup>27</sup> The Stamp Act crisis provided the first real rift between all of his Majesty’s colonies in North America and the mother country in the Age of the Hanovers. It required Americans to reason out and reconfirm their understanding of their relationship with their king and their constitutional status in the British Empire for the first time since the Glorious Revolution. The central issue of the Stamp Act controversy, on its face, was simpler than those of the Revolution of 1689. There was no Catholic king, no invading Protestant Prince, no revolution in England, no abdication or desertion of the throne. The main issue of the Stamp Act crisis was the right of colonists to tax themselves through the agency of their own legislatures.<sup>28</sup> Yet, in the minds of American colonists, many of the same culprits, or at least their eighteenth-century equivalents, were involved. As Mayhew observed, the chief instigators of the heinous Act were evil Englishmen who supported the interests of the French and the exiled Stuarts.<sup>29</sup> Although the crisis had begun when the British Parliament enacted a statute that placed a direct tax upon Americans, most colonists were at some pains to absolve that body of guilt. Instead, they blamed evil ministers and their political machinations, and even colonial administrators like Governor Cadwallader Colden of New York and Governor Bernard of Massachusetts, whom colonists accused of betraying the colonies in order to further their own selfish ambitions.<sup>30</sup> King George III, unlike James II, was absolved of wrongdoing, and American colonists from divines to assemblies, even to the Sons of Liberty, hastened to show their loyalty to and support for their king. Indeed, colonists seemed to take every possible opportunity to stress that their quarrel was not with the king but with his ministry and the Parliament. Even the Sons of Liberty prefaced their manifestoes against the act with protestations of loyalty and allegiance to their ruler.<sup>31</sup> Americans, it seems, though prepared to resist the Stamp Act “to the last Extremity,” had no intention of resisting their lawful and rightful king.<sup>32</sup>

The repeal of the Stamp Act confirmed American colonists’ understanding of their constitution and the king’s place in their system of government. A wrong had been done to Americans by evil ministers, Parliament, and even by colonial governors and fellow colonists who had misrepresented the facts to the

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27 *Ibid.*, 241.

28 For the constitutional questions and the Stamp Tax, see Reid, *The Authority to Tax*, 12-24, *passim*. For the politics and economics of taxes, both local and Parliamentary, in the American colonies, see Robert A. Becker, *Revolution, Reform, and the Politics of Taxation, 1763-1783* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), 8-112.

29 *Ibid.*, 242.

30 See “New York, November 1,” *London Chronicle*, December 14, 1765; “Instructions to the Representatives of Boston, September 18, 1765,” *London Chronicle*, January 9, 1766; “Instructions from the Freeholders of Braintree to their Representative relative to the Stamp-Act, October 10,” *London Chronicle*, January 11, 1766; “Governor Bernard’s Reply to the House of Representatives, Boston, November 11,” *London Chronicle*, July 1, 1766. See also Bernard Bailyn, *The Ordeal of Thomas Hutchinson* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 1974), 116-120, *passim*; Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, 122-123.

31 See “To Mr. Green, Virginia, March 1, 1766,” *Maryland Gazette*, March 27, 1766; “Annapolis, April 3,” *Maryland Gazette*, April 3, 1766; “New York, January 9,” *Pennsylvania Gazette*, January 16, 1766; “Connecticut,” *Pennsylvania Gazette*, January 23, 1766; “New London, February 28,” *Pennsylvania Gazette*, March 13, 1766; “Woodbridge, [New York,] February 21, 1766,” *Pennsylvania Gazette*, March 13, 1766; “Wilmington, [North Carolina,] February 26,” *Pennsylvania Gazette*, March 27, 1766; “Norfolk County Meeting, March 31,” *Virginia Gazette*, April 14, 1766.

32 “New York, January 9,” *Pennsylvania Gazette*, January 16, 1766. See also “South Carolina, March 10,” *Maryland Gazette*, April 10, 1766.

government in London.<sup>33</sup> The repeal, after American resistance, indicated to colonists that the king could still give them relief. As Mayhew stated, “his Majesty and the Parliament were far too wise, just and good to persist in a measure, after they were convinced it was wrong, or to consider it any point of honor, to enforce an act so grievous to three million good subjects.”<sup>34</sup> In short, in the minds of American colonists in 1766, the protection-allegiance covenant held; the system worked.

In one sense, a new epoch had begun in American political thought. During the Stamp Act crisis, colonists began to employ the “True Whig” opposition rhetoric and ideas in ways that they had rarely used them before the Stamp Act. Colonial writers began to apply opposition rhetoric to their controversies with the mother country. Bernard Bailyn, Caroline Robbins and others have shown convincingly that “True Whig” ideology and rhetoric had been well incorporated into American political discourse by the third decade of the eighteenth century.<sup>35</sup> These ideas were, however, used far more often in the give and take of internal political and religious controversies than in issues that concerned the relations between the colonies and the home government. Before the 1760s, colonial political writers were little concerned with the threat of corruption of the fabric of commonwealth government by the pervasive influence of a British “prime minister.” Few Americans thought that the British Parliament had much to do with the internal life of the colonies, where colonial legislatures, authorized and protected by royal charter, were understood to hold sway in those legislative matters that had the greatest effect on the liberties of colonial Britons. While the British Parliament might justly pass laws that regulated trade throughout the Empire, or might otherwise benefit the whole, that body had not, as yet, passed any laws pertaining to the colonies that were generally construed as inimical to the liberties of British subjects in North America.<sup>36</sup>

Colonial governments and their agents had experienced good relationships with the Crown and ministry during the century, and, from the evidence of those relationships, it was apparent that neither the Crown nor its ministers had any malevolent design to deprive colonial subjects of their rights as Englishmen or to undermine their charters. That it was necessary to spread small bribes along the official paths of the London bureaucracy was understood by both colonial leaders and colonial agents. The latter noted in their accounts that these bribes were simply necessary expenses, and the colonial governments paid them with little comment.<sup>37</sup> The ancient system of tipping, bribery and the paying of posted fees (the traditional tips to civil servants were so widespread and uniform that they were codified and published in 1714), which were portrayed by the country opposition as exemplary of English corruption in government, were apparently dismissed by colonial agents and their employers as “the Expenses necessarily attending the negotiation of Business here.”<sup>38</sup>

Opposition rhetoric was, however, employed in conflicts within the colonies. As Bailyn states, in these situations “the writings of the English radical and opposition leaders seemed particularly reasonable, particularly relevant . . . Everywhere groups seeking justification for concerted opposition to constituted

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33 See Mayhew, *The Snare Broken*, Sandoz, 243; James Otis, *The Rights of the British Colonies Asserted and Proved* (Boston: Edes & Gill, 1764), Bailyn, *Pamphlets*, 449; [Benjamin Church,] *Liberty and Property Vindicated, and the Stamp Act Burnt* . . . (Boston, 1765) Bailyn, *Pamphlets*, 592, 596.

34 Mayhew, *The Snare Broken*, Bailyn, *Pamphlets*, 242.

35 Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, 51-52, passim; Caroline Robbins, *Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthman*, 271, passim.

36 For discussions of the distinctions between “internal” and “external” taxes, and Parliamentary rights and trade regulation, see Reid, *The Authority to Tax*, 33-52; Morgan, *Stamp Act*, 53-58, 152-154; Carl Lotus Becker, *The Declaration of Independence: A Study in the History of Political Ideas* (1922, 1942. Rep. New York: Vintage Books, 1958), 89-91.

37 Michael G. Kammen. *A Rope of Sand: The Colonial Agents, British Politics, and the American Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968), 59-61.

38 William Bollan to Josiah Willard. April 19, 1754. Cited in Kammen, *Rope of Sand*, 59.

governments turned to these writers.”<sup>39</sup> When freedom of the press became an issue in the struggles between unseated minorities and the colonial assemblies in various colonies, the opposition writings of the English country party offered ready made ammunition for both the minority and the majority. So, when Peter Zenger was brought forward by the New York Assembly on a charge of seditious libel, he “turned for authority to Trenchard and Gordon’s *Cato’s Letters*.”<sup>40</sup> When, in 1752, William Livingston and his circle of Presbyterians moved their perennial religious/political conflict with New York Anglicans into print with the publication of *The Independent Reflector*, Trenchard and Gordon’s anti-episcopal, anti-clerical *Independent Whig* provided the perfect model.<sup>41</sup> When the Massachusetts Assembly passed an excise tax on alcoholic beverages in 1754, English country opposition writings against the Walpolian excises on cider and perry provided colonial opponents of the tax with a wealth of material.<sup>42</sup>

From the beginning of the Stamp Act crisis, Americans increasingly employed country opposition ideas and symbols as their language of grievance through the series of controversies with the mother country from 1765 to 1776. One possible explanation for the anti-ministerial tone of colonists’ responses to the various bids for Parliamentary supremacy over provincial affairs may be the increased use of “True Whig” opposition rhetoric by William Pitt and various other members of the “Old Corps” of British ministerial politics who were ousted in the early years of George III’s reign. Pitt, who consistently “cast himself in the role of patriot,” based his political influence and prestige on political virtue, and criticized his political opponents with allegations of corruption, resigned from the ministry in 1761.<sup>43</sup> Pitt himself returned to politics in opposition in time to speak forcefully against the king’s “Favorite,” John Stuart, the Earl of Bute, and later, the Grenville ministry that had fostered the Stamp Act.<sup>44</sup> Americans’ interpretations of the events that led to the Stamp Act and other incursions on their rights thereafter were colored by the opposition rhetoric of Pitt, his supporters, and others whose tenure as political players had come to an end in the first years of George III’s reign.<sup>45</sup> Significant evidence is provided for this premise in the fact that Lord Bute became a symbol that colonists frequently employed in the Stamp Act opposition and even in later complaints by Americans against ministerial conspiracy and corruption, even though Bute’s career as “Favorite” had ended before 1765.<sup>46</sup> Benjamin Church characterized Bute as “a

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39 Bernard Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, 53.

40 *Ibid.*, 52.

41 *Ibid.* 53.

42 Leonard Levy, *Legacy of Suppression: Freedom of Speech and the Press in Early American History*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 1960), 39-41.

43 Brewer, *Party Ideology*, 96. For Pitt’s resignation, see Brewer, *Party Ideology*, 103-104.

44 For a discussion of Pitt under George III, see *ibid.*, 96-111. For Pitt and the politics of the Stamp Act repeal, see Morgan, *Stamp Act Crisis*, 329-336; Owen, 180-185. For the British side of the Stamp Act in general, see Peter David Garner Thomas, *British Politics and the Stamp Act Crisis: The First Phase of the American Revolution, 1763-1767* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).

45 For the use of the press by political factions in Britain, see Brewer, *Party Ideology*, 220-239. For coverage of the use of satire in the political contests of the period, and especially against Lord Bute, see, Vincent Carretta, *George III and the Satirists from Hogarth to Byron* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1990), 57-87, *passim*.

46 Lord Bute’s ministry ended in 1763. Richard Pares notes that George III had “recovered from his puerile admiration” of Bute by 1765, when he refused to meet with him anymore (Richard Pares, *King George III and the Politicians: The Ford Lectures, Delivered in the University of Oxford, 1951-2* (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), 107). For discussions of Bute as “Favorite,” see Brewer, *Party Ideology*, 119-127, *passim*; Pares, *King George III*, 46-47, 84-88, 116-117, *passim*. For Bute as a “secret influence” in British politics, see Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, 145-148.

primitive Aaron, leading the people into all manner of corruption.”<sup>47</sup> The Sons of Liberty often employed symbols of Bute in their protests against local stamp officers, as in the case when Boston protesters hanged Andrew Oliver in effigy. Suspended next to the figure of the stamp collector was a large boot with a devil crawling out of it.<sup>48</sup> Bute died hard in American conspiracy theory. In 1769 Americans credited him with the “Townshend Acts,” and again in 1775, he was accused of complicity in the promulgation of the Tea Act.<sup>49</sup> In a cartoon featured in the *Royal American Magazine* in 1774, Bute is depicted, kilted with a drawn sword, among the group of English politicians who are attempting to drown America in tea.<sup>50</sup> In 1775 Richard Henry Lee told John Adams that “we should inform his Majesty that we never can be happy, while the Lords Bute, Mansfield, and North, are his confidants and counsellors.”<sup>51</sup> For American colonists, Bute represented a powerful and enduring symbol of conspiracy and corruption at the center of the British political world, a symbol manufactured by British politicians for their own political purposes.

When they tried to explain the chain of events over the last decade before the American Revolution, colonists searched for a “moral identity between cause and effect, between motive and deed.”<sup>52</sup> As Gordon Wood argues, Americans of the Revolutionary Era generally preferred theories that involved conspiracy and corruption to either strictly mechanistic explanations for historical events, or to the notion that history was guided by a predetermined and unchangeable Providence. Thus, “colonists in effect turned their decade-long debate with the mother country into an elaborate exercise in the deciphering of British motives.”<sup>53</sup> For Americans looking back on the acts of Parliament passed in reference to them since 1765 under several ministries, it must have seemed that the British constitution, as they understood it, had failed beyond all repair. They found their explanation for those constitutionally traumatic events in the Whig opposition rhetoric that had been a part of their political culture since the Robinocracy. They knew that the king could do no wrong. They also knew from the writings of Bolingbroke and other “True Whig” writers that “such as serve the Crown for *Reward* may in Time sacrifice the Interest of the Country to their *Wants*.”<sup>54</sup> They knew that self-interested ministers employed their wiles, their money, and their patronage, to corrupt Parliament to their will. Americans saw no reason why the Parliament of Great Britain should threaten their constitutional rights of its own volition. It defied precedent. The Parliament would not pass such measures unless corrupted, and the king would surely not assent to them unless misadvised. The king could do no wrong, but the ministry certainly could, and two generations of English opposition writers had argued that the corrupt ministries of Great Britain wielded an undue influence on Parliament. The king’s ministers required greater wealth in order to extend their corrupting influence and rather than add to the tax burden of the mother country, they “extended their ravages to America.”<sup>55</sup>

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47 Church, *Liberty and Property Vindicated*, Bailyn, *Pamphlets*, 592.

48 See Robert Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 90. For other examples, see Middlekauff, 106, 127.

49 See Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, 122-123.

50 “America Swallowing the Bitter Draught,” *Royal American Magazine*, June, 1774, insert.

51 John Adams, *Diary*, in *Adams’ Works*, 2:362.

52 Gordon Wood, “Conspiracy and the Paranoid Style: Causality and Deceit in the Eighteenth Century,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ser. 39 (January, 1982), 418. See also Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, 144-159, *passim*.

53 Wood, “Conspiracy,” 421.

54 “Extracts from the Freeholder’s Political Catechism,” *Lord Bolingbroke: Contributions to the Craftsman*, Simon Vary, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 162.

55 John Wilkes, cited in Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, 131. See Bailyn’s explanation of the ministerial conspiracy theory in *Ideological Origins*, 129-137.

Although Americans often employed the language of “True Whig” opposition to frame their explanations of the causes of events that they came to view by 1776 as a systematic tyrannical usurpation of their English liberties by the British government, they never lost sight of the facts. Regardless of the origins of the legislation, by 1770 colonists had begun to see a pattern of arbitrary government that they could identify because they, or at least their grandparents, had seen it before. Given colonists’ understanding of their relationship with the metropolitan government, their grievances were very real. By 1775, the specific wrongs had begun to look very much like those attributed to James II and his evil ministers. The British government maintained a standing army in the colonies even though the nation was at peace just as James had done in England before William of Orange rescued the English nation from Stuart oppression. The British government had established a military officer as the supreme commander of the colonies. If James II had his Andros, George III had his Gage. Since 1763 the number of lucrative offices and places in colonial service had been multiplied with tax agents, admiralty agents, and military officers. Arbitrary courts, such as the Admiralty Court, operated in the colonies just as they had in the days of James II, and agents of the courts were given powers that were inimical to the rights of Englishmen. Assemblies had been “frequently and injuriously dissolved” by royal governors, and the agents of the people “discountenanced.”<sup>56</sup> Americans were taxed without their consent, and, in the case of New York and Massachusetts, their own popular assemblies had been either closed or rendered impotent to do the people’s business. The government in England employed arbitrarily raised taxes to support royal governors and other officials in the colonies, giving provincial governors independence from the colonial legislatures, and thus having “a direct tendency to render assemblies useless.”<sup>57</sup> This was the litany of the “destructive system of colony administration, adopted since the conclusion of the late war.”<sup>58</sup> According to the Continental Congress, “to a sovereign who ‘glories in the name of Britain,’ the bare recital of these acts, must, we presume, justify the loyal subjects, who fly to the feet of his throne, and implore his clemency for protection against them.”<sup>59</sup>

For many colonists, the Quebec Act provided further proof of British tyranny. The statute was enacted in June 1774, less than a month after the passage of the Intolerable Acts. Parliament passed the latter in order “to reduce the colonies to a proper subordination” and to punish Massachusetts for what many friends and foes of the colonies in Britain considered the wanton destruction of property, the “Boston Tea Party.”<sup>60</sup>

Because of its timing, colonists viewed the Quebec Act as another of the Intolerable Acts and therefore as further punishment directed by Parliament toward the errant Bay Colonists. The purpose of the Quebec Act was primarily to set the boundaries of the province of Quebec, to establish the authority of the governor and magistrates of the colony, and to protect the religious rights of citizens of the Canadian colony. “It is hereby declared,” the Act stated, “That his Majesty’s Subjects professing the Religion of the Church of *Rome*,” in Quebec, “may have, hold, and enjoy, the free Exercise” of their religion, and that “the Clergy of the said Church may hold, receive, and enjoy their accustomed Dues and Rights, with respect to such Persons only as shall profess the said Religion.”<sup>61</sup> Colonists saw the Act as an attempt by the government in London to place territory claimed by Virginia, Connecticut and

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56 “Petition of the Continental Congress to the King,” *Pennsylvania Magazine*, 48.

57 “Philadelphia Resolutions Against the Tea Act,” *Royal American Magazine*, January, 1774.

58 “Petition of the Continental Congress to the King,” 48. Virtually all of the above complaints are enumerated in this petition.

59 *Ibid.*, 49.

60 Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause*, 231.

61 The Quebec Act, June 22, 1774, cited in *Documents of American History*, 8<sup>th</sup> ed., Henry Steele Commager, ed. (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Meredith Corp., 1968), 75.

Massachusetts under arbitrary prerogative government and officially sanctioned Papism.<sup>62</sup> That the King of England, the defender of English Protestantism, should preside over or even sanction a Roman Catholic colony many American colonists found suspect. In his apocalyptic sermon in January 1774, Samuel Sherwood described “the Quebec Bill, for the establishment of popery,” as one of the “instruments that have been set to work” by a corrupt Parliament, to “strike at our temporal interest and property, as well as our civil and religious privileges.”<sup>63</sup> Among the acts that the First Continental Congress protested in their resolves of October 1774, was “the act . . . for establishing the Roman Catholick Religion in the province of Quebec, abolishing the equitable system of English laws, and erecting a tyranny there, to the great danger, from so great a dissimilarity of Religion, law, and government of the neighbouring British colonies.”<sup>64</sup> The vision of history and precedent ran strong in American minds. If the king and his ministry could establish arbitrary government and Popery by statute in Canada, why not elsewhere? If the evidence of tyranny was already apparent in the other American colonies, might not Popery be far behind?

By the winter of 1775, colonists had begun to lose faith in their king. In spite of their continued affirmations that they were still loyal subjects of the British Crown, Americans were at war with Great Britain. Despite entreaties, addresses, and petitions to the throne for redress and for peace, the King turned a deaf ear to his faithful subjects in his American colonies. He had, in fact, declared them in open insurrection. Still colonists were in a quandary. Moses Mather summed up the problem when he observed that Americans “have ever recognized” the authority of the king “as their rightful sovereign, . . . and now call upon him as their liege lord for protection, on pain of their allegiance, against the army, levied by the British Parliament, against his loyal and dutiful subjects.”<sup>65</sup> Mather imagined George III’s dilemma:

Methinks I hear the king, retired with his hand upon his breast, in pensive soliloquy, saying to himself, who, and what am I? A king, that wears the crown, and sways the scepter of Great-Britain and America. . . . Do my subjects in America, refuse to resign their liberties and properties to the disposal of my subjects in Great-Britain? . . . Have not my subjects in Great-Britain rights that are sacred and inviolable, and which they would not resign but with their lives? They have. Have not my subjects in America rights equally sacred, and of which they are ought to be equally tenacious? They have. . . . What shall I do for the dignity of my crown, the peace of my dominions, and the safety of the nation.<sup>66</sup>

In his mind’s eye, Mather envisioned the crux of the royal dilemma that became inevitable once the Parliament of Great Britain hit upon the idea of taxing American colonists directly in order to raise revenues. If the king refused his assent to parliamentary bills aimed at the colonies and thus fulfilled his role as protector of the rights of his American subjects, he broke with precedent, and by disallowing an act of Parliament, he wronged his ministry and his British subjects as represented in Parliament. If he allowed the bills to be enacted, he wronged his subjects in America and thus violated the protection-

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62 See “The Mitred Minuet: A Vision,” *Royal American Magazine*, October, 1774, 365; Moses Mather, *America’s Appeal to the Impartial World*, Sandoz, 480; Samuel Sherwood, *The Church’s Flight into the Wilderness*, Sandoz, 514; Samuel Langdon, *Government Corrupted by Vice, and Recovered by Righteousness* [election sermon] (Watertown, Massachusetts: Benjamin Edes, 1775), Plumstead, 360. See also Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, 119

63 Samuel Sherwood, *The Church’s Flight*, Sandoz, 514, 513.

64 “Declaration and Resolves of the First Continental Congress, October 14, 1774,” Commager, *Documents*, 84. See also “Address of the Continental Congress to the Inhabitants of Canada, May 29, 1775,” Commager, *Documents*, 91-92. Interestingly, this document makes no mention of the religious aspects of the Quebec settlement, only informing Canadians that the Act created a despotic government.

65 Moses Mather, *America’s Appeal to an Impartial World*, Sandoz, 474.

66 *Ibid.*, 484-485.

allegiance bond that colonists viewed as the most intimate constitutional link between each province and the mother country.

George III was no more likely to refuse his assent to parliamentary legislation than either of his two predecessors. By the beginning of his reign, political precedent and Whig ideological precept demanded that, while the king technically had the power of the royal veto, in practice he might not use it. The distinction between British constitutional theory and political reality was not as apparent to American colonists. Thomas Jefferson observed that Hanoverian kings were “conscious of the impropriety of opposing their single opinion to the united wisdom of two Houses of Parliament” and had therefore refrained from using the royal veto in the past.<sup>67</sup> Jefferson argued that changes in the circumstances of the government in London and the Empire itself, had “produced an addition of new, and sometimes, opposite interests” between his Majesty’s various dominions.<sup>68</sup> This conflict of interests between Britain and other realms ruled by the British monarch obliged the king to resume the exercise of his veto prerogative over Parliament “to prevent the passage of laws by any one legislature of the empire, which might bear injuriously on the rights and interests of another.”<sup>69</sup> Given both the prevailing philosophy of the executive in Britain and the political proclivities of the Hanovers, this was not a possibility.

The prevailing political idea of the Crown in the constitutional philosophy of Whig England in the Hanover period was that of the king in Parliament. This idea severely limited the powers of the Crown in terms of its ability to act as a balance in government. Saddled with a ministry theoretically chosen independently by the reigning monarch but actually usually comprised of members of the Court Whig political factions whose power base descended from the House of Commons, the king had lost much of the prerogative power attributed to him by constitutional theorists from Coke to Blackstone.<sup>70</sup> Among the most important royal functions that had fallen victim to the new political order was the king’s ability to veto parliamentary legislation that threatened the rights and privileges of the people. By the middle of the eighteenth century, Parliament had become a paramount legislative body, its laws invulnerable to review.<sup>71</sup> Thus, although the king theoretically had the power to constrain Parliamentary legislation that was injurious to his subjects by using the royal veto in response to petitions for redress of grievances, in practice the king was powerless to do so.

The royal dilemma was further complicated by the disparity between English and American understandings of the constitutional status of the colonies. Most British political thinkers of the mid-eighteenth century reasoned that all Britons, no matter where they resided, were virtually represented in the House of Commons.<sup>72</sup> The idea of virtual representation was, and had to be, maintained by the British government not only as a means of subordinating the colonies to Parliament but also in order to govern and tax a growing population of unrepresented Englishmen. As Soame Jenyns, a member of Parliament and of the Board of Trade, observed:

every Englishman is taxed, and not one in twenty represented: copyholders, leaseholders, and all men possessed of personal property only, chuse no representatives; Manchester, Birmingham, and many of our richest and most flourishing trading towns send no members to Parliament, [and] consequently cannot consent by their representatives, because they chuse none to represent them. . . . If the towns of Manchester and Birmingham, sending no

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67 Thomas Jefferson, *A Summary View of the Rights of British America*, in Max Beloff, ed. *The Debate on the American Revolution, 1761-1783*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Dobbs Ferry, New York: Sheridan House, 1989), 168.

68 *Ibid.*

69 *Ibid.*

70 For a study of the political constraints placed on George III in the early years of his reign, see Brewer, *Party Ideology*, 112-126. See also Keir, 296-298.

71 See Keir, 295.

72 See Reid, *The Authority to Tax*, 115-121, 239-240; Morgan, *Stamp Act*, 105-112.

representatives to Parliament, are notwithstanding there represented, why are not the cities of Albany and Boston equally represented in that Assembly? are they not alike British subjects? are they not Englishmen?<sup>73</sup>

American complaints that they could not constitutionally be taxed by a body that did not represent them fueled debate about representative government in Britain, and thus made it all the more important to institutional Whigs that the principle of virtual representation not be surrendered.<sup>74</sup>

Colonists had long asserted without serious contention from Britain that the American colonies were, essentially, “perfect States, no[t] otherwise dependent upon Great Britain than by having the same king, . . . having compleat legislatures within themselves.”<sup>75</sup> According to the prevailing theory among most colonists, their forefathers, at great personal risk, had settled in the American wilderness and had set up their own governments modeled on the English constitution “within the king’s allegiance.”<sup>76</sup> The American colonies were thus separate realms that shared the same king, much as Ireland and Scotland (before the union) had been separate states with a shared king in the past. Unlike other past separate British realms, like Chester and Durham, Wales, and Scotland, and to some extent Ireland, the American colonies had never been annexed to the kingdom of Great Britain by statute or conquest.<sup>77</sup> Thus, Americans viewed each colony as a realm of the king of Great Britain, constitutionally distinct from each other, as well as distinct and independent from the government of Great Britain, and connected to the mother country only by their charters and a shared sovereign, the king.<sup>78</sup> Each colony had its own assembly that represented the king’s provincial subjects and was the appropriate venue for the generation of taxes for that colony. Parliament had no right to tax any colony for the purpose of creating revenues because it did not represent the subjects there, nor even hold any authority over internal matters.<sup>79</sup> That the Parliament of Great Britain should presume to tax his Majesty’s provinces in North America violated colonists’ understanding of their fundamental relationship with the mother country. That their king should acquiesce to the arbitrary acts of a corrupt ministry and Parliament of Great Britain over the colonists’ complaints, remonstrances, and active protest, Americans came increasingly to view as tyranny.

From the spring of 1776, matters went from bad to worse. New England had been in a state of war with British troops for a year, with blood spilled on both sides. Congress, the colonial assemblies, and even British colonies in the West Indies had sent petitions to London, all of which were ignored by the British government.<sup>80</sup> America had few friends in London and none in government. In August 1775, the

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73 Soame Jenyns, *The Objections to the Taxation of Our American Colonies by the Legislature of Great Britain, Briefly Consider’d*, Beloff, 79.

74 See H.T. Dickinson, *Liberty and Property*, 217-220; Brewer, *Party Ideology*, 208-216.

75 Sir Francis Bernard to Lord Barrington, 23 November, 1765, Beloff, 86.

76 John Adams, “Novanglus No. VIII,” *Adams’ Works*, 4:122. See also Cook, *A Sermon*, Plumstead, 339; Mayhew, *the Snare Broken*, Sandoz, 240-241; [John Joachim Zubly,] *An Humble Inquiry into the Nature of Dependency of the American Colonies upon the Parliament of Great-Britain . . . by a Freeholder of South-Carolina* (1769), Sandoz, 272-273; Thomas Pownall, *The Administration of the British Colonies. The Fifth Edition. Wherein Their Rights and Constitution are Discussed* (London: J. Walter, 1774), 1:50-51.

77 *Ibid.*, 4:123. See also [Anon,] *The Liberty and Property of British Subjects Asserted In a Letter from an Assembly-man in Carolina To his Friend in London* (London: J. Roberts, 1727), 26-27.

78 John Adams, “Novanglus No. VIII,” *Adams’ Works*, 4:122

79 For a few examples of these sentiments, see Elliot, *Give Cesar His Due*, 14; Barnard (Harvard 1709), *The Presence of the Great God*, 22; Chauncy, *Civil Magistrates Must be Just*, 16; Samuel Cook, *A Sermon*, Plumstead, 328, 338-339; Mayhew, *The Snare Broken*, Sandoz, 240; [Zubly,] *An Humble Inquiry*, Sandoz, 270, *passim*; “To Mr. Green,” *Maryland Gazette*, March 27, 1766; [John Dickinson,] “Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania, To the Inhabitants of Great Britain, No. 2,” *Maryland Gazette*, December 31, 1767.

80 See “The Humble Petition and Memorial of the Assembly of Jamaica, December 28, 1774.” *Pennsylvania Magazine*, January, 1775, 95-96.

King had declared Americans to be in “open and avowed rebellion,” and in December Parliament had passed the American Prohibitory Act that halted trade with the colonies and gave American shipping the same status as enemy vessels. Henceforth American ships could be taken by the Royal Navy and “forfeited to his Majesty, as if the same were the ships and the effects of open enemies.”<sup>81</sup>

By the beginning of the summer of 1776, while the Continental Congress still stalled on the question of independence, the conviction grew among many American colonists that their king had forsaken them. “Petition no more, save to the King of Kings,” said one letter writer, who observed that an address to the king was, in effect, a petition to the very ministry that had caused the misery in America in the first place.<sup>82</sup> In May 1776, John Witherspoon admitted of the King, his ministry, and the Parliament and people of Great Britain that “many of their actions have probably been worse than their intentions.”<sup>83</sup> He added, however, that distance and differences made “a wise and prudent administration of our affairs” under the colonial system “as impossible as the claim of authority is unjust.”<sup>84</sup> Moses Mather noted late in 1775 that “the king, by withdrawing his protection and levying war upon us, had discharged us of our allegiance, and of all obligations of obedience.”<sup>85</sup> Mather argued that, since the king had forsaken his obligation to protect his American subjects, he had violated the protection-allegiance covenant. Thus, Mather claimed, “we are necessarily become independent.”<sup>86</sup> For Mather the choice of independence was made, not in America, but in London, when the king abandoned his American realms to Parliament and his ministry. “Our affections are weaned from Great-Britain,” he stated, “by similar means and almost as miraculously as the Israelites were from Egypt.”<sup>87</sup>

Members of the Continental Congress made a similar argument in May 1776. The committee appointed to frame the preamble to another address to England returned a report in which they stated that the king, “in conjunction with the Lords and Commons of Great Britain,” had withdrawn his protection from his subjects in North America.<sup>88</sup> The report noted that the king had ignored the petitions and addresses sent from the American colonies and had resorted to force against the American people. The committee resolved that governments be established in the colonies “as shall, in the opinion of the representatives of the people, best conduce to the happiness and safety of their constituents, and America in general.”<sup>89</sup>

By the spring of 1776 popular support for breaking ties with Great Britain had grown. An increasing number of Americans no longer viewed the king as their defender against the incursions of a renegade British ministry or a kept and corrupted Parliament. Instead colonists began to see the king as an active participant in their destruction. Much of the change of heart among American colonists was the result of the radical views of Thomas Paine, whose pamphlet *Common Sense* appeared in January, 1776. Paine’s pamphlet was the first widely circulated work that presented the argument against Great Britain in purely republican terms. He abandoned the traditional “True Whig” approach to opposition writing and

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81 Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause*, 315.

82 “To the Editor,” *Royal American Magazine*, December, 1774.

83 John Witherspoon, *The Dominion of Providence Over the Passions of Men*, Sandoz, 550.

84 *Ibid.*

85 Moses Mather, *America’s Appeal*, Sandoz, 489.

86 *Ibid.*

87 *Ibid.* For a similar comparison with a more millenarian flavor, see Samuel Sherwood, *The Church’s Flight*, Sandoz, 500.

88 “Committee Report, May 15, 1776,” *Adams’ Works*, 3:46.

89 *Ibid.*

struck at the very heart of the connection between Britain and the colonies as Americans understood it.<sup>90</sup> The author of *Common Sense* employed evidence from Scripture and history to make the argument that monarchy, even the best and most benign of monarchies, was ultimately destructive to popular liberty. For Paine, monarchy was “the most prosperous invention the Devil ever set on foot.”<sup>91</sup> He observed that “monarchy is ranked in Scripture as one of the sins among the Jews,” that “monarchy in every instance is the Popery of government,” and that hereditary kingship flies in the very face of nature, “otherwise she would not so frequently turn it into ridicule by giving mankind an *Ass for a Lion*.”<sup>92</sup> Paine admitted that England had been ruled by a few good kings since the Norman Conquest, but he announced that it had “groaned beneath a much larger number of bad ones.”<sup>93</sup> He even questioned the appropriateness of having a king as part of the English system of government. English kings, Paine argued, had “little more to do than make war and give away places; which in plain terms, is to impoverish the nation, and set it together by the ears.”<sup>94</sup> Paine noted that kings were the fount of patronage and, as such, were also the source of corruption and vice in the British Commonwealth. Britons, he noted, extolled their system of government because of “the republican and not the monarchical part of the constitution, . . . viz. The liberty of choosing an House of Commons from out of their own body.”<sup>95</sup> The monarchy that Americans clung to so tenaciously had done little more than sicken the English constitution—it had “poisoned the republic.”<sup>96</sup>

Paine characterized the king, not as the protector of the colonies, but as a tyrant who had “shewn himself . . . as an inveterate enemy to liberty,” who had “discovered . . . a thirst for arbitrary power.”<sup>97</sup> The king could, and often did, disallow colonial legislation at his whim. He would only be willing to allow colonial laws that suited his interests and purposes. Paine argued that, if Americans should become reconciled with Britain, the king, “the greatest enemy this continent hath, or can have, shall tell us ‘there shall be no laws but such as I like.’”<sup>98</sup>

Thomas Paine’s stand against monarchy in general, and the British monarchy in particular, went a long way toward dispelling Americans’ notions of the king as their protector. It offered a timely interpretation of the troubling events that had plagued the colonies since 1765. It provided them with a new language, that of pure republicanism, with which to describe their situation. Whig opposition thought still characterized the monarchy in Whig terms. “True Whig” writers might complain of ministerial corruption and of the dire effects that the growth of ministerial power had on the British constitution, but they nevertheless viewed the Crown as a necessary and beneficial branch of government. In fact, Lord Bolingbroke saw the king as the potential savior of the constitution, the best hope for the restoration of virtue and good government in Britain.<sup>99</sup> Likewise, Americans had depended on the king as a defender and patriot, who would willingly protect their local autonomy from an arbitrary British

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90 For a study of Paine and his works, see Eric Foner, *Tom Paine and Revolutionary America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976). For a short analysis of Paine’s ideas equated with vicarious regicide, see Winthrop Jordan, “Familial Politics: Thomas Paine and the Killing of the King, 1776,” *Journal of American History*, 60 (September, 1973), 294-308.

91 Paine, *Common Sense*, 30.

92 *Ibid.*, 30, 32-33.

93 *Ibid.*, 33.

94 *Ibid.*, 36.

95 *Ibid.*

96 *Ibid.*

97 *Ibid.*, 44.

98 *Ibid.*, 44-45.

99 See Kramnick, 163-168.

ministry and Parliament. Paine's rhetoric placed the king, not on the side of the angels, but at the very center of the British conspiracy to deprive Americans of their liberties. He also appealed to Americans' interests. He offered them both an historical context that demanded separation and a rosy picture of the results of that separation from Britain.

In May 1776, a number of towns and counties began to send instructions to their representatives in which they communicated their sentiments on the future of colonial relations with Great Britain.<sup>100</sup> In one such from Buckingham County, Virginia, the freeholders reflected their own understanding of their changed view of the king. When differences between Virginia and the mother country began, they explained that "we felt our hearts warmly attached to the king of Great Britain and the Royal Family."<sup>101</sup> The freeholders acknowledged that, at first, they had blamed the ministry and Parliament for their distress and had assumed that the king was "deceived and misguided" by his councillors.<sup>102</sup> They had hoped that their king would "in the proper time, open his eyes, and become a mediator between his contending subjects."<sup>103</sup> Events of the recent past, especially the "King's speeches, addresses, resolutions and acts of Parliament," however, convinced the Buckingham County freeholders that they could no longer expect help from the king. They recommended that their representative vote against reconciliation with Great Britain. Significantly, the citizens of Buckingham County closed their address with the following historical observation:

It was by Revolution, and the choice of the people, that the present Royal family was seated on the Throne of *Great Britain*, and we conceive the Supreme Being hath left it in our power to choose what Government we please for our civil and religious happiness, and when that becomes defective, or deviates from the end of its institution, and cannot be corrected, that the people may form themselves into another, avoiding the defects of the former. This we would now wish to have effected, as soon as the general consent approves, and the wisdom of our councils will admit; that we may, as far as possible, keep our primary object, and not lose ourselves in hankering after reconciliation with *Great Britain*.<sup>104</sup>

If Thomas Paine swept away the underpinnings of the alliance between king and people in America, Thomas Jefferson destroyed the covenant itself. In the *Declaration of Independence*, Jefferson laid the full blame for Americans' oppression, not on corrupt ministries or a renegade Parliament, but on King George III himself. Jefferson created, in effect, an American *Declaration of Right*, a summation of the "repeated injuries and usurpations" of a ruler who, like James II, had as his "direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over these states."<sup>105</sup>

Although the protection-allegiance covenant between the king and people was broken, the idea persisted in the new republican environment. For Thomas Paine, the covenant and the crown in a new

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100 Six of them are published in Pauline Maier, *American Scripture: Making the Declaration of Independence* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), 226-234.

101 "The Address and Instructions of the Freeholders [of Buckingham County, Virginia, May 13, 1776[?]]," in Maier, *American Scripture*, 226.

102 *Ibid.*

103 *Ibid.*

104 *Ibid.*, 228-229. For similar sentiments, see "Cheraws District, South Carolina, May 20, 1776," in Maier, *American Scripture*, 229; "Charles County, Maryland Instructions, June, 1776," Maier, *American Scripture*, 231; "Town Meeting of Topsfield, Massachusetts, June 21, 1776," Maier, *American Scripture*, 233; Richard Henry Lee to Landon Carter, Philadelphia, 2d June 1776, James Curtis Ballagh, ed., *The Letters of Richard Henry Lee*, 2 vols. (New York: MacMillan Co., 1912), 1:200.

105 "The Declaration of Independence: The Jefferson Draft with Congress's Editorial Changes," in Maier, *American Scripture*, 237.

American republic rested in the law, “for as in absolute governments the King is law, so in free countries the law *ought* to be King.”<sup>106</sup> Though philosophically sound, perhaps this notion lacked the human touch. For John Witherspoon and other divines, the appropriate protector of the new American nation was the King of Kings.<sup>107</sup> Jacob Cushing, the minister of Waltham, Massachusetts, announced that, unlike an earthly king, God would not “cast off his people, nor will he forsake his inheritance.”<sup>108</sup> Others placed the renewed covenant into the hands of their new secular leaders. For some, the new “fathers of their country,” were the framers of new republican constitutions, and the “honorable Senate and House of Representatives,” who it was hoped, would be “directed by supreme wisdom to such measures as will most effectively promote the best interests of their constituents.”<sup>109</sup> As the covenant passed to public officials, so the accolade of loving father followed. One minister observed of the elected officials under the new national Constitution, that “the people call them father: we are willing to be their political children, as long as they are good parents. . . . Should they not be *ministers of God for good* to the people, in every possible way?”<sup>110</sup> The lion’s share of royal attributes fell on the shoulders of the United States’ first martial hero, George Washington. Beginning as early as the summer of 1776, American Whigs launched a campaign that consciously compared the *personae* of the two Georges. George III, by his despotic and cruel behavior had forfeited the title of “father of his country.” He had become, in the words of Whig propagandists, “an unnatural father.”<sup>111</sup> George’s claim to patriarchy was lost when, “by withdrawing his protection and levying war upon” his American subjects, he violated the compact that existed between the king and his civil progeny.<sup>112</sup> As George III’s star waned, George Washington’s grew.

As early as 1776, American Whigs began to bestow paternal appellations on Washington that hitherto had been reserved for the king. One writer called him “our political Father and head of a Great People.” By 1778 the title “father of his country” was used with regularity in reference to the General. By 1779 Americans observed Washington’s birthday with the same enthusiasm that they had once reserved for the king’s birthday. American almanacs omitted the royal anniversary after 1778.<sup>113</sup>

Washington’s virtues, as expressed by his devotees, took on monarchical trappings in the British Whig tradition, but also often resembled the moral characteristics of great republican leaders and heroes from ages past. American writers like Thomas Paine, Philip Freneau and Francis Hopkinson compared the General’s character to that of Bolingbroke’s Patriot King.<sup>114</sup> American writers praised him for his disinterest in political affairs, for his sacrifice for the sake of his people’s liberty and property and for the

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106 Paine, *Common Sense*, 49.

107 See Witherspoon, *The Dominion of Providence*, Sandoz, *Political Sermons*, 545,547, passim; John Fletcher, *The Bible and the Sword: Or, the Appointment of the General Fast Vindicated . . .* (London, 1776), Sandoz, *Political Sermons*, 565; Abraham Keteltas, *God Arising*, Sandoz, *Political Sermons*, 589, passim.

108 Jacob Cushing, *Divine Judgements upon Tyrants: And Compassion to the Oppressed . . .* (Boston: Powars and Willis, 1778), Sandoz, *Political Sermons*, 619. See also Samuel Cooper, *A Sermon on the Day of the Commencement of the Constitution . . . of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts* (Boston: Fleet & Gill, 1780), Sandoz, *Political Sermons*, 646.

109 Samuel McClintock, *A Sermon on the Occasion of the Commencement of the New-Hampshire Constitution* (Portsmouth, New-Hampshire, 1784), Sandoz, *Political Sermons*, 802-803.

110 Israel Evans, *A Sermon Delivered at the Annual Election . . . of the State of New Hampshire* (Concord: George Hough, 1791), Sandoz, *Political Sermons*, 1070.

111 Cited in Paul K. Longmore, *The Invention of George Washington* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 204-205.

112 Moses Mather, *America’s Appeal*, Sandoz, *Political Sermons*, 489.

113 Longmore, *Invention of George Washington*, 204-205.

114 See Longmore, *Invention of George Washington*, 207; Barry Schwartz, *George Washington: The Making of a Symbol* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), 117.

“mild majesty of his morals and religion.”<sup>115</sup> Others saw in Washington an American Cincinnatus.<sup>116</sup> According to Mercy Otis Warren, “though possessed of equal opportunities for making himself the despotic master of the liberties of his country,” Washington “had the moderation repeatedly to divest himself of all authority, and retire to private life” to end his days on his plantation “in that tranquility which becomes the hero and the Christian.”<sup>117</sup>

Unlike kings, presidents died, or, to put it more succinctly, eponymous republican magistrates passed from office. The virtues and strengths of the first President of the United States, the father of the new nation, were not to be expected in his successors. Americans accorded the paternal title to Washington only; it seems that future presidents could no longer claim to be nursing fathers to their people. Washington’s title, thus, changed in meaning. The first president was the father of his country in the sense that he was its progenitor. Americans ascribed to future presidents, and indeed, Washington himself, republican rather than monarchical virtues. Thus, for a short time, the spirit of the covenant was sustained even after there was no king in America.

Historians generally recognize that American colonists’ loyalty to their king remained strong until 1776. They are less clear, however, as to why colonists sustained their loyalty as long as they did. To answer this question it is necessary to understand how colonists viewed the king as an actor in their political life, to grasp the concept of British kingship in the minds of American colonists. Describing the colonial conception of true kingship, of the king as nursing father of his people—how and why it arose, how it changed over time in the colonies, how the circumstances of colonial life gave it a peculiarly American resonance in colonial minds by the mid-eighteenth century—has been the purpose of this study.

Although the notion that government existed for the preservation of the liberty, property and Protestant religion of the governed had been a basic tenet of English political thought since at least the early 1600s, only after the Glorious Revolution did Britons comprehend that their king was an active participant in preserving these essential rights of Englishmen. William of Orange’s propaganda popularized the persona of the good English Protestant king, and Hanoverian publicists applied the image to the German rulers as part of their efforts to legitimize the dynasty and unite the nation under Whig Hanoverian rule.

The idea of good English kings traversed the Atlantic during the Glorious Revolution and subsequent reigns and became a prominent theme in American colonial political thought just as it was among Britons at home. The idea of Whig kingship resonated among Americans after their experience during the Stuart administrations in New England, New York, and elsewhere in the colonies. Americans, like many of their English brethren, viewed William III and his Hanoverian successors as champions of their civil and religious liberties against the forces of Romanism and oppression as represented by the Stuarts, their Jacobite supporters in Britain, and their allies on the Continent, the French and Spanish. Americans considered themselves active participants in the Glorious Revolution, as William of Orange’s allies in the struggle to end Stuart oppression and restore the rights of Englishmen everywhere. As a result of the Glorious Revolution and the ensuing settlement, Americans embraced a new idea of governance, the protection-allegiance covenant, that assumed that the king and his subjects were united in the primary objectives of government—the preservation of the liberties, property and Protestant religion of Englishmen in the British colonies. This idea persisted until the American Revolution.

By the reign of George II the Whig image of kingship was an important part of colonists’ political culture. While, as Gordon Wood observed, England possessed the most republican constitution of any

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115 Henry Holcombe, *A Sermon Ocasioned by the Death of Lieutenant-General George Washington, Late President of the United States of America*. . . (Savannah, Georgia: Seymour & Woolhopter, 1800), in Sandoz, *Political Sermons*, 1408.

116 See Schwartz, *George Washington*, 122-125.

117 Mercy Otis Warren, *History of the Rise, Progress and Termination of the American Revolution Interspersed with Biographical, Political and Moral Observations*. 2 Vols. (Boston: Manning and Loring, 1805; reprint, Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1988), 2:674-275.

European monarchy, the alterations in government, and particularly in the ruling dynasties of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, had the effect only of altering the nature of “kingly sanctity.”<sup>118</sup> By the reign of George I, neither Americans nor most Britons subscribed to the notions of divine kingship and absolute monarchy associated with the Stuarts and Bourbons. American colonists, nevertheless, viewed their ruler as sacrosanct. Under the Whig image of kingship, monarchs ruled by the consent of their subjects, yet, paradoxically, so long as they continued to live up to their role as protectors and defenders of Englishmen’s rights and religion, English kings were also the anointed of God. In the political sphere, Americans characterized their kings as “nursing fathers,” benevolent and just toward their subjects and ever vigilant to protect their political children.

The democratization of colonial government grew substantially over the course of the eighteenth century as colonial assemblies achieved more and more power over royal governors and councils. The growth of popular institutions in the North American provinces did not, however, necessarily diminish the constitutional role of the monarch as colonists understood it. While American political institutions appeared, at first glance, increasingly republican, colonists’ dependence on the king as a powerful ally in local affairs preserved the monarchical nature of their society. Although the medical careers of English rulers ended when George I abolished the royal touch, and the king’s public persona was much reduced, especially in Britain, by the first two Hanoverian rulers’ lack of enthusiasm for royal displays, Americans still considered their kings to be important figures in society and politics.<sup>119</sup>

Colonists viewed their rulers as arbiters of order and morality, and as political allies against any who would abridge their liberties. Since the king was seen to weigh in on the side of the people, he was often employed by the colonial assemblies as an ally against royal governors and other British officials, even when those officials were actively engaged in the promulgation of policies that originated with the Crown. Americans assumed that the king’s prerogatives were their last defense against tyranny, that an appeal to the throne for protection against encroachments upon their English liberties would be heard, and that their king would defend them. Their evidence for this assumption included the fact that bad governors had been recalled and that, after long controversies on such issues as permanent salaries for governors and money emissions, the Crown had often allowed the colonists to have their way. When the British government repealed the hated Stamp Act in 1766, American colonists gave credit to their king. Through the crises of Empire that followed the repeal, American colonists continued to hope that their ruler would come to his senses and deliver his provinces from the grip of a corrupt ministry and British Parliament.

The events of the year preceding the Declaration of Independence gradually eroded Americans’ faith in their king. New acts of Parliament, like the Coercive Acts and the Quebec Act, the escalation of the American crisis to open war and, finally, King George’s announcement that the American provinces were in open rebellion, made it difficult for colonists to maintain their rationalization of the king as a nursing father in the face of so much evidence to the contrary. Yet the idea continued to persist for lack of another political paradigm. It remained for Thomas Paine, Thomas Jefferson, and other American political thinkers to provide a new paradigm that suggested that, in America, a functional republic was possible without a king. Although the protection-allegiance covenant between good English kings and the American people died with the Declaration of Independence, notions of political leaders as nursing fathers persisted into the Early Republic and beyond.

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118 Wood, *Radicalism*, 98.

119 Wood, *Radicalism*, 98.