

Carlsbad 1819

Like another Chouannerie

Monarchism in America, 1776-1800

August 24, 2017 by Nulle Terre Sans Seigneur

You young men who have been born since the Revolution, look with horror upon the name of a King, and upon all propositions for a strong government. It was not so with us. We were born the subjects of a King, and were accustomed to subscribe ourselves 'His Majesty's most faithful subjects'; and we began the quarrel which ended in the Revolution, not against the King, but against his parliament.

— Rufus King (Federalist Party)

As the Sons of Liberty go marching, a victim of the rebellion, Elizabeth Johnston, a young Georgia loyalist, recalls (<https://archive.org/stream/recollectionsofg00john#page/44/mode/2up>):

In 1774 the Revolutionary War commenced at Boston and began to spread to the south-ward. In '76 the people in Georgia were inflamed against the Government of Great Britain, and were raising a ragged corps of all sorts. Some had guns with firelocks and some without, and all, gentle and simple, were made to declare whether they were on the side of the King or for the people whom we Loyalists, then termed Tories, called rebels. If a Tory refused to join the people, he was imprisoned, and tarred and feathered. This was a terrible indignity, the poor creature being stripped naked, tarred all over, and then rolled in feathers. I might once, if I would have gone to the window, have seen a poor man carried all over the town with the mob around him, in such a plight, but the idea was too dreadful. He was an inoffensive man, a British pilot. Our teachers became officers in the rebel army, and everywhere the scum rose to the top. All the public officers under Government remained loyal and quit the country, their estates being confiscated and afterward sold. My father, at the barking of a dog while he was shaving and preparing to dress that he might escape in his boat, looked up and saw an armed party near the house. He had just time to go through a door that opened into the garden, leap the fence, and lay himself down at a little distance in some tall grass which concealed him. He could hear the soldiers talking loudly to his servants and saying that he could not be far off, for his clothes and watch were in the room. If he was above ground, they said, they would surely have him.

When Massachusetts passed its Confiscation Act against the vacated loyalists on April 30, 1779, their choice of wording is quite revealing (<https://archive.org/stream/cu31924032743332#page/n187/mode/2up>): "Whereas every government hath a right to command the personal service of all its members, whenever the exigencies of the state shall

require it, especially in times of an impending or actual invasion, no member thereof can then withdraw himself from the jurisdiction of the government, and thereby deprive it of the benefit of his personal services, without justly incurring the forfeiture of all his property, rights and liberties, holden under and derived from that constitution of government, to the support of which he hath refused to afford his aid and assistance...”

But of course, the fact that they just published a bona fide case for the parliamentary right they're rebelling against all the same, is simply too obvious, and so they have to follow it up with a justification for why this case is different, and it boils down to the annulment of the colonial charter. The entire thing is clumsy and awkward. Even regarding their main argument, the loyalist Daniel Leonard responded (http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/1332#Leonard_0951_96) in *Massachusettsis*: “However sacred, they are forfeited through negligence or *abuse* of their franchises, in which cases the law judges, that the body politic has broken the condition upon which it was incorporated.”

Joseph Galloway, a moderate Patriot turned arch-loyalist, who in 1774 proposed to the Continental Congress a conciliatory plan of parliamentary union with Great Britain (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Galloway's_Plan_of_Union), would later try to plead for the return of the confiscated loyalist estates by appealing to the same principles of natural rights fashionable with the Americans, in *The Claim of the American Loyalists* (<http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/galloway-the-claim-of-the-american-loyalists>) (1788). Why, he's got Burlamaqui, Vattel, Puffendorff... they'll definitely give him back his shit now!

It didn't work. Natural law obeys only those who are on the right side of history.

It is known that the desire for independence was a controversial issue until quite late into the conflict. As late as 1774, illustrious Founding Fathers like Franklin, Jay, Jefferson, Washington and Madison were all confirming (<https://archive.org/stream/cu31924032743332#page/n51/mode/2up>), the general desire for a non-secessionist resolution to their grievances.

John Dickinson, on July 1, 1776, just three days before the signing of the Declaration of Independence, was quite unequivocal (<http://web.csulb.edu/~jlawler/Course%20DW/JohnDickinson.htm>), about monarchical constitutions:

There are many persons who, to gain their ends, extol the advantages of a republic over monarchy. I will not here undertake to examine which of these two forms of government merits the preference. I know, however, that the English nation, after having tried them both, has never found repose except in monarchy. I know, also, that in popular republics themselves, so necessary is monarchy to cement human society, it has been requisite to institute monarchical powers... Nor should I here omit an observation, the truth of which appears to me incontestable – the English constitution seems to be the fruit of the experience of all anterior time, in which monarchy is so tempered that the monarch finds himself checked in his efforts to seize absolute; and the authority of the people is so regulated that anarchy is not to be feared. But for us it is to be apprehended that, when the counterpoise of monarchy shall no longer exist, the democratic power may carry all before it and involve the whole state in confusion and ruin. Then an ambitious citizen may arise, seize the reins of power, and annihilate liberty forever...

Even a fanatic like Samuel Adams counted on the “wisdom and goodness of his present Majesty” in an article for the Boston Gazette on December 26, 1768.

The king was censured to the extent he sanctioned the “temporary interests and personal ambitions” of ministers, and not the institution of kingship itself. Slowly but surely, however, the cracks were opening up, and by the time we got to Tom Paine’s *Common Sense* being read aloud, the deal was set.

Nonetheless, while it was fun incarcerating loyalists in the atrocious copper mines of Old Newgate Prison (<https://allthingsliberty.com/2013/05/tory-stories-from-the-simsbury-copper-mine/>), and seizing gunpowder in a raid on the Fort William and Mary in Portsmouth, MA (<http://www.whatwouldthefoundersthink.com/the-fall-of-fort-william-and-mary>), (which was actually the first overt hostile military action in the Revolutionary War proper, 4 months before Lexington and Concord), once General Cornwallis surrendered and the Yorktown campaign came to a close, it became necessary to start thinking of *governing*.

It is common wisdom that America has no Toryist or monarchical traditions. It is the land of republicanism, baseball, apple pie and the Hart-Celler Act — few people deny this today. Except perhaps for the parts about baseball and apple pie; it now has gender-neutral bathrooms and quiche.

And certainly, monarchical *traditions* it falls quite short of having. But monarchical tendencies, suggestions, even propensities and inclinations?

It surely did. And not just that, for there were even a few conspiracies to enthrone These United States (or at least one of them) also.

“Monarchist” was a slur frequently thrown by Republicans against Federalists. One of the best examples is this 1817 pamphlet. (<https://archive.org/stream/royaltyoffederal00misc#page/n3/mode/2up>).

The charge: Federalists are crypto-royalists waiting to strike the death blow against America’s democratic government.

The evidence:

- 1) Hamilton once proposed the President and Senate be vested under good behavior (i.e. permanent tenure until impeached);
- 2) They don’t think highly of the French Revolution;
- 3) They don’t really care for Spanish American independence;
- 4) They think Britain is pretty dope;
- 5) Diplomatic correspondence discussing a possible defensive alliance between Britain, the U.S. and General Miranda’s independent Venezuela, which did not come to fruition. Miranda intended on establishing a mixed monarchy, and the fourth article in this proposed alliance uses the phrase “care be taken to strengthen [the alliance] by similarity in the political forms of the three governments,” this similarity being explicitly defined as “the enjoyment of civil liberty properly understood.” But since the two other states are monarchies, this is therefore taken to imply an intention for establishing throne and altar on America;
- 6) Fisher Ames doesn’t like democracy;
- 7) Federalist newspapers sometimes say unflattering things about democracy.

Why, the case is simply damning...

Certainly though, anti-democratic sentiments abound amongst Federalists. It’s all fine and dandy to yell “no taxation without representation” at colonial governors, and to uphold the “firm league of friendship” specified by the Articles of Confederation and to “[not] enter into any treaties or alliances,

nor coin money, nor regulate the value thereof, nor ascertain the sums and expenses necessary for the defense and welfare of the United States, or any of them, nor emit bills, nor borrow money on the credit of the United States, nor appropriate money,"...

But there comes a time after Patriots who didn't get the memo and refuse to pay the excise on distilled spirits (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Whiskey_Rebellion), and after Shaysites reliving the spirit of '76 (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shays'_Rebellion), that it becomes an imperative to Oh Please, Tread on Me — democratic-republican aspirations to the contrary notwithstanding.

The overall objectives of Federalist policy were well summarized (<https://archive.org/stream/worksfisherames03kirkgoog#page/n22/mode/2up>), in a biographic introduction to the works of Fisher Ames. These included: the maintenance of credit, and the repayment of war debts; a system of internal taxation independent of foreign trade balances; pacts with the Indians; alignment with Britain and Spain over France in foreign affairs; internal improvements, etc.

Developmentalist, centralist and in a certain sense "conservative," though not outwardly royalist.

The political thought of John Adams serves as something of an anchor point by which to understand Federalist motivations. The differences between him and Hamilton boiled down to the latter's more enthusiastic avowal of commercial development, with Adams' conception of wealth being mostly in land, whereas Hamilton's was in manufactures and tradable securities — this was nevertheless enough to make the men rivals. Indeed, several High Federalists like Fisher Ames regarded public indebtedness as an augmentation of private savings, and generally held to a "harmony of interests" conception between agriculture and industry.

In any event, Adams thought in terms of a class division between "gentlemen" and "common men," i.e. those educated in the liberal arts and in civic virtue versus those who are not. In practice, this tended to correlate greatly with wealth. The passion for the acquisition of property trumps political ideals, and therefore the ultimate purpose of government is to maintain a steady-state status quo where the poor are not impoverished further, and the rich not expropriated. For this, a constitution involving representation divided between these two orders, a de facto "peerage" and a commons, is necessary, along with a strong executive holding a long term, and an independent judiciary.

The High Federalists were more confident in a unitary government, whereas Adams saw the need for a legal representation of these two contending interests — in practice these ended up being political parties. The executive as the "referee," however, did not pan out too well.

As the Constitutional Convention was being planned and the turmoil from the Shaysites and other internal rebellions were leaving their impact on public opinion, doubts about republicanism were entertained.

William Plumer, prominent New England Federalist, stated in 1784: "I do not feel hostile to either democracy, autocracy, or monarchy. I am inclined to think the people are much more interested in the good administration than in the theory or form of the government — Or, as Pope expresses it, 'That government is best which is administered best.' "

John Jay, in 1786, had his fears: "Much, I think is to be feared from the sentiments which such a state of things is calculated to infuse into the minds of the rational and well-intended. In their eyes, the charms of liberty will daily fade; and in seeking for peace and security, they will too naturally turn towards

systems in direct opposition to those which oppress and disquiet them. If faction should long bear down law and government, tyranny may raise its head, or the more sober part of the people may even think of a king."

Madison's Federalist No. 39 notes the tenuous nature of defining what makes a government uniquely republican, pointing out Holland and Venice with their stadtholders and doges being legitimated through non-popular means. He thus proposes an identity between republicanism and popular sovereignty: "If we resort for a criterion to the different principles on which different forms of government are established, we may define a republic to be, or at least may bestow that name on, a government which derives all its powers directly or indirectly from the great body of the people, and is administered by persons holding their offices during pleasure, for a limited period, or during good behavior."

Thus, a doge with lifetime tenure can still be republican, if he is elected by a people (or representatives thereof) with civic equality, i.e. not divided into hereditary orders.

Rufus King favored lifetime tenure for the executive during the Constitutional Convention, and on July 20, 1787 he said that the executive "ought not to be impeachable unless he hold his office during good behavior, a tenure which would be most agreeable to him; provided an independent and effectual forum could be devised [for impeachment]."

John Adams' views were conflicting, but in letters he wrote to Roger Sherman in July 1789, he could be found stating that the established constitutional government represented a "monarchical republic," or a "limited monarchy."

To better understand these desires for executive supremacy, we ought to examine in greater detail the thought of America's most famous (but still nowhere near famous enough) intransigent anti-democrat, Fisher Ames.

Probably the best summary of the property-holder republican ideal is [this](https://archive.org/stream/influencesdemoc02ewbagoog#page/n154/mode/2up) (<https://archive.org/stream/influencesdemoc02ewbagoog#page/n154/mode/2up>):

Those who possess property, who enjoy rights, and who reverence the laws, as the guardians of both, naturally think it important, and what is better, feel the necessity of supporting the controlling and restraining power of the state : in other words, their interests and wishes are on the side of justice because justice will secure to every man his own. On the other hand, those who do not know what right is, or if they do, despise it; who have no interest in justice, because they have little for it to secure, and that little, perhaps, its impartial severity would transfer to creditors; who see in the mild aspect of our government, a despot's frown, and a dagger in its hand, while it scatters blessings; who consider government as an impediment to liberty, and the stronger the government, the stronger the impediment; that it is patriotism, virtue, heroism, to surmount it ; that liberty is to be desired for its abstract excellence rather than its practical benefits, and, therefore, that it is better to run the hazard of the greatest possible degree of a perishable liberty, rather than to accept it with those guards and defences, which, to insane theorists, seem to make it less, but which, on the just analogies of experience, promise to make it immortal; those, in a word, who look on government with fear and aversion, on the relaxation or subversion of it, with complacency and hope ; all who from credulity, envy, anger, and pride, from ambition or cupidity, are impatient under the restraints, or eager for the trappings of power.

His most pertinent essay, however, was “The Dangers of American Liberty.” (1805)

The two main political dangers in the United States, as Ames sees it, are the private ambitions of state governments, and the democratic licentiousness of factions tearing down constitutional norms.

He gives an example by quoting Cicero, who said that “it is not possible for the people of Rome to be slaves, whom the gods have destined to the command of all nations,” with the humor in hindsight being that this was allegedly uttered but six months before Octavian became Augustus.

He likens the Articles of Confederation to the Amphictyonic League of Greek antiquity, with Virginia playing the role of Macedon. This is likely in reference to Madison’s Virginia Resolutions of 1798 (https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Virginia_Resolutions_of_1798), which in conjunction with Jefferson’s far more radical Kentucky Resolutions of the same year proclaimed the much controversial anti-federalist doctrine of nullification, being both a potential threat to the union in the long run, and in the short run a response to the Alien and Sedition Acts that were to a large degree motivated by the vitriolic attacks emanating from the Republican press.

Ames describes the weak bonds and fiscal laxity of the Articles of Confederation as being akin to a condition where “the king of New York levied imposts on Jersey and Connecticut; and the nobles of Virginia bore with impatience their tributary dependence on Baltimore and Philadelphia.”

“Publick affairs are transacted now on a stage, where all the interest and passions grow out of fiction, or are inspired by the art, and often controlled at the pleasure of the actors,” he laments. FAKE NEWS: older than CNN thinks.

Already, by the 1800s, Ames notes the decline of patriotism (<https://archive.org/stream/worksfisherames03kirkgoog#page/n464/mode/2up>) in favor of parochial interests, which certainly foreshadows many later events:

When we talk of patriotism as the theme of declamation, it is not very material, that we should know with any precision what we mean. It is a subject on which hypocrisy will seem to ignorance to be eloquent, because all of it will be received and well received as flattery. If, however, we search for a principle or sentiment, general and powerful enough to produce national effects, capable of making a people act with constancy, or suffer with fortitude, is there any thing in our situation that could hate produced, or that can cherish it? The straggling settlements of the Southern part of the union, which now is the governing part, have been formed by emigrants from almost every nation of Europe. Safe in their solitudes alike from the annoyance of enemies and of government, it is infinitely more probable, that they will sink into barbarism than rise to the dignity of national sentiment and character. Patriotism, to be a powerful or steady principle of action, must be deeply imbued by education and strongly impressed both by the policy of the government and the course of events. To love our country with ardour, we must often have some fears for its safety ; our affection will be exalted in its distress ; and our self-esteem will glow on the contemplation of its glory. It is only by such diversified and incessant exercise, that the sentiment can become strong in the individual, or be diffused over the nation.

Ultimately, Ames proclaims the death of the Federalist project:

Federalism was, therefore, manifestly founded on a mistake, on the supposed existence of sufficient political virtue, and on the permanency and authority of the publick morals.

Ames predicted American democracy would end with a military dictatorship. The way it actually ended, of course, turned out to be much more ingenious and absurd all the same. (<https://unqualified-reservations.blogspot.com/2007/05/genius-of-new-deal-design.html>).

That the Founders had plenty of doubts over the sustainability of a republic, and great flirtations with a unitary executive and permanent tenures, there is no doubt.

But what of actually trying to establishing a Crown of America?

There were at least five notable instances, in fact. They ranged from simple attempts at persuading figures of authority, to elaborate and even treasonous conspiracies.

The first and most famous was the Newburgh letter of Colonel Lewis Nicola (distinct from but in its proximate causes related to the Newburgh conspiracy) sent on May 22, 1782. It had already been a year since General Cornwallis' surrender and the close of the Yorktown campaign, with American victory essentially secured by that point. However, payments to the Continental Army were being withheld.

Nicola's letter (https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Newburgh_letter) declares himself to be "not that violent and mirer of a republican form of government that numbers in this country are." The three examples of republics he gives are Venice, Genoa and Holland, ones he says achieved brief moments of greatness followed by stagnation. He says the English constitution is the closest to perfection, but with two defects that can be remedied: have elections be made annual and limited to property-owners residing in the countries and a few large trading cities, and have the king's fisc be limited to his demesne.

Besides proposing a large system of congressional land grants and debt repudiation, the real kicker comes at the end:

This war must have shewn to all, but to military men in particular the weakness of republics, & the exertions the army has been able to make by being under a proper head, therefore I little doubt, when the benefits of a mixed government are pointed out & duly considered, but such will be readily adopted; in this case it will, I believe, be uncontroverted that the same abilities which have lead us, through difficulties apparently unsurmountable by human power, to victory & glory, those qualities that have merited & obtained the universal esteem & veneration of an army, would be most likely to conduct & direct us in the smoother paths of peace.

Some people have so connected the ideas of tyranny & monarchy as to find it very difficult to seperate them, it may therefore be requisite to give the head of such a constitution as I propose, some title apparently more moderate, but if all other things were once adjusted I believe strong arguments might be produced for admitting the title of king, which I conceive would be attended with some material advantages.

I have hinted that I believed the United States would be benefited by my scheme, this I conceive would be done, by having a savage & cruel enemy seperated from their borders, by a body of veterans, that would be as an advanced guard, securing the main body from danger. There is no doubt but Canada will some time or other be a seperate State, and from the genius & habits of the people, that its government will be monarchical. May not casualties produce enmity between this new State & our Union, & may not its force under the direction of an active prince prove too powerful for the efforts of republics? It may be answered that in a few years we shall acquire such vigour as to baffle all inimical at temps. I grant that our numbers & riches will increase, but will our governments have energy enough to draw them forth? Will those States remote from the danger be jealously anxious to assist those most exposed? Individuals in Holland abound in wealth, yet the government is poor & weak.

Republican bigots will certainly consider my opinions as heterodox, and the maintainer thereof as meriting fire & faggots, I have therefore hitherto kept them within my own breast. By freely communicating them to your Excellency I am persuaded I own no risk, & that, tho disapproved of, I need not apprehend their ever being disclosed to my prejudice.

Washington's reply was one of great shock (http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/2414#Washington_1450-10_396): "Let me conjure you, then, if you have any regard for your Country, concern for yourself or posterity, or respect for me, to banish these thoughts from your mind, and never communicate, as from yourself or any one else, a sentiment of the like nature."

Just a month later (June 23, 1872), Gen. James Mitchell Varnum (later an Ohio pioneer), at the time an officer in the Rhode Island militia, sent a letter to Washington despairing over the instability under the Articles of Confederation in a very stark and alarmed tone that he fears drastic measures might emerge:

Such is the dreadful Situation of this Country that it is in the Power of any State to frustrate the Intention of all the others — This Calamity is so Founded in the Articles of Confederation, and will continually increase 'till that baseless Fabric shall yield to some kind of Government, the Principles of which may be correspondent to the Tone of the Passions. The Citizens at large are totally destitute of that Love of Equality which is absolutely requisite to support a democratic Republic: Avarice, Jealousy & Luxury controul their Feelings, & **consequently, absolute Monarchy, or a military State, can alone rescue them from all the Horrors of Subjugation.** — The circulating Cash of the Country is too trifling to raise a Revenue by Taxation for supporting the War, — & too many of the People are obstinately averse to those artificial Aids which would supply its Deficiency. In this Situation every Moment augments our Danger, by fixing the Habits of Licentiousness, and giving Permanency to British Perseverance: And should Dejection in our Ally proceed to Misfortune, the Instability of national Policy may give Place to the Sentiments of the mediating Powers, 'that we are too young to govern ourselves.

Washington's response was much more measured, since it was more of a distressed observation than a proposal for an American throne.

The third incident was much more serious. It is known in historiography as the "Haldimand affair." A good summary can be found [here](https://allthingsliberty.com/2013/11/ethan-allen-patriot-land-promoter-turncoat/). (<https://allthingsliberty.com/2013/11/ethan-allen-patriot-land-promoter-turncoat/>).

The modern territory of Vermont was for decades a contested area between New York and New Hampshire, each selling land grants. Although in 1764 George III ruled in favor of New York, the governor of NH persisted. In addition, a paramilitary force called the Green Mountain Boys led by Ethan Allen emerged to protect their lands from New York's jurisdiction, resulting in a series of non-decisive skirmishes.

With the American revolutionary war in force, by 1780 the outcome of the war was still not entirely certain and thus the British military authorities, as part of a broader plan, drafted a proposal for a separate peace with Vermont, which declared independence in 1777 (unrecognized by the Continental Congress). Because of the Canadian border being dominated by loyalists and Britain controlling Lake Champlain, the Vermonters were in a vulnerable position.

Lord Germaine wrote to Frederick Haldimand, Governor General of Quebec:

The drawing over the inhabitants of the country they call Vermont to the British Crown appears a matter of such vast importance for the safety of Canada, and as affording a means of annoying the northern revolted provinces that I think it right to repeat to you the King's wishes that you may be able to effect it, though it should be attended with considerable expense.

At some point, negotiations began between a loyalist officer, Justus Sherwood, and Ethan Allen, initially for a prisoner exchange and truce with Canada, with the understanding that discussions of Vermont joining the British Empire would also take place.

Ira Allen and Joseph Fay were dispatched by the legislature to meet with Sherwood and Dr. George Smyth, a Tory physician, sometime around November 9, 1780, inconclusively.

Internal British correspondence spoke of establishing a solid northern front and deterring territorial claims of NY and NH. On May 9, 1781, the prisoner exchange took place with Ira Allen and several of his escorts, greeted by Justus Sherwood and Major Dundas.

Per Sherwood's testimony, Allen was "very cautious and intricate." But eventually, he ostensibly relented (<https://archive.org/stream/reluctantrepubli00vand#page/270/mode/2up>):

Allen, apparently grown weary of pestering and confusing the earnest Sherwood, now demanded that he have a personal interview with Haldimand himself. When this was refused him, he wrote the Governor General in what the letter's recipient thought were "abstruse terms." Haldimand's reply was sent by his adjutant. Major Lernoult, who told Allen that Vermont must either rejoin Great Britain "or continue at enmity with it." Lernoult also brought the Governor General's ironic apology for answering Allen's letter orally. He explained that Haldimand did not care to have his communications read aloud in Congress.

Perhaps in reprisal for that slap, Allen let the British commissioner suffer a little longer. May 20, Sherwood wrote that his opponent was still pursuing "the same equivocal and tedious line" and "says many plausible things but nothing to the point."

Five days then intervened, and at some time in the course of these the British agent must have felt a thrill of triumph and the Vermont a hidden spasm of amusement. Ira Allen abandoned his objections and doubts — they must have begun to irk even himself — and agreed, incredibly, with Sherwood. In the exaltation of this achievement, Haldimand's deputy seems to have cast his last suspicion away.

Hostilities were to be suspended until after the next meeting of the legislature — longer than that if Haldimand deemed it wise. At this imminent session, an attempt would be made to appoint commissioners who would conclude a formal alliance between Vermont and Great Britain.

The Vermont authorities were to make every effort "to prepare the people" for reunion. Messages to the conspirators — Chittenden, the Aliens, Timothy Brownson, Jonas Fay, John Fassett, and Matthew Lyon were named — were to be forwarded from Haldimand by a trustworthy messenger and in a form for immediate swallowing if necessary.

The long contest of wits was over. Ira Allen had obtained essentials for the government of Vermont — time, immunity from British attack, a weapon with which to threaten American aggressors — and had paid for them with only more empty promises. He had completely overcome the original hostilities and suspicions of an extremely intelligent man.

Were the Allens following their economic interests, genuinely deciding to become turncoats, or playing 4D chess, is quite controversial and difficult to ascertain due to sparse documentation.

Regardless, by August 1781, the Continental Congress had approved a proposal for Vermont's statehood, and though correspondence between the Allens and Haldimand was maintained up to 1783, indeed Ethan Allen writing late into it that "I shall do everything in my power to render this state a British province" — the Yorktown campaign and the prospects of joining the United States ended up turning diplomacy with the British on the Vermont Question into a series of stalling and diversions.

A fourth and similar incident involving Kentucky would end up known as the "Spanish conspiracy" (http://history.hanover.edu/hhr/98/hhr98_1.html), its primary episode lasting from 1787 to 1790.

General James Wilkinson, a veteran of the Continental Army. By 1785, he would become a mainstay of Kentucky's politics (still a part of Virginia at the time), embroiling him in the struggle for independent statehood, a problem for which he'd come up with a very interesting solution.

He evidently achieved a lot of respect from the locals, not least of which because of the fact that a man of his status was an unusual one to emigrate to the West. Wilkinson's biographer writes:

When a midwife was needed he stood by; when neighbors needed a physic he prescribed – salts, tartar, laudanum, and blistering 'plaisters' were some of his favorite remedies; and hence Charles Scott, a friend of Revolutionary days, was urged to have a 'snug little apartment' of them when he came to Kentucky.

During the third convention assembled in 1785 for discussing Kentucky's separation, a petition was passed to the Virginia Assembly, which in turn responded with an enabling act that, rather than convening a constitutional convention, required the gathering of an intermediate convention on September 1786 under Virginia's strict conditions.

Wilkinson and others thus began calling for a unilateral secession. The September convention was postponed for January 1787 due to the delegates embarking on an unforeseen campaign against Indian tribes of the north. Virginia would then pass a second enabling act pushing the relevant dates further, embittering public opinion.

In April of 1787, Wilkinson took matters into his own hands and sailed for New Orleans, under the jurisdiction of Spanish Louisiana. There, he proposed to Governor Esteban Rodriguez Miro that a monopoly for the Mississippi river trade be established under Wilkinson's control to promote both Spanish and Kentuckian interests. In August, he signed an expatriation declaration, swearing allegiance to the King of Spain.

Using an interesting application of the social compact theory of government, he justified himself thus:

Born and educated in America, I embraced its cause in the last revolution, and remained throughout faithful to its interest, until its triumph over its enemies: This occurrence has now rendered my services useless, discharged me of my pledge, dissolved my obligations, even those of nature, and left me at liberty, after having fought for her happiness, to seek my own; circumstances and the policies of the United States having made it impossible for me to obtain this desired end under its Government, I am resolved to seek it in Spain...

He soon obtained permission from Governor Miro "to direct or cause to be brought into [Louisiana], by inhabitants of Kentucky, one or more launches belonging to him, with cargoes of the productions of that country," which ended up making him the sole authorized exporter from Kentucky to Spanish Louisiana.

He explained in a memorial his suspicion that the then United States likely approved of the tumult in the Western territories serving as a migration barrier to maintain "preeminence of the Atlantic states," and that therefore the practical choices at hand for the West would be alliance with either Spain or Britain.

Wilkinson recommended an American agent of Spain be appointed to Kentucky:

I comprehend that it is not out of reason that a man of great popularity and political talents, co-operating with the causes above mentioned, will be able to alienate the Western Americans from the United States, destroy the insidious designs of Great Britain and throw those (Western Americans) into the arms of Spain.

Upon returning to Kentucky in 1788, the Articles of Confederation were in the process of being superseded, and so new constitutional circumstances led to the cancelation of the prior enabling act. This had the effect of creating anti-federalist sentiment. Wilkinson continued his correspondence with Miro, while at the same time an associate of Wilkinson's, John Brown of Kentucky, entered discussions with Don Diego de Gardoqui regarding Kentucky's use of the Mississippi river. However, Brown began growing uneasy of the scheme.

As the seventh convention for resolving the independence question was held in Denville, KY on Nov 3, 1788, Wilkinson was elected chair. As he delivered his address, he gave the floor to Brown, who proceeded to give a restrained and dispassionate explanation of his discussions with the Spanish minister, diminishing Wilkinson's momentum. Increasingly large demands on part of Wilkinson regarding pensions and other amenities ended up drawing away Spanish enthusiasm also, and Spain's opening up of its New Orleans port also killed any remaining economic advantage. Kentucky joined the union on June 1, 1792.

The "Spanish conspiracy" is especially notable for the sheer brazenness of its main conspirator, but once again it can be written off to material interests.

The fifth and last case, however, is probably the most interesting of all. It was a conspiracy involving U.S. representatives who acted out of sincere ideological conviction, although it would meet a rather premature end.

It has become known as the "[Prussian scheme \(https://archive.org/stream/jstor-1832837/1832837#page/n1/mode/2up\)](https://archive.org/stream/jstor-1832837/1832837#page/n1/mode/2up)."

The Prussian scheme, occurring sometime in 1786, was, for a century nothing more than an urban legend. There were two versions: one reported by Baron von Steuben's biographer, Friedrich Kapp, in a circle of Steuben's associates discussing politics and government, someone asked (whether or not in jest) if Prince Henry of Prussia, the younger brother of Frederick the Great, would accept an invitation and if he were to make for a competent executive. Steuben's answer: "As far as I know the prince he would never think of crossing the ocean to be your master. I wrote to him a good while ago what kind of fellows you are; he would not have the patience to stay three days among you."

A second version involves a memorandum from Rufus King in 1824 where he recounts that James Monroe had expressed the opinion that a group of Federalists around Washington's time had been exponents of monarchy, and had cited an alleged attempt involving a written letter by Nathaniel Gorham, Massachusetts delegate to the Constitutional Convention, to crown Prince Henry.

However, in the early 20th century, an autograph draft of a letter was discovered in the royal Hausarchiv in Charlottenburg, addressed from Prince Henry to Baron von Steuben (undated, but likely written around April 1787):

Your letter from the 2nd of November has reached me. I received it with all the feeling of grateful recognition of surprise. Your good intentions are worthy of my esteem; they seem to me to be a zeal that I would like to acknowledge, while my surprise is a continuation of the news which I learn from the letter of one of your friends. I confess that I can not believe that it was possible to resolve to change the principles of government which have been established in the United States of America, but should the whole nation agree to establish another, and choose for its model the constitution of England, which according to my judgment I must admit that it is of all the constitutions that appears to me the most perfect. We have the advantage that if, as in all human settlements, there is something defective, that it could be corrected and good laws made such that the balance is better established between the sovereign and the subjects, that neither one nor the other could ever encroach on the rights allocated respectively to each. [...] I'm going to France this autumn, maybe I'll find one of your friends. The French are, until now, the true allies of the United States of America. It seems to me that nothing great will be able to be done in your house, unless the alliance is contrived.

"One of your friends" is indeed quite likely Nathaniel Gorham. It is also very interesting that Prince Henry proposes that if a monarch is to be selected for the United States, it ought to be a French one. The influence from Montesquieu is also evident.

Nathaniel Gorham's own views are difficult to ascertain, because he left a dearth of writing. However, he was an enthusiastic federalist and is reported by the historian and archivist Jeremy Belknap to have given a speech in the Massachusetts state convention for ratifying the Constitution extolling the advantages of the Presidency, specifically the "advantage of the responsibility of *one man*," which certainly suggests some attraction to the idea of a final absolute decision-maker at the least.

With that, our tour of *monarchism in America* is at an end. No, the redcoat is not quite American. But it is also not quite un-American either, so perhaps it is not that outlandish to consider it. Nathaniel Gorham certainly didn't think it was.

All I'm trying to say is that far-right Americans who aren't writing letters inviting European royalty to stage a coup, are all a bunch of cucks. That's all.

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3 thoughts on "Monarchism in America, 1776-1800"

1. Pingback: [Monarchism in America, 1776-1800 | Reaction Times](#)

2. [Philippe-Joseph Salazar](#) says:

[August 28, 2017 at 8:29 am](#)

"That's all". I like your coda, it has the ring of a Ciceronian final clause. Insightful essay.

[Reply](#).

3. [marcusmontisursinensis](#) says:

[September 11, 2017 at 7:32 pm](#)

I wonder who would have succeeded King Henry (without the number or maybe even the Ninth?!). In 1786 he was 60, childless, his wife well but too old to have children. Moreover, Henry was not known for showing any interest into women.

Henry, was the second of the three younger brothers of childless Frederick the Great. Thus, he did have a younger brother who had sons, and whose inheritance would not threaten a personal union with Prussia (the Prussian throne passed to the son of the eldest of Frederick's younger brothers, Frederick William II, who already had several sons in 1786).

Still, I consider a Bernadotte-style adoption (which could not be followed as a precedent as it happened only in 1810) by Henry more probable.

Reply.

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