

Nick Whalen

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Review Essay #1, Course Week 2

The first three chapters of Robert Middlekauff's *The Glorious Cause: The American Revolution, 1763-1789* begins its narrative of the period leading to the American Revolution during the French and Indian war of the midcentury in North America. Middlekauff's decision to begin the narrative at this point is directly related to the ascension of George III to the English Crown in 1760. George III brought a philosophy of governance that represented somewhat of a departure from the philosophies of previous kings, particularly his grandfather, George II. These differences in philosophy, a newness of society and distance from England in the American colonies, in conjunction with a "radical Whig understanding of politics [that] had embedded itself deeply in American minds," that was at odds with the transformation of governance of the colonies during George III's reign, created the situations that would eventually culminate in the Revolution.<sup>1</sup>

King George III's political education, Middlekauff explains, did not come especially from his grandfather on the throne, but rather from an advisor of his mother, John Stuart, the Earl of Bute.<sup>2</sup> As Middlekauff posits, "Bute himself knew much but did not understand men or human conduct."<sup>3</sup> George III was "proud, and intolerant" of views that did not match his own, and had a "suspicion in Parliament" that was strongly at odds with the ideologies of commoners of the English cities and those who believed so strongly in the rights of governance of the American colonial assemblies.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, George III, like all Kings to that point in England, were of divine right, and the belief was, according to Johann Sommerville in *Ideology, Property, and the Constitution*, that "God had entrusted the king with the government of the realm."<sup>5</sup> Since the wars that the English had fought over the previous century wars were expensive, George III would employ his rigid views of governance in order to collect funds from any available source. Furthermore, following the French and Indian War, George III decided to maintain a standing army in North America, which would add to England's debt and require financial maintenance.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the genesis of English colonial establishment occurring more than a century prior to the French and Indian War, both Middlekauff and the author of another one of the texts, Jack P. Greene's *Peripheries and Center: Constitutional Development in the Extended Politics of the British Empire and the United States, 1607-1788*, seem in agreement that there were important demographic and geographic factors that persisted between the American colonies and England. According to Greene, unlike in England, the American colonies were composed of "emigrants and their descendants, [which were] new settler populations" that were essentially "new societies."<sup>7</sup> Middlekauff describes several of the populations that had come to inhabit the colonies including English, Scotch-Irish, German, Dutch, and Scots on pages 34-35. He continues to explain that one commonality between all of these groups was that they were "people who could not stand further oppression whether in poverty or persecution."<sup>8</sup> Beyond the newness of American society, the colonies were located "three thousand miles away," and that the "distance made such a goal [firm incorporation into the

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause: The American Revolution, 1763-1789*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 51.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 19.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 20.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> Johann Somerville, "Ideology, Property, and the Constitution," in *Conflict in Early Stuart England: Studies in Religion and Politics, 1603-1642*, (London: Longmans, 1989), 52.

<sup>6</sup> Middlekauff, *Glorious*, 55-61.

<sup>7</sup> Jack P. Greene, *Peripheries and Center: Constitutional Development in the Extended Politics of the British Empire and the United States, 1607-1788*, (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1986), 8.

<sup>8</sup> Middlekauff, *Glorious*, 35.

Commonwealth] unfeasible”.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, while the colonies may have been held as separate, or distinct, dominions, English officials still viewed them as dependent.<sup>10</sup>

Perhaps most central to the argument of the early portion of *The Glorious Cause* is Middlekauff’s position on the development of an American political ideology that was at odds with the King’s, and was firmly rooted in the spirit of the Glorious Revolution of the 17th century and in a belief in the power of religious dedication to morality to repel despotic leadership. Customary law had carried the weight of law in England for centuries, but with the “rise of the parliamentary supremacy during the seven or eight decades after the Glorious Revolution, parliamentary statutes gradually came to be seen as taking precedence over custom”.<sup>11</sup> Much like the affirmation of the Parliament as a governing body after the Glorious Revolution, the American colonists believed deeply in the power of their religious morality and assemblies to eschew, “a general moral decay of the people which would invite the intrusion of evil and despotic rulers, and the encroachment of executive authority upon the legislature, the attempt that power always made to subdue the liberty protected by mixed government”.<sup>12</sup>

Ultimately, this line of reasoning appears to be a connection to the idea of “glory” in Middlekauff’s first three chapters. Glory is a word often reserved for the state of regard in which a person, an action, or an event is held by a people. Glory seems to imply an amount of righteousness not only in success, but probably more-so in motivation of the individual or groups who seek to act in its name. Glory is also a term rooted in an amount of populism, a word only bestowed by the people. If the Glorious Revolution was the affirmation of the importance of the will of the people to be honored through the English Parliament, the *Glorious Cause* to which Middlekauff alludes is the affirmation of the importance of that will in the American colonies, and later the United States of America, as well.

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<sup>9</sup> Greene, *Peripheries*, 9-10.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 38.

<sup>12</sup> Middlekauff, *Glorious*, 51.

**Works Cited:**

Greene, Jack P. *Peripheries and Center: Constitutional Development in the Extended Politics of the British Empire and the United States, 1607-1788*. Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1986, pp. 8-42.

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