

In the final chapters of Robert Middlekauff's *The Glorious Cause: The American Revolution, 1763-1789*, the theme that developed throughout the course of the book was realized by the the new Americans. As the Revolutionary War came to a close in the early 1780s, Americans were forced to face the unimaginably difficult process of creating a nation that had demonstrated solidarity throughout the war, but remained relatively weak and fragmented in its governance. The glorious struggle for independence founded in Protestantism and Radical Whig ideology did not end with the surrender of the British. Rather, the fundamental struggle to establish a new nation in the spirit of republican ideals was one that took place off of the battlefield as well, in the minds of the leaders of the new nation.

As the Revolution came to a close after the British surrendered, the Americans' allies in the French and Spanish had their own self-interested peace terms that they desired that had little to do with republicanism and much to do with settling European scores that had plagued their continent for generations. Americans had one particular term of peace that took precedent above all others: British recognition of their independence and sovereignty. While British representatives did not necessarily arrive at the peace negotiations ready affirm American independence, "the Americans insisted that Britain must recognize independence before a treaty of peace was agreed upon".<sup>1</sup> Only after British negotiator Richard Oswald was permitted by Britain to discuss a treaty with Americans Jay and Franklin as representatives of the new nation were peace talks able to proceed.<sup>2</sup> Middlekauff explains that this resolute commitment to the causes of independence, liberty, nationalism, and republicanism were all critical intangibles that helped the Americans to win the war at all.<sup>3</sup> Abandonment of independence as a centerpiece of peace negotiations simply would not have been an acceptable outcome.

During the years of the Revolution through the ratification of the Constitution, state legislatures under the Articles of Confederation carried and embodied the republicanism of the Radical Whig ideology as well as the preservation of Protestant ideals. In the very earliest days of the struggle for independence, a central issue faced by the new nation was the maintenance of debt created by the war. However, with the imposition of import taxes by the weak national government, "suspicion of central authority rose again" and would only be accepted if state governments agreed.<sup>4</sup> The dire condition of the American economy led newspapers to print "letters and essays virtually every week about grim conditions and the dangers they brought to virtue and republicanism" and sermons about them in churches too.<sup>5</sup> As the nation moved into the mid-1780s, Middlekauff explains that the states indeed carried the the spirit of the Revolution onward while the Congress faltered.<sup>6</sup> In Virginia, for example, the *Declaration of Rights* and the state constitution it spawned "established that sovereignty resided in the people, the government was the people's servant" and that the people had a right to abolish a government that did not meet these ends.<sup>7</sup> Pennsylvania also sought to expand the democratic nature of the state in its constitution and ultimately produced a more democratic document than any other state during the era.<sup>8</sup> As many Americans increasingly feared the encroachment of a central authority and feared the result of a loss of virtue that a despotic government represented, state governments attempted to carry the values of the Revolution.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause: The American Revolution, 1763-1789*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 593.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 596.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 606.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 613.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 625.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 627.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 637-638.

By the late 1780s, the insufficiencies of Articles of Confederation were too clear and numerous for the United States to survive without a new constitution. The convention that would eventually produce the United States Constitution was dogged by the debate over the republican identity of the nation. Of the first proposed plans, Virginia's provided for a government that popularly elected representatives to one house of a bicameral legislature and another selected by state legislatures, all of whom would select members of the other branches.<sup>9</sup> States with smaller populations immediately feared tyranny of the larger states, as representation in this plan was proportional. However, the rebut proposed by the delegates from New Jersey with a unicameral legislature of equal state representation was seen as inviting the threat of arbitrary rule from the legislature. The argument from smaller-population states like New Jersey was that their plan was "representing the ideals of the Revolution. Their principles were the rights of man."<sup>10</sup> The compromise that followed, while without opposition from powerful voices, affirmed the general commitment to the cause for which the nation had fought for independence. In a strong example of the commitment of the framers to their republican ideals, a property requirement for political participation was dropped as there was a "feeling that the ordinary people of the nation would be repelled by it and would then reject the constitution".<sup>11</sup>

The years of the Revolution, the Articles of Confederation, the Constitutional Convention, and finally ratification affirmed the Protestant virtues and Whig ideology that had spurred the revolutionary movement from its early days. Independence was the prerequisite condition for the negotiation of peace. As the young nation developed a governmental identity, in the face of a lack of a strong central government, states attempted to take the republican lead under their sovereignties. The Constitution, despite the objections of Anti-Federalists and those who feared the tyranny of the people, was a commitment to an experiment in representative government on a grand scale. Of course, many millions of people were left out of this experiment for the foreseeable future and would struggle for their place in it for many decades. Nevertheless, the debate seems clear; the glorious cause had led the United States to its place in the world.

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<sup>9</sup> Middlekauff, *Glorious*, 649.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, 652-653, 657.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 664-665.

**Works Cited:**

Middlekauff, Robert. *The Glorious Cause: The American Revolution, 1763-1789*. Revised and expanded edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008 [1982].