

The Development of a Revolutionary Mentality. Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1972.

With the approach of the bicentenary, we can expect a veritable deluge of books on the American Revolution. This particular volume is the product of the first, in May, 1972, of five annual symposia at the Library of Congress. It is a pity that the inaugural conference of what will undoubtedly be one of the most prestigious of many seminars on the Revolution did not strive to be more innovative, if not revolutionary. Is it asking too much of historians to suggest that they forsake the jig-saw puzzle technique and adopt a more disciplined approach to a subject which has seen nearly two centuries of interpretation? Rather than dismiss the problem of definition, let us hope that some conference will attack it directly and with fresher views. Commager's essay on the Revolution as the institutionalization of Enlightenment thought is good, but not challenging. Professor Morris' startling statement that it was "first and foremost, a war for independence," does not receive the unanimous consent which he unabashedly claims. The achievement of independence by thirteen British colonies was not the original goal of their leaders; something akin to dominion status for British North America might have been more acceptable, before 4 July 1776, and certainly would have wrought a revolution in imperial management even more than it did ninety years later. Mary Beth Norton notes in her contribution that "Tories" shared both the Patriot's opposition to imperial policies and their desire to achieve constitutional reform within the empire.

Professor Norton thinks that the identification of the Loyalists as "Tories" has distracted historians from the fact that, with some exceptions, they argued from a position that was based on true Whiggish principles; the Patriots deserted these and became enamoured of the "ancient republican heresy." This innovative element, republicanism, divided Loyalist from Patriot and converted a colonial rebellion into a revolution. Caroline Robbins' essay reminds us that, as Europeans, the Americans had the benefit of both republican theories and historical examples, although there was no clear model to fit their circumstances. We must remind ourselves that neither did they have our understanding of democratic theory in the 18th century to which Professor Robbins has contributed so greatly. According to Pauline Maier, royal policies disillusioned once loyal subjects who eventually lost their enchantment with the British constitutional system; King George III no longer was the exception to "the nefarious tendency of monarchy." She offered the suggestion that the colonists' experience with associations organized to protest and to resist imperial policies did much to convince them that republics could command the veneration and obedience of the people as much as hereditary rulers. Jack Greene comments that "once the colonists had opted for independence," the creation of a republic was the only "available alternative." That may be so, and this implies that independence was the goal of the Revolution but it should not mean that a republic was not a deliberate choice. Indeed, it is possible to consider the decision for independence as a necessary means to the attainment of a republican goal. Observing, as did William Knox in the 1770's, that the American colonies had long been "tinctured with republicanism," Green suggests another line of enquiry — to determine why the republican goal was not adopted more readily.

Perhaps other symposia will see some replies to Greene's suggestion. Hopefully, more attention will be devoted to the republic-making process of the American Revolution, both before and after 1783. Thomas Jefferson once wrote that "the creation of a proper political system was the whole object of the revolution" and the operation of that new government would be the test of its success. Commager cited this remark in his paper which also noted that the revolutionary generation directed the American republic for a half-century. It is those fifty years which comprise a revolution.

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