

FOREWORD

The legacy of the colonial period was protean in politics and enduring in culture. In the nearly two and a half centuries between the accession of George III and the death of Diana, Princess of Wales, the love-hate relationship with the British monarchy has been part of America's conversation about itself. This is an account of that conversation, of a nation that overthrew British rule only to become captivated by the magnetic attraction of royal renown. A fascination with the monarchy has been a continuous theme in American opinion from its colonial beginnings, and it persisted despite the demonization of George III during the Revolution. For all their egalitarian principles, many Americans have been highly susceptible to the transcendent glamour of hereditary kingship – what has been called 'a family on the throne' – and find little contradiction in saluting the stars and stripes one moment and bowing to the British sovereign the next.

Republics resemble monarchies in many ways, and from its early days the newly-formed American nation, which derived its political and cultural heritage from Britain, looked across the Atlantic for time-honoured traditions, family ties and possessions that would give a sense of inheritance to a people otherwise defined by their novelty. Expansion and rapid social change unsettled United States citizens, leaving them uneasy about class but preoccupied with status. Titles, honours and distinctions of rank alleviate the monotony of democracy. And with exquisite paradox, Americans fell under the spell of royal tradition from the lofty heights of republican virtue. This book, which constitutes a tour of monarchy and public opinion in America, seeks to illuminate that paradox but also the greater paradox to which it is joined – America's simultaneous belief in the future and reverence for the past.

The book begins with the high politics of the Founding Fathers and George III, but shifts to cultural issues and American attitudes to royalty as the British monarchy lost its political significance in the young, independent nation. For a century or more after the Revolution the dominant culture in the United States, as expressed in the press, literature, and public events, remained under the sway of the mother country. Was it not remarkable that the usage 'Victorian' became a commonplace in the United States? It was a tribute to the power of British civilization in the nineteenth century, an era in which America saw itself linked to the mother country by the bonds of language, law, and liberty. It was also a tribute to the British monarchy itself, which effectively cultivated America for diplomatic and commercial reasons.

The decline of British power and the rise of the United States, together with the vast increase in migration to the United States from non-English speaking parts of Europe, gradually changed American attitudes towards the Crown. In the twentieth century, it was largely royal ceremonial and visits to the United States by members of the royal family that kept the monarchy in the headlines and in the American imagination. Kings and queens, princes and princesses provided the personages that propelled the monarchy's popularity in the United States. America's curiosity towards the public and private life of the royal family is a fascinating subject in itself, and the character of this curiosity, often romantic, sometimes prurient, is as revealing of United States culture and Anglo-American relations as the Jay Treaty or Queen Victoria's role in the Civil War.

Historically, monarchy may be seen as the fount of celebrity. From the Prince of Wales, later Edward VII, to Princess Diana, members of the royal family have been major players in the emergence of America's obsession with fame, offering an exclusive and class contrast to the instant creations of the media. Hereditary kingship also propels British ceremonial, which has dazzled the citizens of a young nation comparatively lacking in hallowed settings and traditions. American expressions of joy and sorrow at royal marriages and funerals, coronations and jubilees have been extraordinary, given the rejection of the monarchy during the Revolution. Are they simply ephemeral reactions to what have become media events, or do they represent some deeper human response to pomp, class, and the hereditary principle?

The evolution of the relationship between the American people and the British monarchy is an absorbing story, which should tell us a good deal about America and perhaps something new about monarchy itself. But this book is not simply about the royal presence in America. The Founding Fathers were more monarchical in their assumptions than is widely believed. They created a veiled monarchy in the United States, giving presidents quasi-regal status

and the trappings of royalty. Theodore Roosevelt, not one to minimize the powers of his office, once described the President as an ‘elective King’. Attributing kingly powers to America’s highest office, a recurring theme in United States history, has recently revived in political discussion. Thus the British monarchy, a largely benign presence in the United States after the reign of George III, continues to provide a point of reference in the nation’s conversation about itself.

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This book springs from a longstanding interest in the history of the British monarchy. This particular topic originated out of a discussion following a talk on early American material culture by my colleague Kariann Yokota at Yale. I wondered aloud whether Americans celebrated the Jubilee of George III in 1809. No one present knew the answer so I had a look at the American newspapers of the day and found that many of them mentioned the festivities in Britain and several looked favourably on the King. This finding led me to examine the views of the Founding Fathers on the monarchy, which in turn led to the issues of diplomacy, political and social custom, the media, and the American temper. The study broadened further with a visit to the Royal Archives to explore the Crown’s attitude towards the United States. Thus an innocent inquiry about George III’s Jubilee became a survey of the relationship between the American people and monarchy over the past 250 years, an inexhaustible subject that has received surprisingly little attention from historians on either side of the Atlantic.

It is a pleasure to thank the institutions and individuals who have assisted in the writing of this book. As ever I am deeply indebted to archivists and librarians, but owe special thanks for their advice and support to Judith Schiff, Susan Roberts, and Kevin Pacelli at Yale’s Sterling Memorial Library. Ellen Cohn and her staff at the Franklin Papers project, housed in the Sterling Library, provided expert guidance on the Founding Fathers. A book on the monarchy and America would be a poor thing without access to royal sources. By permission of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, I have been able to use material from the Royal Archives at Windsor, for which I am very grateful. Other institutions that have aided my research include the Library of Congress, the Houghton Library at Harvard, and the National Archives at College Park, Maryland.

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Women's Organization for the opportunity to test some of my ideas in a series of lectures. *History Today* published a shortened version of the first chapter in August 2007 under the title 'The American Monarchy'. As a former author with Yale University Press, I am delighted to be back in the fold, and would like to thank the staff in both London and New Haven for their care and proficiency. Finally, I am ever grateful to my wife Alice and our children Elizabeth and William for their comment and encouragement. They support me in dedicating the book to a dear family friend and guide, who nursed this book along from its inception.