

Fall 2015 History & Heritage -- #1

(A Seasonal Catechism for the Study of Western and American Civilization)

Tempest in a Teapot? --- (Kirk; *Roots of American Order*, pp. 393-401)

This ironic title suggests that what sparked the American Revolution of itself was no big deal, having had little to do with a heavy tax on (or higher price of) tea? In truth Britain's Tea Act of 1773 lowered duties as well as the price of tea imported by Americans, to the chagrin of smugglers who profited handsomely when higher rates were in play. The defiant Boston Tea Party, while it made its point about colonial self-government, actually had the effect of inflating the price for the popular drink.

The King Can Do No Wrong --- (Kirk; *Roots*, pp. 401-415)

This English legal maxim, a legal fiction but by no means untrue on that account, seeks the preservation of the king and the kingdom he superintends? On the surface the principle indicates royal infallibility, not because a king is perfection itself but in order to grant him personal immunity (legal safeguard) for governmental abuses of power. In such cases, British precedent allowed for the impeachment of the king's officials, although retribution against Charles I (1649) was an exception few wanted repeated.

The Lamp of Experience --- (Kirk; *Roots of American Order*, pp. 393-401)

This source of wisdom, said Patrick Henry to his fellow Virginians in 1775, served as the true light by which his steps were guided and he could foresee the future? The Founders concurred with Henry, writes Kirk, looking "for guidance to their own historical past in America, and to the past of the civilization, European and Christian, in which they shared. Thus, in the course of the Revolution, America's leadership class set out to preserve a world with which they were content, not invent one to suit their fancies.

The American and French Revolutions Compared --- (Kirk; *Roots*, pp. 393-401)

This essay, the reflections of Prussian scholar Friedrich Gentz, was translated by J.Q. Adams and published anonymously in Philadelphia in 1800? Gentz contrasted the defensive, conservative impulses of the American Patriots with the violent, innovative motives of the French Revolutionaries. Americans, wrote Adams to Gentz, cannot but be gratified "to see [their] revolution so ably vindicated from the imputation of having originated, or having been conducted upon the same principle, as that of France."

Deism or Christianity? --- (Kirk; *Roots of American Order*, pp. 401-415)

This longstanding controversy pits scholar against scholar over which religious influence is strongest in the Declaration of Independence? The document's appeal to "the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God" leans toward a philosophic assertion of an absentee god; its reference to reliance upon "the protection of Divine Providence" reflects greater biblical orthodoxy. Safe to say, both beliefs were represented in the Founders' councils, orthodoxy being greater among Americans generally.