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Anglo-American Attitudes: From Revolution to Partnership

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Fred Leventhal

Roland Quinault

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Alan Dobson

The chapters in this collection were originally given as papers at a conference at the Minda de Gunzburg Center for European Studies at the Harvard University in 1997, sponsored jointly by the North American Conference on British Studies and the Royal Historical Society.

The introduction informs the reader that the collection was prompted by the 'serious lack of historical investigation of Anglo-American attitudes in the widest sense of the phrase' [p. 1]. While there has been plenty of work on 'government to government' and 'diplomatic' relations, there has been little on 'social, economic, intellectual, or cultural connections'[p. 1]. We are told that concentration on the colonial period and the Second World War needs to be balanced by investigations over the whole period of Anglo-American relations. 'The connection is, furthermore, multifaceted and symbiotic. Without discounting the centrality of economics or diplomacy, we would argue for a variety of mutual influences that were enhanced by independence from and rivalry with the former mother country.' [Pp. 2-3] 'While Britain and the United States have separate histories, they have a common one as well that transcends the geographical separation. Anglo-American history has a reality distinct from the history of its component elements, and this is the particular focus of the contributors in this volume.' [p. 3] Part of this review will examine whether the book as a whole delivers on its promises and, in particular, whether it identifies a common history that transcends the geographic divide between Britain and the USA. First of all, though, some comments will be offered on each of the contributions.

The essays by P.J. Marshall (*The Case for Coercing the Americans Before the Revolution*) and E.H. Gould (*The American Revolution in Britain's Imperial Identity*) raise interesting issues to do with political identity

and sovereignty. Marshall places the eighteenth century crisis with the American colonists in the context of previous and ongoing challenges by the Scottish Highlanders in the 1745 Rebellion, and from Ireland and India, to the British conception of Hobbesian unitary sovereignty. Such challenges became more focused in the American colonies. Should the writ of Parliament run to questions of colonial taxation and internal colonial law and order? Gould explains the emergence of similar difficulties to do with sovereignty that arose specifically from the dilemma of Britons fighting fellow Britons. The British notion of empire, consisting of Britons abroad ruled by Parliament and with the King as head of state, provided no room to categorise the American-Britons as opponents in war. However, with the defeat at Saratoga in 1777, General Burgoyne was forced to treat with the Americans not as rebels, but as if they were representatives of a sovereign power. This, suggests Gould, marks a shift away from seeing the Americans as part of empire to a conception of a federal relationship.

Gould reiterates the findings of other historians concerning the consequences of the defeat at Saratoga: the British recognised the emergence of a new class of people in America; this recognition paved the way for a more stable identity within the metropolitan confines of England, Scotland and Wales; and it ushered in an authoritarian period of governance to deter would-be imitators of the American colonials. He goes on to add and emphasise one further point, namely that the American Revolution: 'convinced the British as never before of the need for firm, clear boundaries not just between themselves and their European neighbours, but between their political centre, where a common sovereignty based on ties of nationality and law could be assured, and their imperial periphery, where it could not.' [p. 32]

Both these essays offer interesting perspectives, but there is nothing particularly new here. Nor is there anything particularly Anglo-American, though there could have been. As the essays stand they are conventional historical approaches that deal respectively with the colonial challenge to a British notion of sovereignty, which logically implied that Britain had the right to tax and coerce recalcitrant colonial subjects, and with the impact of the American War of Independence upon the British conception of empire. There is nothing that is Anglo-American about these issues that transcends the geographic divide. What would have done so would have been an examination of how the developments in question affected the idea of sovereignty on both sides of the Atlantic, changed it in similar ways, and how it linked with the growth of a form of Anglo-American democracy. Curiously, although federalism is specifically mentioned regarding Britain, and the idea of divided sovereignty is implied at certain points in both essays, there is no development of that concept. Both essays in their own way are about challenges to the Hobbesian notion of unitary sovereignty, but it is never specifically explained or discussed. One could argue that the most important contribution that the Americans made to eighteenth century political thought was to suggest the divisibility of sovereignty, and yet the opportunity to explore that, both in the context of the crafting of the new American government and regarding British conceptions of imperial governance, are not exploited. Whether such ideas also had impact on government within Britain might also have been worth exploring. The claim of British national unity by Gould, given the existence of a strong Scottish identity, is at least a little questionable, and an examination of the powers of local and municipal government might reveal some influence from the idea of divided sovereignty. The unitary state that became so all pervasive in the twentieth century was not so much in evidence in the nineteenth century, or the twentieth, until the First World War. In short, both authors raise the issue of sovereignty, but fail to trace the development of that concept in Anglo-American thinking.

One could argue that Roland Quinault's essay (*Anglo-American Attitudes to Democracy from Lincoln to Churchill*) picks up the Anglo-American political theme where Marshall and Gould left off. It explores how the ideology of democracy developed in tandem in the two countries. Here we do have a better claim to a distinctive Anglo-American history that transcends the geographic divide. Quinault compares and contrasts the ideas and rhetoric of Lincoln and Gladstone, Lloyd George and Woodrow Wilson, and Roosevelt and Churchill. Brief biographical sketches, often revealing fascinating background similarities, are effectively interspersed with detail of thoughts and speeches of the great men. One gets the overall impression of the two nations struggling with the challenges of modernity and adapting institutions and practices in ways that can aptly be described as generically democratic. However, an adequate definition of democracy is never

offered. The author refers repeatedly to the franchise and its extension, but this is not sufficient. Citizens in Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union had that, but one would be hard pressed to describe their systems of government as democratic. And even if one were to qualify things and say that elections must be free, that would not do either. In principle, one could still conceive of a free people voting in free elections and wishing to oppress or exterminate a minority class of citizens. And, if one is not happy with arguments of principle, then one only has to look at the American constitution or Magna Carta to realise that, in practice, the will of the majority is not everything so far as defining constitutional democracy is concerned in both the USA and Britain. When Quinault quotes Churchill and notes the importance of 'free and secret elections, freedom of speech and an independent judiciary' [p. 135] he touches on the heart of the issue of democracy in Britain and the USA. Into that heart feed two forms of nourishment that do not always mix easily together: the will of the majority, and the rights of individuals and minorities. It is the tension between these two that has been at the centre of the drama that has been, and still is, the unfolding of democracy in the modern world. Unfortunately, Quinault does not specifically address this. In not doing so, he misses an opportunity to explore the similarities and differences within a common stream of Anglo-American democratic development. Instead, we are offered an interesting set of portraits of three pairs of statesmen in which ideas and political rhetoric are mixed up in a way that does not lend itself to the kind of analysis that would have done justice to both the concept of Anglo-American democracy, and its development.

There are three other essays in the collection with clear political aspects to them: Alan O'Day (*Irish Nationalism and Anglo-American Relations in the Later Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries*); Christine Bolt (*Was There an Anglo-American Feminist Movement in the Earlier [sic] Twentieth Century?*); and Reba N. Soffer (*Commitment and Catastrophe: Twentieth Century Conservative Historiography in Britain and America*). O'Day's is an interesting piece, and his conclusion is persuasive. 'The paradigm of Irish-America's inability to log substantial political success despite a supposedly high level of ethnic identity and commitment to the homeland arises from a misunderstanding of how ethnicity functions in an adopted land where the hurdles to incorporation are comparatively low and the group sought resolution of grievances through non-ethnic parties and institutions.' [p. 189] However, one is puzzled by the absence both of differentiation between Catholic and Protestant emigrants and of an examination of the impact that that divide might have had on the concept of Irish-American. Bolt, in her essay, sees a sharing of tactics and ideology among the early feminist movements in Britain and the USA, but the experience of the First World War, and achievement of the franchise were followed by divergence because of 'race, class, and international differences' [p. 208]. The essay by Soffer probably reads strangely to a British audience not fully accustomed to analyses of historical schools of thought. Soffer argues that that there was a kind of common American and British conservative school of historians concerned with similar issues, which approached them from a shared ideology. However, some of the candidates for the class of conservative historians are rather unusual. Viereck, for example, was more of a political theorist than historian, and the idea of similarity between British and American conservatives is not entirely convincing. Viereck subscribed to a form of Burkean organic conservatism, but that was often seen by other American conservatives as alien to the American experience. In the end, the author does not give a clear enough picture of a conservative ideology shared by the historians she discusses, and thus it is never entirely clear what unites them as a class. The call for workers of the world to unite is one thing, but the idea that conservatives from different countries and traditions might unite is rather odd. The underlying assumption of this collection of essays is that there is something Anglo-American that is nationally transcendent, but can that at-oneness stretch to embrace the possibility of Anglo-American conservatism, when to be conservative is to be culturally specific? This is not categorically to deny the possibility of Anglo-American conservatism, but it is to assert that there must be a presumption against it, and, therefore, that the evidence and argument need to be all that more persuasive. In Soffer's essay such evidence and argument are not sufficiently manifest to persuade, at least this reader. The article is interesting in what it says about various British and American historians, and by exploring their beliefs the essay casts light on their positions, but the category of conservatism that is crafted is not robust enough to carry the analysis through with conviction.

David Hancock (*Transatlantic Trade in the Era of the American Revolution*), Anthony Howe (*Free Trade and the International Order: the Anglo-American Tradition, 1846-1946*), and Kathleen Burk (*War and Anglo-American Financial Relations in the Twentieth Century*)

) provide the main economic diet in the collection. All three are highly competent pieces of a kind one would expect from such good scholars, but only Hancock's offers anything that is original, and only Howe offers anything that really reaches beyond conventional bilateral relations to produce something truly Anglo-American.

Hancock's is a well researched and tightly argued piece that sets out to answer the question: Did the War of Independence change the well-established trade pattern between Britain and America, or was Britain's commercial dominance quickly re-established along with traditional trading patterns after the war? Using trade in Madeira wine as a case study, Hancock convincingly argues that this question needs to be answered within a broader context. Some trade relationships were re-established, others were not, but most important of all, two long-term trends that had begun well before the war had major impact. These trends were globalisation of trade and the expansion of the American presence in the sea borne carrying trade. 'The outcome was nothing short of a critical re-channelling of entrepreneurial aggressiveness into world-wide carrying activity.' [p. 165] Howe's essay detects the presence of a strong undercurrent of free trade doctrine beneath America's nineteenth and early twentieth century dominant doctrine of protectionism. This is an important, and all-too-often-neglected facet of American economic thinking and it deserves further elucidation. Unfortunately, Howe moves on all-too-quickly to the post 1934 period, i.e. after the passage of Cordell Hull's Reciprocal Trade Agreements Act, and stumbles into a trap similar to the one he has sprung about pre-1934 protectionism. After showing the importance of free trade doctrines prior to 1934, he then underestimates the legacy and vestigial power of protectionism after 1934. Although he observes that one of the two main obstacles to the success of multilateral trade in 1946 was 'residual American protectionism' [p. 157] he also notes that American commitment to free trade was 'far greater than in the past'. [p. 157] This gives a rather overstated impression of US commitment to free trade. The author does not tell us that the ITO had to be withdrawn from Congress several months later because it had no chance of passing, that the USA had discriminatory preferential arrangements with several countries and specific and highly protective arrangements for the wheat trade and the maritime and defence industries, and that multilateralism for either the abortive ITO or the GATT was a bastardised form of multilateralism - tariff reductions were negotiated bilaterally (giving the USA immense leverage) and only then 'universalised' among GATT members via the Most Favoured Nation Principle. Also, while one recognises the confines imposed by space (and how irritating it is for reviewers to criticise authors for not writing what they would have written), nevertheless, one feels that the IMF/Bretton Woods system should also have been, at least briefly, considered, and, in particular, the form of responsibly managed capitalism that it embodied. Given the inextricable link between trade and international monetary exchange, the IMF/Bretton Woods system was clearly a modification of the doctrine of free trade. Burk's is the last of the three pieces on economic matters, and it deals with Anglo-American financial relations, largely during wartime. It tracks Britain's convenience lending in the Boer War to the convenient but necessary help received in the Falklands War.

Paul Langford (*Manners and Character in Anglo-American Perceptions*), Walter L. Arnstein (*Queen Victoria and the United States*), James Epstein (*'America' in the Victorian Cultural Imagination*), Fred M. Leventhal (*Public Face and Public Space: The Projection of Britain in America before the Second World War*), and D.L. LeMahieu (*America and the Representation of British History in Film and Television*), all deal in their separate ways with the giving and receiving of images of behaviour, people, countries, and histories. What strikes one about all five pieces is that, except for two secondary source references in Leventhal [see notes 4 & 9], there is no systematic effort to assess impact on the relevant public constituencies. Neither public opinion/mass observation data (from the period in which such material is available), nor substitutes (available throughout the various periods at issue) such as systematic samplings of newspaper editorials, or other possible newspaper indicators, are used. Instead the authors rely on anecdotal evidence and qualitative types of analysis to make their cases. Langford concludes that the American colonials were little different to provincial English society, though the stereotypical images fostered during the War of Independence had resonance long after the conflict ended. Arnstein sees Queen Victoria as having a positive and beneficial impact on Anglo-American relations, which helped promote the growing-together that became evident in many aspects of the relationship at the end of the nineteenth century. Epstein explores how 'various tropes about America were worked and reworked, to suggest how 'America' was put

into discourse' [p. 107] in Britain. Looking primarily at the views of Dickens and Matthew Arnold, he concludes that 'America' was subject to constant revision as a concept because of changing social, political, economic and cultural changes in Britain, though the idea of 'America' as a symbol of modernity abided in various forms. Leventhal focuses on the British Pavilion at the New York World's Fair, the 1939 visit of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth in 1939, and the exhibition of British war art at the Museum of Modern Art in 1941, in order to show how the British, while abjuring propaganda, managed to project a positive image of itself to the USA. LeMahieu catalogues a variety of British films and TV serials, which were popular in the USA, and tells the reader what they were about and that they projected a more progressive image of Britain. However, this remains largely *his* opinion. There is no evidence offered as to how they were received and understood, or what actual impact they had in the USA. One is left wondering: Did Americans see them in the same way as LeMahieu? Did they draw the same conclusions as the author? And to what extent did they create an Anglo-American 'history' distinct from British and American History?

The final essay in the collection is about diplomatic relations. Peter Hahn (*Discord or Accommodation? Britain and the United States in World Affairs, 1945-92*) offers an overview of Anglo-American history from 1945 to 1992 in thirteen pages. The title is reminiscent of David Reynolds' idea of Anglo-American competitive co-operation, and indeed the author relies extensively on Dimbleby and Reynolds, *An Ocean Apart* (David Dimbleby and David Reynolds, *An Ocean Apart: The Relationship Between America and Britain in the Twentieth Century*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1988). The overview is of necessity rather crude, but it should have taken some factors into account, which it does not. The re-forging of the special relationship after the Second World War was, as Hahn argues, largely because of the Cold War, but it was also because of the need for co-operation in the economic sphere. The claim that there was a breach in the special relationship from 1963 through the 1970s is over-exaggerated. It needs to be qualified by the following observations: there was extensive co-operation to prop up sterling in the mid 1960s; the Polaris programme went ahead and there was agreement to replace it with Trident between Prime Minister Callaghan and President Carter; and there were close relationships between Callaghan and both presidents Ford and Carter.

Overall this collection of essays does not achieve the aim the editors claim for it in the introduction. One does not have a strong sense of an Anglo-American history that transcends the geographic divide between the two countries. Most of the essays are about specific impacts that Britain had on the USA or vice versa. Perhaps this is what the editors meant by a distinct Anglo-American history, but I do not think so. If it were, then they should have defined the enterprise of the volume more carefully. Some of the essays do genuinely seem to have an Anglo-American history in their sights, but then, as with the essays by Marshall, Gould and Quinault, they fail to develop the potential, or, as with Howe and Hancock, they concentrate upon developments relative to one of the two countries. Drawing conference papers together into a coherent collection to persuade publishers to put them into print is never easy. These essays are worthy pieces of scholarship in the main and will be read with pleasure and gain by those interested in Anglo-American relations, but they do not create an Anglo-American history that transcends the geographical divide. They do not generally offer original scholarship, though they do offer insights and summaries of original scholarship published elsewhere by these distinguished scholars. And they do not significantly break the mould in terms of subject matter - five essays are about rather conventional political topics, three are about conventional economic issues, and the final essay is, ironically, about diplomatic relations. There is a certain ambiguity in the introduction about the status of Anglo-American economic studies. At one point it is claimed that there has been inadequate scholarship in this field (something with which I would beg to disagree, at least to a modest extent), at another point economics is grouped with diplomatic studies as central to Anglo-American studies as if it were well catered for. All the articles are competently or well written. The book is well produced with few errors. The title is not well chosen: many of the essays are not about attitudes. There is no bibliography.

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