

Flipping his Whigs:

A response to Gordon S. Wood<sup>1</sup>

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In a recent review essay, Gordon Wood asks whether my book, *The Royalist Revolution: Monarchy and the American Founding*, should be regarded as the “rewriting of the history of the [American] Revolution for our generation.”<sup>3</sup> He answers that it should not. This by itself is hardly a grave indictment. Precious few books have delivered paradigm-shifting revisions to our understanding of the Revolutionary period. Yet many works of scholarship that do not accomplish, or even attempt, such a feat nonetheless have something valuable to teach us about early American history. But Professor Wood does not think my book is one of these either. He announces that I have not “uncovered any phenomena of which previous historians were unaware,” nor have I “presented a

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<sup>1</sup> Gordon S. Wood, “Revolutionary Royalism: A New Paradigm?” in *American Political Thought* 5 (2016): 132-154. I should explain briefly why this reply does not appear in *APT*. Professor Wood, who sits on the journal’s editorial board, submitted his article-length critique of *The Royalist Revolution* unsolicited to the editor (*APT* had already commissioned a review of my book, which appeared in the spring 2015 issue). The editor accepted the article and offered me 2000 words in which to respond. After my reply had been written, the editor informed me that he had granted Professor Wood a further 1500 words in which to “reply to my reply” in the same issue of the journal. Given the already stark imbalance in our respective allotments of space, this struck me as both unfair and improper. I therefore declined to publish my response in *APT*.

<sup>2</sup> For extremely helpful comments on this rejoinder, I am indebted to David Armitage, Bernard Bailyn, Eric Beerbohm, James Hankins, the late Mark Kishlansky, Shirley Sarna, and Quentin Skinner. No one who had the pleasure of knowing him will be surprised to learn that I owe my title to Mark Kishlansky.

<sup>3</sup> Wood, “Revolutionary Royalism: A New Paradigm?”, 132. See also pp. 1-2.

more compelling explanation of the phenomena” in question.<sup>4</sup> As for my specific arguments, Professor Wood finds them alternately “confused,” “convoluted,” “precious,” and animated by “hermeneutics gone wild.”<sup>5</sup> To make matters worse, there are apparently numerous conceptual points that I fail to “understand,” “appreciate,” or “grasp” (in this final respect, at least, I am “like many other scholars”).<sup>6</sup> Professor Wood does describe me as “ingenious and imaginative,” but this, alas, is not intended as a compliment.<sup>7</sup> He means to suggest that I have a knack for fiction.

Professor Wood’s dismissal of my work is therefore quite comprehensive. It is also, from a certain point of view, unsurprising. Professor Wood recognizes that “*The Royalist Revolution* aims at nothing less than replacing the present standard interpretation of the constitutional history of the American Revolution with a new one,”<sup>8</sup> and he himself has been largely responsible for constructing the “present standard interpretation” in a series of influential books written over the last fifty years. We might therefore expect him to stand his ground. Yet, as I hope to explain, Professor Wood’s approach to my book is nonetheless surprising in several respects.

*The Royalist Revolution* argues that many patriots of the late 1760s and early 1770s abandoned the whig political tradition in favor of an avowedly Royalist conception of the English constitution and its relation to empire. It further suggests that this turn to the royal prerogative proved to be a crucial moment of intellectual formation for the figures in question. Despite the coming of independence and the abolition of the kingly

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<sup>4</sup> Wood, “Revolutionary Royalism: A New Paradigm?”, 144.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Wood, “Revolutionary Royalism: A New Paradigm?”, 141, 142.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Wood, “Revolutionary Royalism: A New Paradigm?”, 138, 144.

<sup>7</sup> Wood, “Revolutionary Royalism: A New Paradigm?”, 144.

<sup>8</sup> Wood, “Revolutionary Royalism: A New Paradigm?”, 132.

office in America, those patriots who had most aggressively developed and propagated the neo-Stuart defense of prerogative power during the imperial crisis—John Adams, James Wilson, Alexander Hamilton, James Iredell, Benjamin Rush, and their allies—never changed their minds. They continued to argue for the next two decades that sweeping prerogatives in a single chief magistrate were not only compatible with the liberties of citizens and subjects, but in fact necessary for the preservation of free states. They emerged as fierce critics of the overwhelmingly whig state constitutions adopted during the first year of the Revolutionary War, and ultimately presided over a broad resurgence of Royalist constitutionalism in the late 1770s and 1780s. Their great triumph came in the Philadelphia Convention of 1787, when delegates agreed to invest the new president of the United States with many of the same prerogative powers that these “patriot Royalists” had unsuccessfully urged George III to revive fifteen years earlier. The Constitution, I argue, upheld the spirit of ’75.

The book presents a great deal of textual evidence—drawn from pamphlets, correspondence, private papers, speeches, resolutions, marginalia and other sources—intended to establish the strong connection between the earlier and later constitutional ideas of these leading theorists. I do not rest my case on the suggestive fact that virtually every patriot pamphleteer who defended the neo-Stuart account of the royal prerogative in the early 1770s emerged in the following decade as a leading advocate for a strong presidency. Rather, I am able to point to dozens of instances in which these figures themselves highlighted the continuity in their own thought and returned to the very same language and clusters of arguments that they had first evolved during the imperial crisis.

The usual way to refute an evidence-based argument such as this one is to challenge the evidence on which it is based. Perhaps the passages have been misconstrued; perhaps their significance or representative character has been exaggerated; or perhaps they are simply beside the point. The striking fact about Professor Wood's review is that it has nothing to say about the evidence presented in my book. He simply asserts, as he has for decades, that the Constitution, with its strong executive, was a contingent, reactionary response to "the radical democratic forces unleashed by the Revolution," rather than an organic extension of the Revolutionary legacy itself.<sup>9</sup> The emergence of "such a powerful chief executive," he insists, has nothing to do with "some resuscitated 1774 theory of Royalism" or "the monarchism of [Nelson's] patriot Royalists."<sup>10</sup> But since Professor Wood does not challenge my construal of a single passage referenced in the book, I am unclear about the basis for these assertions. For example, I call attention to a claim made by James Wilson in the Constitutional Convention on June 1, 1787. His colleague Edmund Randolph of Virginia had objected to the presidency on the grounds that "a unity in the Executive magistracy" would amount to "the foetus of monarchy." Randolph further insisted that Americans, having just rebelled against the British crown, had "no motive to be governed by the British Government as our prototype."<sup>11</sup> Wilson responded by asserting instead that "The people of America Did not oppose the British King but the parliament—the opposition was not against an Unity but a corrupt multitude."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Wood, "Revolutionary Royalism: A New Paradigm?", 144.

<sup>10</sup> Wood, "Revolutionary Royalism: A New Paradigm?", 144.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in Eric Nelson, *The Royalist Revolution: Monarchy and the American Founding* (Cambridge, MA, 2014), 1.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Nelson, *The Royalist Revolution*, 1.

With this remark, Wilson straightforwardly related his support for a prerogative-wielding single executive to a Royalist understanding of the character and purposes of the Revolution. The colonists, on this view, had rebelled against a “corrupt multitude,” not a monarch. They had sought protection for their liberties in the prerogatives of the crown, not in the wisdom of popular assemblies. Since this was precisely the understanding of the imperial crisis that Wilson himself had so influentially championed in the early 1770s, the passage would appear to constitute good evidence for the sort of intellectual continuity that Professor Wood denies. What, then, does he make of this passage and so many others like it? He owes us some account of why it does not unsettle his convictions, at least a bit. Does he doubt that the remark is correctly attributed to Wilson? No one else does. Perhaps he would instead concede that the remark reflects Wilson’s view, but deny that Wilson himself played an important role in the creation of the new federal executive. This too would seem a less than promising approach, since Wilson made his striking claim only moments after offering the motion that created the presidency—and was unquestionably that office’s chief architect in the Convention. Something, as they say, has got to give.

Again, if Professor Wood’s dismissal of the “continuity thesis” is plausible, what are we to make of Rufus King’s observation that many delegates to the Convention favored a strong executive because they “were born the subjects of a King, and were accustomed to subscribe ourselves 'His Majesty's most faithful subjects;'" and “began the quarrel which ended in the Revolution, not against the King, but against his parliament”?<sup>13</sup> Or of the fact that, when Alexander Hamilton rhapsodized in 1781 about

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<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Nelson, *The Royalist Revolution*, 2.

a chief magistrate whose authority “pervades the whole frame of the republic, and is a common link by which the provinces are bound together,” he was simply paraphrasing his own insistence in 1775 that only “the person and prerogative of the King” could serve as “the connecting, pervading principle” for the various, distinct dominions of the British Empire—or, as Benjamin Franklin had put it in 1770, “the common link” connecting its various parts?<sup>14</sup> Likewise, would Professor Wood deny that John Adams’s 1789 assertion that “England is a republic, a monarchical republic it is true, but a republic still”—and that “the practice of Great Britain in making the supreme executive a branch of the legislature, and giving it a negative on all the laws, must be imitated by every monarchical republic,” including the new United States—was a virtual quotation from his *Novanglus* letters of 1775? To contest my evidence is one thing; to ignore it is quite another.

Indeed, Professor Wood offers only one piece of evidence *against* the continuity thesis, and it is a passage from the *Novanglus* letters that he appears to have misconstrued. He reads “Novanglus’s” claim that “a democratic despotism is a contradiction in terms” to mean that popular governments cannot behave tyrannically—and, since Adams clearly believed nothing of the kind in the 1780s, Professor Wood takes the passage as evidence that Adams acquired his anxieties about the “excesses of democracy” only after the Revolution.<sup>15</sup> But “Novanglus” was simply (and pedantically) criticizing his interlocutor, Daniel Leonard, for misusing established constitutional terminology. The previous sentence reads as follows: “The influence of the Whigs [Leonard] calls a democracy or

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<sup>14</sup> Quoted in Nelson, *The Royalist Revolution*, 170 (the Franklin passage is reproduced on p. 317n107; its precise dating is unclear, but it must have been written no earlier than 1769 and no later than the end of 1770).

<sup>15</sup> Wood, “Revolutionary Royalism: A New Paradigm?”, 143

republic, and then a despotism: two ideas incompatible with each other.”<sup>16</sup> In Montesquieu’s famous typology, there are three basic regime types: despotism, monarchy, and republic. The first is defined as the arbitrary rule of a single person (on the model of the Ottoman “Grand Signor”). Democracy is, instead, classified as a form of “republic.”

Adams insisted upon this distinction for the rest of his life: the defining characteristic of a republic, he repeated in 1789, is that “the sovereignty, which is the legislative power, is vested in more than one man.”<sup>17</sup> Democracy, as well as “mixed,” or limited monarchy, therefore counts as a variety of republican government, whereas despotism does not. A “democratic despotism” is, for that reason, a “contradiction in terms.” At no point, however, did Adams deny that republican and democratic governments could behave tyrannically. Indeed, only months after writing *Novanglus*, he argued at length in *Thoughts on Government* that rule by a popularly-elected “Single Assembly” is “liable to all the vices, follies and frailties of an individual. Subject to fits of humour, states of passion, flights of enthusiasm, partialities of prejudice, and consequently productive of hasty results and absurd judgments.”<sup>18</sup>

Professor Wood’s review becomes still more surprising when he turns his attention from the continuity thesis to my arguments about the character of patriot discourse in the late 1760s and early 1770s. In a published response to my 2011 article on “Patriot Royalism,” Professor Wood rejected my claim that patriots of the period

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<sup>16</sup> Adams, *Novanglus V*, in *Papers of John Adams*, Series Three, ed. Robert J. Taylor, Mary-Jo Kline, and Gregg L. Lint, 15 vols. (Cambridge, MA, 1977), 2:287.

<sup>17</sup> Adams to Roger Sherman, July 17, 1789, quoted in Nelson, *The Royalist Revolution*, 206.

<sup>18</sup> Adams, *Thoughts on Government*, in *PJA* 4:88.

“mounted an affirmative defense of the Stuarts against parliament.”<sup>19</sup> He was particularly keen at the time to challenge my assertion that Edward Bancroft’s *Remarks on the Review of the Controversy between Great Britain and her Colonies* (1769) proved to be “the most influential patriot text of the early 1770s and supplied a definitive template for defenses of the dominion theory.”<sup>20</sup> Since Bancroft’s essay offered a full-throated defense of the Stuarts, the question of its influence in patriot circles was (and remains) of central importance. Professor Wood responded to my “surprising claim” about the *Remarks* by stating that “no American spokesman at the time, as far as I know, ever explicitly cited or referred to it,” and he dismissed out of hand my insistence that (in his words) “nearly every patriotic pamphleteer read it.”<sup>21</sup> In the present review, however, Professor Wood states matter-of-factly that “Hamilton, Adams, and other patriots certainly read and used Bancroft’s pamphlet.”<sup>22</sup> His objection now is that the pamphlet “by itself could scarcely have accounted for the dramatic shift in American thinking that took place in the early 1770s”<sup>23</sup>

I leave it to the reader to judge whether my book suggests that Bancroft’s pamphlet “by itself” did anything at all in the early 1770s. The more interesting point is that Professor Wood has silently retracted his dismissal of my claim about the place of the *Remarks* within patriot discourse. *The Royalist Revolution* establishes beyond doubt that Bancroft’s distinctive argument about the early Stuart parliaments and the settlement of British America reappeared in almost every major patriot publication of the period—

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<sup>19</sup> Gordon S. Wood, “The Problem of Sovereignty” in *WMQ* 68 (2011), 573-577 (see esp. p. 576).

<sup>20</sup> Wood, “The Problem of Sovereignty,” 576.

<sup>21</sup> Wood, “The Problem of Sovereignty,” 576.

<sup>22</sup> Wood, “Revolutionary Royalism: A New Paradigm?,” 136.

<sup>23</sup> Wood, “Revolutionary Royalism: A New Paradigm?,” 136.



and Professor Wood has apparently been persuaded by the evidence I provide. Yet he does not say so. Indeed, the reader of his review could be forgiven for supposing that the matter had never been in dispute.

But the issue is actually a good deal broader than this. Professor Wood now seems to grant my entire argument about the Royalist and neo-Stuart character of patriot discourse in the years leading up to the Revolution. What he denies is that “all the colonists’ talk about the Stuarts and royal prerogative in 1774-1775 is to be taken as an honest expression of their feelings.”<sup>24</sup> On his revised account, the patriots did indeed say what I take them to be saying; they simply did not “sincerely believe” what they said.<sup>25</sup> I shall explain in a moment why we should resist this argument, but it is worth pausing to register just how much it concedes. Professor Wood’s classic study, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (1969), dedicates 125 pages to an account of “The Ideology of Revolution,” by which he means the “pattern of beliefs” that organized the “political literature of the period.”<sup>26</sup> What it offers us, in other words, is a characterization of patriot *argument*. Yet this lengthy discussion includes not a single mention of Royalism or the defense of the Stuarts against parliament. What we get instead is the familiar claim that patriots wrote as radical whigs who were motivated by a terror of executive corruption and crown power. In their pamphlets, Wood tells us, “George III was only a transmigrated Stuart bent on tyranny,”<sup>27</sup> not a king who betrayed his American subjects precisely by refusing to revive the “just prerogatives” of the Stuart

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<sup>24</sup> Wood, “Revolutionary Royalism: A New Paradigm?”, 140.

<sup>25</sup> Wood, “Revolutionary Royalism: A New Paradigm?”, 136.

<sup>26</sup> Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787*, Rev. Ed. (Chapel Hill, 1998), xvi.

<sup>27</sup> Wood, *Creation of the American Republic*, 136.

monarchs. Essentially the same account is on offer in Wood's subsequent monograph, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (1991).<sup>28</sup> Thus, whatever we think of Professor Wood's argument about the disingenuousness of "patriot Royalism," his new position amounts to a substantial retraction of his influential account of patriot discourse.

But should we regard "patriot Royalism" as a disingenuous forensic maneuver? Professor Wood misrepresents some of my views about the methodological issues at stake, but he is perfectly right that I propose to take the patriots at their word.<sup>29</sup> My suggestion is that historians of political thought "should begin by trying to take seriously the account that agents give of the content of their own beliefs, and of the relation between those beliefs and their actions."<sup>30</sup> I do, however, also concede that "agents sometimes deploy arguments disingenuously in order to advance their interests," so I need to explain why I believe these patriots were in fact committed to their arguments. Professor Wood writes that "the creation of a strong president in 1787 is the evidence that in Nelson's mind proves that the patriot Royalists were sincere and honest in their desire

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<sup>28</sup> See Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York, 1991). The dominion theory is mentioned once in this text, on p. 166.

<sup>29</sup> Professor Wood attributes to me the view that "it is only if we can show that a given political principle genuinely acted as a motive for engaging in a given course of political action that we can hope to establish the need to refer to the principle in order to explain the action" (Wood, "Revolutionary Royalism: A New Paradigm?", 140n4; quoting Quentin Skinner, "The Principles and Practice of Opposition: The Case of Bolingbroke versus Walpole," in *Historical Perspectives: Studies in English Thought and Society, in honour of J. H. Plumb*, ed. Neil McKendrick (London, 1974), 107). I nowhere endorse this view (and nor, of course, does Skinner). On the contrary, I readily concede that political principles can have causal efficacy even if they are not genuinely endorsed by those who deploy them (I have no doubt, in other words, that "legitimation" is often a necessary condition for successful political action). My point is rather that ideas and principles very often have *more* causal efficacy than the "legitimation" model allows—they *do* frequently function as motives for political action. See Nelson, *The Royalist Revolution*, 23-28.

<sup>30</sup> Nelson, *The Royalist Revolution*, 25.

for a powerful Stuart-like king.”<sup>31</sup> But this seems to be an almost willful misreading of my argument. While I certainly take it to be revealing that the same cast of characters who most prominently championed the neo-Stuart theory of empire in the early 1770s became the most prominent advocates for a prerogative-wielding president in the 1780s (does Professor Wood regard this fact as a mere coincidence?), I do not remotely rest my case on this observation. Rather, I suggest that we ought to look at the surviving private and public utterances of these patriots, composed during and after the imperial crisis, to form an educated guess about how seriously they took their Royalist claims. Did they argue differently in public and in private? Did they jettison the commitments in question as soon as the imperial crisis had passed, or did they continue to insist upon them long afterwards?

Certainty in such matters is never within our reach. But in the case of “patriot Royalists,” the evidence of their sincere attachment to the principles in question is overwhelming. Benjamin Franklin did not merely defend crown power in published pamphlets in the late 1760s. He wrote in a private letter that the Lords and Commons “seem to have been long encroaching on the Rights of their and our Sovereign, assuming too much of his Authority, and betraying his Interests,”<sup>32</sup> and complained in the margins of his copy of a British pamphlet that to assert “the legislative authority of Great Britain” over America was to “thrust [Parliament] in with the Crown in the Governmt. of the

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<sup>31</sup> Wood, “Revolutionary Royalism: A New Paradigm?”, 140.

<sup>32</sup> Franklin to Samuel Cooper, Jun. 8, 1770, quoted in Nelson, *The Royalist Revolution*, 3. One could of course question whether letters in the eighteenth century were regarded as “private” in the strong sense, but it seems uncontroversial to assume that they were more private than published pamphlets.

Colonies,” thus “encroaching on the Royal power.”<sup>33</sup> It was likewise in a letter to a close friend that Benjamin Rush railed in 1768 against “the usurping commons” who have “endeavored to rob the King of his supremacy over the colonies and divide it among themselves.”<sup>34</sup> In 1785, two years after the Peace of Paris, Thomas Jefferson, of all people, was still insisting that the origins of the Revolutionary crisis were to be found in the defeat of the seventeenth-century Royalist cause: “in 1650 the parliament, considering itself as standing in the place of their deposed king, and as having succeeded to all his powers, without as well as within the realm, began to assume a right over the colonies... This succession to the exercise of the kingly authority gave the first colour for parliamentary interference with the colonies, and produced that fatal precedent which they continued to follow after they had retired, in other respects, within their proper functions.”<sup>35</sup> He later reaffirmed this view in his *Autobiography* of 1821.<sup>36</sup> James Iredell made the same argument, explicitly taking James I and Charles I as his constitutional authorities, in a series of unpublished manuscripts and private letters written throughout the later 1770s, and James Wilson meticulously reproduced his defense of the royal prerogative and the patriot theory of empire from the 1774 *Considerations on the Nature and Extent of the Legislative Authority of the British Parliament* in his “Lectures on Law,” delivered in 1790.<sup>37</sup> If this is insincerity, what does sincerity look like?

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<sup>33</sup> Franklin, “Marginalia in Protests of the Lords against Repeal of the Stamp Act” [1766?], quoted in Nelson, *The Royalist Revolution*, 34.

<sup>34</sup> Benjamin Rush to Ebenezer Hazard, October 22, 1768, quoted in Nelson, *The Royalist Revolution*, 38.

<sup>35</sup> Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, quoted in Nelson, *The Royalist Revolution*, 157.

<sup>36</sup> See Nelson, *The Royalist Revolution*, 158.

<sup>37</sup> See Nelson, *The Royalist Revolution*, 149-156.

Professor Wood’s insistence that these patriots did not mean what they said is grounded, not in any evidence from their later writings, but rather in a pair of rhetorical questions. “If the colonists were so enamored of the prerogative powers of the king in 1774 and 1775,” he asks, “why did they break from him so decisively a year later in the Declaration of Independence?”<sup>38</sup> And again, “If they respected executive power of a Stuart sort so keenly, why would they in their state constitutions of 1776 create such weak and enfeebled governors shorn of all prerogative powers?” My answers to these questions occupy chapters 3 and 4 of the book, respectively. Put briefly, the patriots in question rejected the King in 1776 because he refused to wield the sweeping new powers they offered him. He was determined, as he himself put it, to continue “fighting the Battle of the Legislature.”<sup>39</sup> The Declaration of Independence accordingly denounced George III as a tyrant partly on the grounds that he “has combined with others to subject us to a Jurisdiction foreign to our Constitution, and unacknowledged by our Laws [that of Parliament]; giving his Assent to their Acts of pretended Legislation.”<sup>40</sup> That is, the king ought to have revived the “negative voice” and “refused his assent” to the offending acts of Parliament, this despite the fact that no English monarch had vetoed a Parliamentary bill since 1707/8.<sup>41</sup>

As for Professor Wood’s second question—why did the same patriots who defended the royal prerogative in 1775 favor the weak executives established under the

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<sup>38</sup> Wood, “Revolutionary Royalism: A New Paradigm?”, 141.

<sup>39</sup> Quoted in Nelson, *The Royalist Revolution*, 63.

<sup>40</sup> Quoted in Nelson, *The Royalist Revolution*, 65.

<sup>41</sup> As I further explain, the fact that Congress indicted the king alone in July of 1776—so often taken as clear evidence of patriot antimonarchism—reveals, to the contrary, their continuing attachment to the neo-Stuart theory of empire. The only “Allegiance” from which patriots claimed to be “Absolved” was that “to the British Crown,” because they acknowledged no other. The word “Parliament” never so much as appears in the text.

first state constitutions in 1776?—my answer is that it is badly posed. Some patriots did *not* favor the weak executives of the first state constitutions, and in most cases these were the same figures who had pioneered the neo-Stuart defense of the royal prerogative during the imperial crisis: Adams in Massachusetts, Wilson and Rush in Pennsylvania, Hamilton in New York, and so on (the great exception, as I explain in detail, was Franklin).<sup>42</sup> It is, however, certainly true that these theorists, who had spoken for a broad colonial consensus in the early 1770s, found themselves marginalized in the spring of 1776. Once word reached America that George III had declared the colonies to be in a state of rebellion, disillusioned patriots turned on their king with unprecedented ferocity. Many also turned against kingship itself, as well as the Royalist constitutionalism that had animated patriot discourse for almost a decade. The result was a revival of whig political theory that deeply distressed the protagonists of my story—and also proved to be very short-lived. By 1777, the winds had shifted yet again. New York’s new constitution featured an independent executive armed with a qualified veto, and the Massachusetts constitution of 1780 created a chief magistrate who was more powerful still. These developments, as well as the eventual emergence of the federal executive in 1787, make

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<sup>42</sup> On my account, this division between Royalist and whig patriots was already present during the imperial crisis and never disappeared (see Nelson, *The Royalist Revolution*, 8). The disagreement between Professor Wood and myself can therefore be characterized as follows. He wishes to equate the political thought of the Revolution with the ideology of the first state constitutions. As a result, he must dismiss both the constitutional thought of the imperial crisis and that of the later 1770s and 1780s as aberrant responses to contingent political realities (and he is correspondingly uninterested in exploring the continuities between them). I wish to insist, in contrast, that there were rival strands in patriot political thought from the very beginning. One of these—the Royalist one—achieved intellectual dominance in America on two fateful occasions: once in the early 1770s and a second time in the later 1780s. The other strand was essentially whig. It dominated patriot discourse in the early 1760s and returned to prominence for a short time in the early months of 1776 (and continued to have its advocates well into the nineteenth century).

substantially less sense if one fails to recognize their ideological roots in the Revolutionary movement itself.

Professor Wood raises a number of other issues that I am unable to address in this brief rejoinder.<sup>43</sup> I have, for example, said nothing about his extended argument about “sovereignty,” because it is drawn verbatim from his 2011 contribution to the *WMQ* forum on my “Patriot Royalism” essay—and I addressed it in a published reply on that occasion.<sup>44</sup> In general, I continue to feel that Professor Wood and I are talking past one another. His unshakeable conviction about what patriots *must* have been thinking ultimately depends, I suspect, upon an underlying sense of what they *should* have been thinking. His real quarrel is with them, rather than me.

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<sup>43</sup> Professor Wood claims, for example, that my account of the debate over representation fails to distinguish between “deriving all power, including monarchical power, from the people” and “representing the people” (p. 142). If by “deriving all power from the people” he means “regarding all magistrates as authorized agents of the people,” he is begging the question (many patriots, as I demonstrate, took the view that a representative *just is* any agent authorized to act on our behalf). If he means anything else, the claim is simply false.

<sup>44</sup> See Nelson, “Taking Them Seriously: Patriots, Prerogative, and the English Seventeenth Century.” *WMQ* 68 (2011), 588-596 (see esp. pp. 589-590). I also address the issue at length in a forthcoming essay (Nelson, “Prerogative, Popular Sovereignty, and the American Founding,” forthcoming in *Popular Sovereignty in Historical Perspective*, ed. Richard Bourke and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge University Press, 2016)). For a similar and detailed explanation of what has gone wrong in Wood’s account of the sovereignty debate, see Alison LaCroix, “Rhetoric and Reality in Early American Legal History: A Reply to Gordon Wood” in *The University of Chicago Law Review* 78 (2011): 733-756 (esp. 739-745).

