

Proposal

Title – Fighting over Meaning: Historians Interpret the American Revolution

Program of Study – History

Presentation Type – Digital Poster

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Category – Textual

Abstract example: Origins are important. Knowing where one has come from is inextricably bound to one's destination. Such is the importance, then, of the American Revolution. So essential is a working understanding of the Revolution in contemporary American society that every election cycle Americans are bombarded with promises by candidates to adhere strictly to the founding documents and to the founders. The problem of course is that the fathers are constantly twisted to fit a narrative. So with all these twists and half-truths and sophisticated historiographies, history has faded into myth and legend. The American Revolution as a story of heroes and villains have dominated American Revolution historiography since the Jacksonian Era, a few generations removed from the Revolution itself. Several historians have entertained the researcher's thinking to help understand the causes of the Revolution. Perhaps though, it is better to list the schools of thought along with their most vocal authors. First is Beard and Schlesinger's economic progressivism. Second is the consensus scholarship of Lockean liberalism dominated by Diggins, Kramnick, and Zuckert. And lastly, the republicanism of Wood, Pocock, and McDonald. So the question is asked – what caused the American Revolution? From these historians several narratives take shape: economic classist-struggle which pitted the gentry against the people; consensus neo-Lockean ideals which emphasized liberalism and Locke as the bedrock of the Revolution and the eventual free market economy;

and revisionist Renaissance republicanism arguing for the power of ideology, the driving force of the Renaissance, and the political philosophy of the Whigs as key to understanding the founding. It is the intention, then, of this research proposal to highlight these key schools of historiography associated with the American Revolution. It is the hope of the researcher to spur future research on a synthetic-variant, if indeed a synthesis of the schools is possible.

Christian worldview integration: It is my conviction that not only is God at work in history, but that He has gifted man to play their part in history. My subject deals with how historians have interpreted the American Revolution. The level of sophistication and insights displayed by these historians evidence a God who has created man to think deeply and reflectively about life. The American Revolution continues to be the dominant theme of American life today. One cannot turn a corner without being bombarded with some vestige of the Revolution – what comes to mind are parks, streets, schools, buildings, *ad infinitum* named after the founders. Yet, while the Revolution continues to capture the imagination of Americans, very little is understood about those who have interpreted the Early Republic. This is curious. Currently, two standard views exist – the triumphalist view espoused by the right and the progressivist view espoused by the left. Such simple demarcations harm the legacy of the founders and shame those who have worked to understand them. How does this research impact the culture at large; simple. History is learned from the masters. It is to them that this proposal shall turn its attention.