

## Constitutional Corner – The Character of a Prince

*“A Prince whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a Tyrant, is unfit to be the ruler of a free people.”*

As I pointed out in my last essay, the English government of the late 1700s would hardly be called tyrannical or despotic by an impartial, dispassionate judge. The twenty-seven “abuses and usurpations” that Jefferson levies against the King and parliament struck at the heart of colonial expectations of self-government, but those actions could hardly be called tyrannical by modern standards (see North Korea, Soviet Russia, etc.). Nevertheless, King George III was a useful and necessary target for the opening salvo of the Declaration’s “long train of abuses,” with repeated references to: “He has refused..., He has forbidden..., He has dissolved..., He has obstructed...,” and so on. Jefferson had an admittedly tough assignment: convince colonial Americans, many of them firmly devoted to their King, to instead seek independence. A tyrant was needed and so a tyrant the King became, at least from the Declaration’s perspective.

Yet a different picture of George emerges from other voices. The blogger “Mad Monarchist” writes:

*“King George III was as far from being a cruel, despotic tyrant as any man could be. He was, in fact, an upright, generous man of simple tastes, extremely devoted to his family and could, with relatively little opposition I think, be considered the most able and admirable monarch of the Hanoverian dynasty of Britain. This monarch who came to be so hated in America was very popular in Britain, even beloved.”<sup>1</sup>*

Once the American Revolution was over, the King re-established diplomatic relations with his rebellious former subjects (you may recall the depiction of George receiving newly appointed Ambassador John Adams in the HBO movie, “John Adams”). He also worked to ensure the United States remained a major trading partner of the British Empire.

The fact that two distinctly different portraits of George III exist is illustrative of the dilemma we face in judging the character of candidates for elective office today: good character does not equate to effective leadership and success in government.

Jimmy Carter is widely regarded as a sincere man of faith; generous and compassionate. His Christian witness was readily apparent before, during and after his single term of office. Yet his four years as Chief Executive are generally regarded as [a policy disaster](#);<sup>2</sup> inflation ran into double digits yet economic growth stagnated, leading to the coining of the term “stagflation;”

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<sup>1</sup> <http://madmonarchist.blogspot.com/2009/07/monarch-profile-king-george-iii.html>.

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.americanthinker.com/articles/2007/08/jimmy\\_carters\\_human\\_rights\\_dis.html](http://www.americanthinker.com/articles/2007/08/jimmy_carters_human_rights_dis.html).

long lines were the norm at gas stations across the country; the Shah of Iran was removed from power, transforming the most progressive Muslim country in the Middle-East into the leading sponsor of Islamic terrorism; the Panama Canal, built with American dollars and technology was given away.

How could a good man be such a failure as a President that he was denied a second term?

How could George III, devoted father and husband, make such horrible decisions as King that he lost from his empire what eventually became the world's leading economic power?

[To one writer](#),<sup>3</sup> "being the American President is all about character." If that is the case, then Jimmy Carter had a fabulous presidency.

No, it is clear that good character is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for success as President, or as King; capability – capability that produces results – is equally important.

So, as Americans prepare to select a new President this fall (as well as 33 Senators and 435 Representatives), perhaps a review of Presidential character would be in order.

Christians are familiar with the guidance Jethro gives Moses in the Book of Exodus concerning the men to be chosen for Israel's first republic: "able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness"<sup>4</sup>

In Deuteronomy, the guidance is complimentary: "wise and discerning and experienced men."<sup>5</sup>

This is admittedly not a lot to guide us. But there is still more we can glean from the Biblical record. Once the people of Israel demanded that Samuel appoint a king over them, "like all the nations," the people soon found out (though they were warned<sup>6</sup>) that their experience with kings would generally not be favorable. It appears from [this listing of the kings of Israel and Judah](#)<sup>7</sup>, the people of Israel got the bulk of the "bad" kings while the people of Judah had a few good experiences.

Fortunately, our Constitution creates a President, not a king. While Alexander Hamilton's "British Plan" included a Chief Executive serving essentially for life ("during good behavior"), the Framers knew enough about man's fallen nature to guard against a "President for Life."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.forbes.com/sites/rickungar/2015/07/24/donald-trump-and-the-decline-of-american-character-a-cautionary-tale/#6d97af521557>.

<sup>4</sup> Exodus 18:21, KJV.

<sup>5</sup> Deuteronomy 1:13 KJV.

<sup>6</sup> 1 Samuel 8:10-18.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.ldolphin.org/kings.html>.

<sup>8</sup> For a great example of "President for Life" look up Idi Amin.

There was little talk in the Constitutional Convention concerning the character sought in a Chief Executive -- qualifications, yes, but discussion of character was handled with kid-gloves; the heir-apparent, George Washington, "the first character in the world," was sitting before them on the dais. While George III may not have been the perfect picture of a tyrant, America's first president is generally regarded as the perfect picture of a gentleman. Which other President, as a child, drafted Rules of Civility -- and tried to follow them the rest of his life?

By the time of the Constitutional Convention, Washington's character had reached near-mythic proportions and was well beyond reproach. Nevertheless, Dr. Franklin observed that even if the President were not to receive a salary, the country "shall never be without a sufficient number of wise and good men to undertake and execute well and faithfully the office [of President]."

George Mason cautioned, however, that a way of removing an "unfit magistrate" was made necessary by "the fallibility of those who [elect the Executive]," as well as by "the corruptibility of the man chosen." Washington's reaction on hearing these words is undocumented.

On the question of whether to give the Executive the power of a complete legislative veto, Roger Sherman was against it because "no one man could be found so far above all the rest in wisdom."

The U.S. President enjoys nothing approaching the powers of King George III; the Framers were intent on that. A relatively weak chief executive becomes a problem, however, when Americans start viewing their President as a King. In such circumstances, he is doomed to fail; he finds he is powerless to produce the reforms the people demand or those he foolishly promised. Then, out he goes, hat in hand after a single term.

Over the years, Americans have elected some enormously flawed Presidents, but should we celebrate those flaws as [this article from the Washington Post](#)<sup>9</sup> suggests?

The upcoming election is shaping up to be as much about character as policy, perhaps even more so.

Hillary Clinton's behavior during her eight years as First Lady, eight years as Senator and four years as Secretary of State has provided ample opportunity for her character to be questioned.

The list of books and videos discussing flaws in Clinton's character is long. Therein she is variously described as "ruthless," "vindictive," "mendacious," "venal," "sneaky," "ideological," "intolerant," "deceitful," and an "inveterate liar." Some writers take pride in pointing out that

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<sup>9</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/magazine/presidents-are-every-bit-as-flawed-as-all-of-us-lets-celebrate-that/2015/02/05/56d7e834-86d9-11e4-a702-fa31ff4ae98e\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/magazine/presidents-are-every-bit-as-flawed-as-all-of-us-lets-celebrate-that/2015/02/05/56d7e834-86d9-11e4-a702-fa31ff4ae98e_story.html).

Hillary was the first First Lady to come under criminal investigation during her stay in the White House. You can find an analysis of Hillary Clinton's character/personality [here](#).

Donald J. Trump, on the other hand, has been variously described as "ambitious," "racist," "sexist," "narcissistic" (also said of Hillary), "arrogant," "haughty," "patronizing," "obnoxious braggart," "contemptuous," "borderline psychotic," and many others unfit to print. One analysis of Donald Trump's personality can be found [here](#).

What character traits would I prefer to see in someone charged with leading the world's most powerful military force? They include the following:

**Honesty.** First and foremost, we must be able to trust, explicitly, everything the President says, or every word and deed becomes suspect, including words about....

**Faith.** Despite the words of Article VI, Clause 3 ("no religious test"), the President of a predominantly Christian nation should be one himself. And so far, [all but a few](#)<sup>10</sup> of our forty-three presidents (Grover Cleveland served twice) have been church-going Christians. Faith in a universe-creating omnipotent God produces humility and compassion (or it should), two essential traits for such a high office.

**Fidelity.** No, not marital, although that is necessary as well; rather I feel a President should have fidelity to the Founders' Constitution. He should understand and be willing to uphold the principles of the Declaration of Independence as well as the Constitutional limitations of his office. These principles, by the way, are incompatible with democratic socialism.

**Bravery.** Not necessarily bravery in battle -- although that should be seen as a "force multiplier"-- but bravery when confronting difficult decisions, decisions that will affect the lives of millions of Americans, born and unborn.

**Well spoken.** The President must be a communicator, and a superior one, and not just when reading teleprompters. He must have sufficient command of the English language and the pertinent facts to speak clearly and forcefully -- extemporaneously.

The character of our "Prince" is exceptionally important to our success as a nation. I encourage all citizens to spend time over the next three months identifying and then pondering the character traits they feel should be exemplified by the next President of the United States of America, the greatest nation the world has yet seen.

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/02/12/almost-all-u-s-presidents-have-been-christians/>.