

COMMENT ON 'NATIONAL TARTAN DAY', AND REJOINDER

COMMENT

Duncan A. Bruce

In his article 'National Tartan Day: Rewriting History in the United States' (*Scottish Affairs*, no. 38, winter 2002) Euan Hague might have used a more accurate title such as 'Rewriting Duncan A. Bruce's **The Mark of the Scots**'. Hague has misquoted and misrepresented, sometimes by omission, what I have written in **The Mark of the Scots**. In that work I make comparisons between the Declaration of Arbroath and the Declaration of Independence. On his page 103 Hague tells his readers that I have highlighted 'words that appear in both documents' but he doesn't tell his readers what the most striking ones are. Many can be seen on my page 40. Nor does Hague mention that I have presented important similarities of ideas between the two documents. For instance I note on my pages 39-40 that both documents advocate government by the consent of the governed, and the right of the people to overthrow an unjust government and institute a new one. I also show many other similarities between the two declarations.

On his same page 103 he says that I have recovered "'Scots" as unlikely as ... Napoleon, Charles de Gaulle and Lech Walesa'. To represent that I did so makes my work look silly. But I did not call these people 'Scots' (his quotation marks). On my page 153 I did not say Napoleon was a Scot. I said

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that one genealogical source said that Napoleon had noble Scottish ancestry and I gave a reference. On my page 173 I did not say that de Gaulle was a Scot. I said the he 'was partly of Scottish ancestry', and referenced his biographer. On my page 186 I did not say that Lech Walesa was a Scot. I wrote: 'It seems quite possible that ... Lech Walesa ... is really a Wallace.' I referenced his autobiography.

On his same page 103 Hague, only partially quoting me, says that I claim that Scots are responsible for "'The entire development of Western popular music.'" Here, against all accepted practice, Hague places a period after the word 'music' ending the sentence where I did not. In so doing Hague conveniently leaves out part of the sentence which, when included, changes the whole meaning of what I said. What I actually wrote on page 240 was: 'The entire development of Western popular music, and even some classical music, has been influenced by Scottish themes, traditions, composers, and performers.' I go on to develop this subject on the next three pages.

There is more misrepresentation, but I won't tire your readers. If one makes the comparisons between what Hague says I wrote and what I actually wrote, it will be seen that what he has done is not scholarship.

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REJOINDER

Euan Hague

Historical analysis needs a more secure base than broad claims developed from genealogy. Similarly, forging connections between two documents written 450 years apart by comparison of their content and wording is imaginative, but cannot be robust. Contrary to US Senate assertion, there is no historical evidence that the 1776 Declaration of Independence was

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'modeled' on the 1320 Declaration of Arbroath, as Resolution 155 establishing National Tartan Day in 1998 claimed. Neither contemporaries in the nascent United States, nor commentators in Scotland in the Eighteenth Century, made such a connection. Indeed, Jefferson explicitly condemned Scots in an early draft of the Declaration of Independence. Duncan A. Bruce's **The Mark of the Scots** is the only assessment which I have encountered that stresses a direct connection between these two Declarations. That contention is problematic. Myriad evaluations of the philosophical and historical influences on the Declaration of Independence, including those by Andrew Hook and Gary Wills specifically focusing on Scottish contributions, fail to recognize this lineage.

Bruce's comment implicitly raises further questions. Firstly, how is history made and interpreted? Are there events and lineages that are beyond interpretive analysis or is history a continuous practice of reinterpreting the past and engaging in historical construction? In the United States in the 1990s there was active construction of a historical connection between the Declarations of Arbroath and Independence. This succeeded in generating political support for the establishment of National Tartan Day. Secondly, how are 'Scots' defined and what constitutes Scottish identity? Bruce's work is entitled **The Mark of the Scots** and his subsequent publication is **The Scottish 100: Portraits of History's most influential Scots** (Carroll and Graf, New York, 2000). One conclusion a reader may draw is that as both these books are about the impact of 'Scots', then the people discussed in them are by the author's definition 'Scots' and 'Scottish'. There is an assumption in Bruce's work that Scottish ancestry, be it of people, political ideas or cultural practices, is in some way definitive. In contrast, my research shows that genealogy is partial and selective, and necessarily so, as people give importance to some antecedents over others. In my opinion, **The Mark of the Scots** trumpets the importance of Scottish ancestral influences, rather than critically assessing them. For me this raises another question: *why* strive to assert such tenuous associations to Scotland as those given for de Gaulle, Napoleon and Walesa? Readers can make their own judgement by examining Duncan A. Bruce's books to assess the merits of his contentions.

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