

# It's good to be the king, but I'd rather be President.

by Michael Curtis



On May 1782 General George Washington who was still Commander in Chief of the Continental Army, encamped in Newburgh, New York, received a letter from Lewis Nicola, an Irish born Colonel in the Army. Nicola confessed he was not a “violent admirer of a republican form of government” and pointed out that though republics in the past had shone with great brightness, their luster had been of short duration as if only a blaze. In contrast, the principal monarchies of Europe although having had periods of vigor and weakness, yet they still subsisted and shone with luster.

Pointing out the financial difficulties of the army, which were due to lack of payment by the states and the weakness of the new republic, Nicola with some ambiguity suggested an alternative , that the new country have a strong leadership, a monarchy though not an absolute monarchy, but one “governed by

wise and moderate councils," not a tyranny. He suggested to Washington that he fill that role. But Washington, who viewed the letter with "abhorrence" replied on the same day rejecting the proposal and told Nicola to banish these thoughts from his mind. He became President of the U.S. in 1789.

Since then, no one in the U.S. has sought or been given royal titles, except some of the most celebrated jazz musicians. The country has been honored at different levels by Paul Whiteman, King of jazz, Benny Goodman, King of swing, Ella Fitzgerald, Queen of jazz, Billie Holiday, Lady Day, Bessie Smith, Empress of the blues, King Oliver and King Cole, Count Basie, Earl Hines, Duke Ellington, Sir Roland Hanna and Sir Charles Thompson.

Today the droll highly publicized soap opera featuring the Duke and Duchess of Sussex, the 35 year old Prince Harry and the 39 year old Meghan Markle, the drama of a member, even if nominal, of the British Royal Family, RF, seriously thinking of running to become President of the U.S., is a comic parallel of the preference of George Washington, a model of integrity, courage, and moral character, in deciding his or her role. Nothing with kings, nothing with crowns, bring on the ex-royals and clowns.

Let us start with the changing status of the Sussex duo. Queen Elizabeth II gave the title of the Dukedom of Sussex to Harry and Meghan at their marriage in May 2018. In January 2020 the duo announced their intention to step back as senior members of the RF and said that they would seek financial independence. Harry's last solo engagement was attending the opening of the Silverstone Experience, the family attraction at the home of British motor racing, in March 2020. The last official trip of the duo as members of the RF was an expensive one to South Africa, Botswana, Angola, and Malawi, which cost pounds 245,643, the most costly royal trip for some time.

Harry is still a member of the RF but no longer a working

member, and his comments are made in a personal capacity. He remains Prince Harry, but presently has no royal duties and will receive no public funds. Yet he is 6<sup>th</sup> in line in succession to the throne, and has not yet been deprived of his title though he and Meghan have agreed not to use their HRH (His, Her Royal Highness) titles. Harry does not formally represent the Queen, but is expected to "uphold her values." Meghan remains Duchess. In view of this changing relationship. However, it is arguable that the Sussex duo is exploiting the royal title for personal benefit and financial gain.

The couple now living in a \$14.7 million mansion in Montecito, in Santa Barbara county, California, an area known for its celebrity residents, such as Oprah Winfrey and Gwyneth Paltrow. It is understandable that they view life in the California sun as preferable to royal duties, visiting community projects in minor cities in Britain or participating in meeting of charity organizations. It is less understandable that Harry is deficient in his awareness of British constitutional practice. By political convention, Harry, like all members of the RF did not vote in British elections in order to be above party politics. Nevertheless, in a joint video address with Meghan, Harry, an outsider and ineligible to vote in the U.S. called on American citizens to vote in the 2020 presidential election, saying it was vital to reject hate speech, misinformation, and online negativity. Though Harry did not mention a preferred candidate, Biden or Trump, his preference and that of Meghan is clear. What is even more clear is that Harry crossed the line, and unwisely encroached into the arena of politics.

There is no mistaking the views of Meghan who informed citizens, that this U.S. election is the most important election of our time, and called on people to vote. She has been personal active. Gloria Steinem revealed that Meghan had joined her in calling Americans to vote. President Donald Trump reacted to her activity, saying he was not a fan of

Meghan, but "I wish a lot of luck to Harry, because he's going to need it." The feeling is mutual. Meghan at different times has referred to Trump as divisive and misogynistic. Yet, unless appearances and body language are deceptive, Harry, once seemingly confident in his own skin, appears as a ventriloquist's dummy, mouthpiece for his wife.

The Sussex duo, possessed of fragile egos, told us they left the UK for greater privacy, but this raises two issues. One is that Meghan confessed her frustration at having to be silent while a royal in UK. The other is that the duo has sought privacy in what is probably the most highly publicized and spotlight area in the world, the world of Hollywood.

In its latest issue, *Time Magazine* congratulated the Sussex duo "as this year's transformative leaders and change makers. You work tirelessly to create a better world, a better global community for all of us." So far, the transformation has been limited. Meghan did send a video message of sympathy to 59 year old singer Archie Williams, wrongly convicted for rape, who had been imprisoned for 36 years. More significant, and more rewarding, is the multi-million dollar deal with Netflix, which has 200 million subscribers, supposedly to provide nature series, scripted shows, children's programs, and documentaries.

This is a far cry from the activity of the RF with their thousands of official engagements a year, in public and charitable services in the UK and abroad. The official roster of the last year lists the Princess Royal with 447 engagements, the Prince of Wales with 398, and the Queen with 283. In 2018, 3793 royal engagements were listed, and in 2019-20 there were 3,200. The members of the RF are involved as patrons or presidents in a wide range of more than 3,000 organizations in many areas: educational, environment, hospitals, and housing. Estimates are that more than 70,000 people are entertained each year at meals, receptions, and garden parties. The purpose of the activity is to strengthen

national unity, and to participate in community and local events.

The heir to the throne, Charles, Prince of Wales is patron or president or member of over 400 charities and organizations, and more than 20 performing arts organizations, including the Royal College of Music, Royal Academy of the arts, the Royal Opera, the Royal Ballet, the Royal Shakespeare Company, the Foundation for Children and the Arts. Charles founded the Prince's Trust in 1976 which is said to be the largest multi cause charitable enterprise in the UK.

The world now is aware that Meghan is interested in politics. Recent reports and rumors, and speculation in the latest issue of *Vanity Fair* suggest that, though she has not had personal political experience, she is seriously interested in running for U.S. president in 2024.

This is understandable. Harry, 6<sup>th</sup> in line to the throne, is not going to become King, and Meghan therefore will never become Queen. The alternative is apparent as observers have noticed. In a *Tatler* November survey of 4,174 people, 68% of Britons believe that the Sussex duo should lose their royal titles as Duke and Duchess, but more than a third think Meghan has political ambitions and 35% thought she wants to be president of the U.S. If that happens, the comedy becomes farce. Harry will no longer be Captain General of the Royal Marines and will become First Husband of the U.S.

Thomas Jefferson in a letter of May 2, 1788 to George Washington wrote "there is not a single crowned head in Europe whose talents or merit would entitle him to be elected a vestryman by the people of any parish in America." It is unlikely that the talents or merits of a Duchess of Sussex entitle her to be elected president of the U.S.