



A Royal Experiment: The Private Life of King George III

Janice Hadlow

[Download now](#)

[Read Online](#) 

A Royal Experiment: The Private Life of King George III

Janice Hadlow

A Royal Experiment: The Private Life of King George III Janice Hadlow

The surprising, deliciously dramatic, and ultimately heartbreaking story of King George III's radical pursuit of happiness in his private life with Queen Charlotte and their 15 children

In the U.S., Britain's George III, the protagonist of *A Royal Experiment*, is known as the king from whom Americans won their independence and as "the mad king," but in Janice Hadlow's groundbreaking and entertaining new biography, he is another character altogether—compelling and relatable.

He was the first of Britain's three Hanoverian kings to be born in England, the first to identify as native of the nation he ruled. But this was far from the only difference between him and his predecessors. Neither of the previous Georges was faithful to his wife, nor to his mistresses. Both hated their own sons. And, overall, their children were angry, jealous, and disaffected schemers, whose palace shenanigans kick off Hadlow's juicy narrative and also made their lives unhappy ones.

Pained by his childhood amid this cruel and feuding family, George came to the throne aspiring to be a new kind of king—a force for moral good. And to be that new kind of king, he had to be a new kind of man. Against his irresistibly awful family background—of brutal royal intrigue, infidelity, and betrayal—George fervently pursued a radical domestic dream: he would have a faithful marriage and raise loving, educated, and resilient children.

The struggle of King George—along with his wife, Queen Charlotte, and their 15 children—to pursue a passion for family will surprise history buffs and delight a broad swath of biography readers and royal watchers.

A Royal Experiment: The Private Life of King George III Details

Date : Published November 18th 2014 by Henry Holt and Co. (first published August 28th 2014)

ISBN : 9780805096569

Author : Janice Hadlow

Format : Hardcover 704 pages

Genre : History, Biography, Nonfiction, European Literature, British Literature, Literature, 18th Century, Historical

 [Download A Royal Experiment: The Private Life of King George III ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online A Royal Experiment: The Private Life of King George I ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online A Royal Experiment: The Private Life of King George III Janice Hadlow

From Reader Review *A Royal Experiment: The Private Life of King George III* for online ebook

H. P. Reed says

Taking a view of the House of Hanover's family life, and most specifically, George III and his queen, Caroline, and their 15 children, was a fascinating way to look at what made them the people they were. Some of their behavior was opaque to them, as much so as any "reality" family today. George couldn't see how his stifling and disapproving behavior affected his heir, and how he indeed repeated his grandfather's behavior to his son, Frederick. With all the earnestness of true believers, George and Caroline tried to make their family as happy as they imagined others without the strains of ruling might be. For a short time, when the children were small, they had the happy home life the king and queen had envisioned. But divisions in the family were inevitable as the boys (and the girls to a lesser degree) began to want lives of their own. The reading of that history, to any parent, is familiar even when the events are on a much grander scale.

The writing is fairly good, with an occasional lapse into the "he must have thought" or "must have felt" that doesn't really work well in a biography. But the subject really matters, that determination to build a good family as rulers, and we can see its influence today in the Windsors.

Stephanie says

2016 Read Harder Challenge: Read a book that's over 500 pages long.

This is another book that could fit multiple challenge categories. But those I feel confident about finishing, while who knows if I can finish another super long book this year. And anyway, this book is just... really really long. In number of pages, but also in scope. Huge cast of characters, over a hundred years of history, 30% of the e-book is devoted to citing sources (and you're still going to be reading for 600+ pages all the same.)

Anyway, wow, this book was one of the most pleasant reading surprises I've had in a long time. So informative, but also so engrossing and riveting and so surprisingly sad in places. I knew absolutely nothing about George III's immediate predecessors, but they turned out to be fascinating in their own right. By laying out all their dysfunction, the author also shows just how revolutionary George III was being when he made a conscious effort along the lines of "yeah, I'm not going to cheat on my wife, and I'm not going to passionately hate my children." By living this life (and by living this life for a long, long time) George III completely altered the tone of relations in the royal family from then on.

Not that he was perfect. Far from it. The author makes a good case that George was an absolute tyrant to his family. For benign reasons, but still. It starts from his decision making when selecting a wife. One of his most important credentials was that she not challenge him ever. Cue 17-year-old Charlotte leaving Germany, arriving in England, and being ordered to not engage in politics and not have any real friends among her ladies-in-waiting. Hadlow is clear that he showed Charlotte a great deal of affection until his madness ruined things between them, but you still have the rather terrible reality of a man stifling basically all of a woman's independence and free thought. And Charlotte hated her lack of control, and wrote many letters to her brother that indicated having to suppress her emotions, and swallow all of her opinions. Between this and 20 years of near continuous pregnancy (she and George had 15 children) Charlotte often had to bear the brunt of keeping up a functional, happy royal family.

In turn, Charlotte often took out a natural need for control on her children. And what happened with their children is such a goddamn tragedy. They were given some of the best (and most progressive- yes, really, progressive!) education in all of Europe. The boys and girls alike. However, their parents often practiced a mix of controlling behavior and chilly reserve when it came to their children. Because George was away from them a lot of the time, Charlotte was often perceived as the reason for their boredom, when, in reality, she did almost nothing without George's say so. With the exception of the heir, all the boys were sent far from home to work. Whenever they came back, they were typically criticized for every way they'd failed while abroad. The girls were kept as permanent attendants to their mother, until they married. And, out of 6 girls, only 3 of them married. Only one of them married before menopause. There are a lot of complex reasons for their parents failing to secure marriages for them, but it led to the same life for all of them. Decades spent shut up with their mother, educated as hell, but rarely allowed any outlet for their energy. No projects, no travel, nothing.

Now imagine this pressure cooker situation, and what happens when the patriarch who controls it all goes mad.

I've really only touched on the surface of this book (despite rambling for paragraphs.) But it's just a really compelling, well-researched exploration of a turning point in history. It's also a family drama in which people fuck up majorly by trying so hard to do the right thing. After I finished I was left with a real sense of melancholy. There's something unchanging about people, isn't there? 99.9% of us won't be as privileged as the people studied in this work, but I think most of us have been caught up in family situations where people harm each other while being convinced they're doing right by each other. Despite her subjects' extraordinary life circumstances, Hadlow tapped into some universal characteristics in this work. I came away a lot more knowledgeable than I was about a whole century's worth of history, but I also came away reflecting on human nature in general.

Jaksen says

I was glued to this book. It can be heavy, ponderous almost, obsessively detailed with paragraphs that are the length of pages, or half pages, but the more I read, the more I wanted to read. I have not read very much historical non-fiction lately (I used to read everything I could find on Winston Churchill), but I am interested in history, and overall, my knowledge of history is fairly adequate. But this book throws such a spotlight on George III and his family, it's as if I knew nothing about this era in English history.

Starting with George III's great-grandfather, then grandfather and father, the Hanover line of kings is illustrated in a non-flinching, accurate and meticulously researched way. But instead of being a rather dry read, the book is rich with detail that delves into the emotional lives of the Hanover kings, their wives and children. Everyone is firmly fleshed out; every fact is continuously annotated. The use of diaries - and frequent quoting from them - gives life to what could be a dull topic (sometimes.) I was finding myself thinking, well that prince, or princess, is a lot like so-and-so...and the name of a politician, president, or even a celebrity would come to mind. I was also very aware how much George III was like so many present-day leaders, or celebrities, in that, since he was really answerable to no one, then no one could really tell him what to do. This proved fairly disastrous when it came to issues of his health, though at this time in history it's doubtful anything could really be done about his 'manic' episodes and eventual mental illness.

(I kept wondering: what are some of the other theories, in addition to porphyria, for the cause of King George III's illness? Lead poisoning? Did he drink from a favorite cup or tankard, one with a lead base?

What about other kinds of heavy metal contamination? Or a brain tumor? Could he have been diabetic, or what about a combination of some of these? Anyhow, I found those parts of the books fascinating. It's also worth mentioning that the diagnosis of porphyria has been partly discredited, or downplayed by some recent researchers.)

I also was surprised to learn about all his children, and how they grew up, married - or in the case of the princesses, who the king really didn't want to marry, and what happened to them. I kept flipping to the family tree so many times I folded back the page. There are so many children - fifteen in all - and each one was well-delineated, described and sometimes 'dissected' as to what motivated them and how they reacted to the two dominating influences in their life: their father and their mother, the queen. Again, everything is backed up by the many letters each wrote and the diaries they kept. (Letter-writing in the 1700's is like texting today. Constant and required if one is to keep up with what's going on in one's social circle.)

I also thought, this would make a great mini-series, or similar. Fifteen children. Imagine the cast. And the interplay, the dynamics amongst them. Against a historical backdrop of the American, and then the French Revolution, the Napoleonic Era. Amazing time in history. Amazing family.

Near the end of the book the author mentions that George III laid the groundwork for the modern monarchy of the kind still found in England today: family first. This was carried on after his death by his eventual successor, Victoria, and then into modern times with Elizabeth II.

Anyhow, excellent book. A bit tough to bite into at first, but well worth it.

I received a copy of this book through the goodreads giveaway program.

Caroline says

You would think a 700+ page book on the private domestic life of a Georgian king I knew little more about than the fact of his madness would be boring, or at the very least would flag through the mass of pages. Not a bit of it! I could hardly put this book down. I came to feel real affection for all of the personalities in this tale (or almost all of them - it's hard to feel much sympathy or affection for the Prince Regent, later George IV) and I was sorry to come to the end of it.

Whilst George III's granddaughter Victoria is largely credited with the creation of the modern monarchy and the notion of the 'royal family' at the heart of it, it was George III who really blazed that trail, determined to bring an end to the Hanoverian tradition of family discord, suspicion and hostility. He was the first to really conceive of his royal role as one of duty and obligation, with the monarch as a role model and figurehead for his people, and this vision extended to his entire family.

He was a kindly, benevolent father to his enormous brood of children, but his paternal virtues were best on display when the children were young. He struggled with all of them, sons and daughters, when they grew

older and developed wills and desires of their own; he could not understand and would not tolerate any deviation from his vision of royalty with the family at the heart of it. As a result his role as father and king degenerated into a form of emotional tyranny, keeping his daughters infantilised and dependent by refusing to allow them to marry, isolating and shunning his sons by his disapproval and rigidity. None of George III's children could really have been said to lead happy, fulfilling lives.

And yet George III is an immensely appealing figure, a simple, unassuming man who genuinely wanted those he loved to be happy, yet unable to see that his own actions to a certain extent perpetuated the Hanoverian legacy of family discord. One could argue his madness was the least of the burdens he bequeathed to his family.

Melora says

This was marvelous – interesting and entertaining all the way through! The author tells the story of George III and his family, keeping the focus personal rather than political, but she nevertheless succeeds in making the story of George's “royal experiment” relevant to the modern world. The “experiment” of the title refers to George III's goal of building a royal family which would function smoothly and happily, and which could become a model for his subjects to follow in their own family lives. Given his own incredibly dysfunctional family background (which Hadlow presents), and the circumstances of his position, one can see why this project was unlikely to see complete success, but despite George's and Charlotte's many rather monumental mistakes, Hadlow convincingly shows that their laudable project was not a complete failure

The back of my copy of *A Royal Experiment* says that the author, Janice Hadlow, “has worked at the BBC for twenty-eight years...” and I suspect that this experience may have helped her, but for whatever reason she does a great job of distilling what is obviously a vast amount of information gleaned from letters, journals, newspapers, etc. into a compelling, smoothly flowing narrative which reads like a juicy novel. She provides enough historical detail for context (I wouldn't have minded a bit more, actually), but focuses on the personal details of the lives of her characters. Even people who might easily appear purely stubborn and selfish (and George and his wife, Charlotte, were often both) become sympathetic through Hadlow's generous vision.

I received this book for free through LibraryThing's Early Reviewer program, but this did not affect my opinion or rating.

Lisa says

Historian Janice Hadlow has acquitted herself well with her dual biography of George III of England and his wife, Charlotte of Mecklenburg-Strelitz. Americans of a certain age have two modes of thinking about George III. First he is the heartless tyrant, oppressor of American Independence. We know it was this very George that John Hancock meant when he may or may not have declared that he was going to sign the Declaration of Independence so large that the king would not need his spectacles. The other mode is as a raving lunatic whose diminishing mental stability left the kingdom in the hands of Georgie-Porgie. I say Americans of a certain age because my years of teaching have proven to me most of our youth don't know George III from George Clooney. Perhaps it is better that way since like other monarchs he has gotten some rabidly bad press.

Hadlow vividly portrays a man who went into his new role with a clear vision of recreating the role of the monarchy in England. Under John Stuart, Lord Bute's tutelage he came to understand that the king should first be a model of English virtue, and that virtue beginning at home in the loving care of one's children and a faithful and loving relationship with one's spouse. With George III's coming from a dynasty known for all but eating their young, especially their heirs, and who considered extramarital alliances not just their due, but a necessity in establishing their power, this makes his "experiment" all the more remarkable.

In her account of the private life of George III and Queen Charlotte, Hadlow presents a history which is both a well researched font of information and very enjoyable reading. She has a talent for making the two royals appealingly human. One quibble is that there were times the narrative bogged down. Information was perhaps redundant.

Daisy Goodwin says

The string of Georges in the eighteenth century have always seemed like a wedge of Germanic pumpernickel between the glamorous Stuarts and the tartan tinged domesticity of Queen Victoria. But as Hadlow's enthralling book reveals, the psychodrama dancing from one generation to another is every bit as gripping as Henry VIII's marital dilemmas or Queen Victoria's tempestuous relationship with Albert. The heart of the story is the attempt by George III to be a model family man as well as monarch. He doesn't have much in the way of role models - the Georges were notoriously vile to their heirs, and were capable of great cruelty to their wives. George is determined to break the pattern, and this book is a compelling account of how his noble experiment foundered. What makes this book so compelling is Hadlow's novelistic eye for detail : Charlotte was a German princess so poor that she had no spare dress to send to London as a pattern, with the result that all her wedding clothes were too big. The fate of George's daughters was particularly poignant, one of them Sophia had an illegitimate child who she was forced to give up, while the sons gleefully ignored their father's uxoriousness. But the real revelation of the book is Charlotte, an intelligent woman who must have longed for her husband to take a mistress as she struggled through fifteen pregnancies. This book is long, but never boring. A must read for anyone interested in royalty, the eighteenth century or the intricate warp and weft of family disfunction across the generations.

Full disclosure - Janice Hadlow is a friend, but I know lots of authors and I don't give them all five star reviews!

Louise says

In this meticulously researched work, Janice Hadlow describes the family lives of the England's Hanoverian Kings, George I, II, III and IV. As she sees it, George III made a concerted effort to break with the sordid, feuding and hate-filled lives of his grandfather and great-grandfather. Hadlow poses that the ideals implanted by George III reached their fulfillment in what we have come to know as "Victorian" and that the standards he set for the British royal family have been a cornerstone in its survival.

The first third of the book sets the stage. The reader sees how George I banished his wife for an affair (while he had many). Her cruelly enforced seclusion was complete; she never saw or heard from her young children. Their son, who grew to be George II, similarly experienced George I's cruelty and was also separated from his children. As king, George II loathed son Frederick who tried to give his son, the future

George III, a healthy childhood. While Frederick died too young to see his son fully grown and married (and too soon to accede to the throne) the seeds of a new way were planted.

While George's new style of family life did not have the anger of past generations, it was a stultifying mix of isolation and discipline. As a result not one happy person is described in the book. The Queen who bore 15 children was angry and bitter most of the time. The King revealed deep depression in his mental illness periods. The boys rebelled. That they produced perhaps 50 grandchildren, but only 1 born in wedlock, was clearly an affront to the family values espoused by their father. Only brief sketches are given of the boys' rebellions. The girls suffered the most and their sad lot is well defined.

The girls were closely supervised and tightly controlled. The queen says their tutors should balance their praise with "uprightness". Letters survive from Augusta (the youngest) and Royal (the oldest) that literally beg their tutor, Mary Hamilton, to love them (p.269-70). In their teens and twenties, any hint of flirtation or romance is cruelly squelched. The girls long to be married. The author seems to feel that the Queen is enforcing the King's wishes (p. 605), but when the King was incapacitated beyond recovery, The Queen fought not just against any marriage proposal but also attendance at various social engagements.

The Romanov Sisters: The Lost Lives of the Daughters of Nicholas and Alexandra shows these similarly cloistered teen and younger girls to have the same sweetness, charity and wholesomeness ascribed to these British counterparts. However, the British princesses' letters belie the happiness and calm they project. Few of the letters of the Romanov girls survive to draw their full portraits. Were they to have survived would their lives and happiness have been similarly thwarted?

The author shows the impact on the family of losing the 13 American colonies (the King is depressed and it cannot be mentioned), the French Revolution (horror) and the various issues facing Parliament. It can be wordy in areas such as modern opinions on illness (particularly the King's), descriptions of the novels family members read and assassination attempts to name a few.

Janice Hanold is to be commended in bringing this all together. It is recommended for those interested in this family and or the period.

Tredyffrin Township Libraries says

This is a biography of King George III of England – the man who was king during the American Revolution. This is probably one of the best and most readable biographies I have ever read. I wanted to read it because I had learned almost nothing about this king and what I did “learn” was from American History classes, where we are told that he was an evil tyrant. This book shows a very human side to the king and also shows that, rather than being a tyrant, he was actually quite moral.

The experiment that the title refers to is how he and his wife set out to show that, unlike their ancestors, the royal family could be the moral examples for England. George grew up witnessing the immorality and fighting that went on in his family and was determined to not let it happen anymore. He and his wife, Charlotte, had 15 children, 13 of whom survived childhood. They were determined to be good parents and make sure their children were well-educated and had plenty of attention. This book presents George as not only king, but as a son, husband, and father. Unfortunately, with all his good intentions and, I would say, his lack of a good example, he falls short of being a loving father.

As is well-known, George eventually succumbs to mental illness and the author handles this with compassion and it is heartbreaking to see how his mind fell apart toward the end of his life. This book is well-researched and almost reads like a novel, rather than a dry biography.

Jess says

Really, somewhere between 2 and 3 stars because a lot of it didn't hold my attention. But the positioning of George III as the antecedent to Victoria and Albert's domestic bliss is FASCINATING. And man, poor Queen Charlotte. Poor princesses. It's amazing the way that lives can get fucked up just from people trying to do what they think is right.

A very interesting read.

Girl with her Head in a Book says

I have had this book on my Want list for a very long time but sadly nobody took the hint. This is not to complain, I am fully aware that I am a very lucky girl in terms of having generous family and friends who buy me books but this one really piqued my interest. I was in Brighton over the summer and visited the Royal Pavilion, leaving slightly flabbergasted that it was possible to spend quite that much money with quite such poor taste. The royal houses which preceded the Hanoverians were hardly going to be mistaken for the Brady Bunch (Wars of the Roses was essentially a fall out between cousins) but the Hanoverians are still the by-word for familial dysfunction. With painstaking detail and a clear passionate interest in her subject, Hadlow seeks to explain exactly why that was.

Although the main focus of her book is on George III and his family, (which with fifteen children is no small task,) Hadlow devotes considerable time to the roots of the family, going back to his grandfather George I and that gentleman's mother the Electress Sophia of Hanover. Ad Hadlow points out in her prologue, the Georgians are now best remembered as a 'lull' between the 'religious intensity' of the Tudor and Stuart period and the 'earnest high-mindedness of the Victorians', but these are the people of Jane Austen's novels, who watched as revolutions raged on the continent and who lived through enormous industrial and social change. Despite indicating by the title of her book that they were an odd bunch, Hadlow is clearly determined to give them a more accessible voice.

I had a feeling that with this book I would be cutting fresh ground in terms of my own reading; despite having a fairly omnivorous interest in history, the Georgian period has rarely caught my eye. That being said, I realised rapidly that there were more than a few familiar faces. Georgiana Duchess of Devonshire and her husband have walk-on albeit non-speaking roles and it was with delight that I spotted the Lennox sisters, whose group biography *Aristocrats* was so much fun last year. All the same, the main stars were without contest George and Charlotte as well as their fascinating and complex relationship with their many children. George III ascended to the throne determined to be an entirely new kind of king and as Hadlow points out, his policies continue to be followed by our own monarchs today.

Having observed three generations of son-hating and infidelity, George was determined to do things differently. His great-grandmother had ended her days in enforced seclusion with no visitors having been caught in adultery, his grandfather George II had been roundly mocked for being over-managed by his wife

and his own father Frederick had been so loathed by his relatives that when his mother was on her deathbed, she consoled herself that she would at least never have to see the ghastly beast again. Husbands were unfaithful on a point of principle, with George II taking mistresses lest he be further mocked for being too fond a husband, ostentatiously waiting outside his mistress' rooms checking his watch until the time came for their assignation. George III wanted to do things differently. Recognising that as a constitutional monarch, kingship was changing, he believed that his mission was 'to graft moral purpose on to the nation's policy'.

Time and again, it became clear that the fissures within the royal family reflected the changes in the world at large. George III was determined to conquer his private inclinations; upon his succession, he developed an infatuation for Sarah Lennox but cast aside romantic ambition in favour of his moral determination. He chose Charlotte of Mecklenberg only after having made extensive enquiries around the courts of Europe, with detailed questioning on appearance, interests, education and behaviour having to be satisfied before George was prepared to commit. Other candidates from more powerful states were rejected for reasons such as being interested in philosophy or a tendency to lightness in behaviour. George had no intention of repeating his great-grandfather's error.

Still, although this was a match of Cinderella-esque proportions for a young girl from an almost forgotten duchy, there was a sad note to this. The marriage contract banned any other members of Charlotte's family from marrying a Briton – bad news for Charlotte's sister who was already in love with the Duke of Roxburghe. These plans had to be put aside and neither party ever did wed. George was determined to be a model uxorious spouse however and Charlotte appeared to have done very well. Still, what was clear – as in so many biographies of monarchs – was how their public role defined their private selves; there was so much of their lives that Charlotte would have wished to have done differently had she not been Queen, a role that stifled her wit, her intellectualism and her relationships with her children – quite apart from her twenty year long 'campaign' of child-bearing.

Another big social change was the decline in infant mortality, which some commentators feel led to a greater willingness on the part of parents to invest in their children emotionally, they being less likely to die. Hadlow argues that this is over-simplistic but does agree that changes in ideas of education did lead to a change in attitudes. Rather than being born wicked, the idea of childish innocence, the tabula rasa was born. These children were to be adored, as indeed they were so long as they never challenged their parents.

For my full review: <http://girlwithherheadinabook.co.uk/2...>

Wisteria Leigh says

Most American's have an opinion of King George III as the king who overtaxed the colonies, a stubborn and unreasonable tyrant. If you believe that then, "A Royal Experiment, by Janice Hadlow will intrigue you.

The American Revolutionary Era in American History stands out as one of my most favorite historical time periods. I have read and studied the history of this era in post-grad classes and it never fails to dominate my personal curiosity with an influence on my reading choices. Whether non-fiction history or historical fiction, I gravitate to this setting with un-satiability. I have read biographies, memoirs, primary documents, historical texts, articles and non-fiction books that focus on the American side of the Atlantic. However, this is the first book that I have read that takes place entirely on the other side of the ocean.

From the moment I read about this book, I planned to fit it into my TBR book list. I was then fortunate to receive a review copy by the publisher, Henry Holt and Company. Janice Hadlow has written an account of King George III and his wife Queen Charlotte that is not about the American Revolution, but instead depicts the man in his less familiar role as father and husband. Who would think King George !!! had any wish to provide a stable and loving home? He and Queen Charlotte had fifteen children. Charlotte was first pregnant at age eighteen. Remarkably, thirteen of their children survived infancy.

The king was determined to show that his commitment to fidelity and family life were paramount in his life. He planned to show his kingdom, a view far different from his ancestors. It was important to him that the world see him as a devoted father and faithful husband as well as king. It was to be, as Janice Hadlow so aptly titles her book, "A Royal Experiment."

Hadlow's author's notes offered new insight for this reader. I learned that Queen Charlotte, was a highly intelligent woman who resented her twenty plus years of pregnancy. She was a woman out of sync with her generation. King George III believed "the personal was always inextricably linked to the political" (pg xvi) and his hope was that the public would want to mirror his private life. I assumed that if his label as a tyrant in the colonies was genuine, it would carry over to his personal life. (No spoilers.)

Janice Hadlow relied on countless 18th century letters, diaries and correspondence to gather the most honest and personal account of this royal monarchy. The letters available by friends and family during the 18th century of her research are abundant. I found it humorous that she discovered they were inclined to gossip and they loved to write. One wonders what the 18th century Facebook would be like?

A Royal Experiment is a richly detailed book about King George III and Queen Charlotte. Hadlow is able to provide a fascinating full dimension view of the American Colonist's former monarch. A compelling and highly recommended history.

Jaylia3 says

You'd never know it from the way things turned out, but decades before his granddaughter Victoria was born George III had hoped to break the Hanover cycle of rampant family dysfunction to live a private life filled with affection, harmony, and virtue that would be a model for his people and prove British royalty worthy of the great tasks assigned to it by Providence. George III's dream of a loving and prudent family fell apart long before madness claimed his mind, and ending up with a profligate heir like Regency Prince turned King George IV is just part of the story.

While the focus is on George III, A Royal Experiment begins with the first Hanover king, George I, who was imported from Germany to keep the British royalty Protestant and who was unimaginably cruel to both his wife and his son George II, and the book ends with Queen Victoria, who in some ways was able to bring her grandfather's moral vision to life. In addition to covering the personal lives of several generations of the royal family, the book is filled with thought-provoking information about and reflections on the culture and attitudes of the time, including the differentiated roles of the sexes (not a good time to be an intelligent independent woman) and the changing views of marriage (love or practical alliance? equal partnership or male ruled household?), family life, childhood (coddled or challenged?), madness, religion, childbirth

practices (female midwives or medically trained male doctors?), and the duties and/or rights of royalty.

As an American it was fascinating to read about the various ways the American Revolution looked to and affected George III, British politicians, the general population of Britain, and the French. Without being overly sensational, *A Royal Experiment* fully engaged my emotions as well as my mind--it was horrifying to witness George III's descent into madness and heartbreaking to read about the early death of George IV's daughter Princess Charlotte, a high-spirited young woman who self-identified with Marianne of Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*. Thoroughly researched, well organized, accessibly written, and unrelentingly interesting.

Charity says

I rather think one's response to this book depends entirely on what one expects to get out of it. I expected a more intimate portrayal of George III and instead found myself inundated with information not only about him, but his parents, grandparents, their marriages, his children and their romantic affairs, his wife, and various members of their households and larger court, including mentions of Georgiana, the Duchess of Devonshire, and others like her.

It talks about the immorality of court preceding George's ascent to the throne, his determination to remain separate from his ancestors in marital fidelity, his choice in a wife, their many children, his eccentric habits and desire for solitude, his unusual behavior as regards children (he was a playful, good natured father who crawled about on the floor with his brood, but as they got older took a more authoritarian tone with them all; the most odd thing about him was his love of having daughters, in a male-dominated society), and so on and so forth.

For one who wants a comprehensive look at the court of the period, and some of its more popular (and lesser known) characters, this is a decent book. It is not, however, an intimate biography of George III, since while the book revolves around him, one can read for pages and pages without running across any mention of him. Even more disappointing, though, was the section regarding the "Conflict with the American Colonies." I looked forward to that section with anticipation, hoping that maybe it would shed some light on why such an honorable, good-natured monarch would walk away from that conflict with such shame and a reputation for stubbornness. Much to my surprise, the conflict is glossed over – a few paragraphs and then we are once more on to politics on a larger sphere, dealing with his advisers and moving on to family portraits and such.

The most wisdom gleaned from that section was that George regarded the Colonies as unruly children who needed brought into hand, but there was so little about his actual involvement in the process that I am no wiser than when I started. This trend continued into the later chapters (I started skim-reading shortly after this) where a huge amount of attention is paid to the embarrassing details of his "insanity" but with no resolution at all, or even suggestion as to what might have been wrong with him. I expected some sort of modern diagnosis, or at least addressing the various suggested illnesses that modern doctors have posed as reasonable suggestions for such a sever shift in his behavior. With hardly any warning, George went from a faithful husband, always appropriate and proper, to a lecherous head case locked up in a straight jacket half the time, destroying his previously wonderful marriage in the process.

In the end, I did search online for related symptoms and illnesses and his increasingly frequent episodes hold up nicely against the "manic" phase of someone with a severe case of bipolar disorder.

George's life is a tragic one. He is most remembered for his insanity and "being the king that lost America," which is unfortunate, because underneath the stoic monarch beat the heart of a romantic, who adored his wife and children, who was faithful in a court fraught with immorality, who has the indignity of the entire world knowing about his worst moments and having no insight into his kinder ones. This biography is a good read, if you want a generalized picture of the Georgian period and its more prominent characters at court, but it wasn't quite what I hoped it would be.

Jeanette says

"What happened in America between 1775 and 1783 genuinely changed the world. It also almost destroyed George III's kingship, and left him with a sense of failure from which he never fully recovered."

"The crisis also struck a blow at George's carefully constructed vision of kingship, demonstrating the limitations of its effectiveness when faced with a direct confrontation. His inability to deliver an outcome that he believed was both right and just instilled in him an anger and unhappiness as acute as anything felt by his wife."

"The sense of having failed in an endeavor which was central to his conception of himself as a man and a monarch was hard enough to bear; but George's frustration was made more acute by the prolonged misery of the experience itself."

My motivation for picking up the book was, mostly, to gain a better understanding and knowledge of King George III and the era of the American Revolution. But I didn't want the American point of view of things. I've got that available in spades. What I wanted was to learn more about what was happening on the British side of events. All we are ever really taught here is that George III was a tyrant and mad.

This book was fascinating and engrossing from the start. I did need to keep a page marker on the family tree at first in order to refer back to it frequently but before long I had all the Georges, their wives, children and siblings sorted.

I definitely gained the insight I was hoping for and then some.

King George had very strong, guiding beliefs about how a royal family should live and behave. He was trying to reform the idea of kingship during his reign. His ideals and values, while sometimes resulted in good, to often imposed obligations and pressures on his family at too high a cost.

His daughters, I feel, suffered the most. If anyone needs help distinguishing between the fairy tale life of a princess and the reality they need only read about King George's daughters. Though his sons did not fare much better, they at least had a bit more freedom.

Reading about King George's recurring bouts of illness and madness and the effect it had on his family, especially the queen, was rather saddening at times.

Janice Hadlow has the wonderful, and sometimes rare, ability to write a non fiction book of over 600 pages that never feels bogged down or boring.
