



Pursuing Happiness: The Organizational Culture of the Continental Congress

Neil C. Olsen

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This book arose out of an investigative attempt to use methods adapted from the field of Organizational Culture to answer the related questions, "Where did the ideas behind the Declaration of Independence come from?", "What kind of men could create a document so powerful it became a revered work of what some call republican scripture?", "How did the supposedly flawed organization of the Continental Congress accomplish so much, and create so many ideas of so lasting importance?" And most important, "What lessons can we learn from them?" It suggests that 106 contributors to the Declaration - 100 delegates and 6 men of moral influence in Philadelphia connected to the congress - debated not only the politics of separation, but the moral philosophy that justified the revolution. The Declaration was as Jefferson called it a "harmonizing sentiment" among competing moral values systems of Calvinist-Puritans, Quaker-Spiritualists, Social-Anglicans and a new domestic school of moral philosophy American Practical Idealism that arose in 1740s at Yale, and the 1750s at King's College (now Columbia) and the College of Philadelphia (now Penn). This last school of philosophy was not based on ideas from Locke, or English Republican Radicals, Scottish "innate sense" moral philosophy, as often suggested, but on the moral philosophy of the American Dr. Samuel Johnson of Yale and King's College, which was then promoted by Dr. Benjamin Franklin and Provost Dr. William Smith at the College of Philadelphia. It also suggests that the Continental Congress in its fifteen years of existence was not just a rather long ad hoc meeting of individuals in wigs. Rather, it was a tremendously effective organizational culture in itself that deserves to be analyzed for its extraordinary accomplishments -- and to see if we can imitate its successes.

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