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George III and the Law of Nations

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This article examines how George III, from his early years as prince of Wales in the 1750s through to the twilight of his active rulership in the early nineteenth century, was engaged with what contemporaries called the law of nations, in theory and in practice. It particularly highlights his princely education, how as king he gathered and processed information about imperial and international affairs, and how his constitutional and juridical knowledge shaped his understanding of international relations, the American Revolution, and the abolition of slavery, among other pressing contemporary questions. From an examination of the Georgian Papers at Windsor Castle and the King's Library at the British Library, a new picture emerges of George III as a thoughtful, engaged, and at times surprisingly radical student of, among other sources, Montesquieu and Blackstone. This portrayal presents George III as a modernizing monarch uniquely well equipped to reflect on the changing nature of sovereignty in an age of revolutions that spanned from his own British kingdoms to the Hawaiian monarchy of King Kamehameha I. An appendix to the article publishes for the first time the precociously critical reflections on slavery and the slave trade George drew from Montesquieu's *De l'esprit des loix* in the late 1750s.