Why did George Washington tell his troops that the Declaration of Independence was a call to defend the British constitution against the British army? To answer this puzzle requires coming to grips with Patriot political ideas as they developed in the British Atlantic world from the 1730s through the 1770s. By restoring British American Patriot discussions to their imperial context it becomes clear that the American Patriots were concerned that George III’s government had done too little rather than too much. In particular the Patriots complained that George III’s government had done too little to promote immigration, support commerce and tradition British North America away from a slave-based economy.