

# "NO FRENCH AND INDIAN WAR, NO AMERICAN REVOLUTION"

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In September 1762, just months before the hated French and Spanish officially capitulated in the French and Indian War, undergraduates at the College of New Jersey expressed their pride in being members of the British Empire by staging "an entertainment" honoring "The Military Glory of Great-Britain." But less than fourteen years later, in early 1776, another American play trumpeted "The Fall of British Tyranny Or American Liberty Triumphant, The First Campaign," and on July 2, 1776 thirteen of Great Britain's North American colonies declared their independence<sup>1</sup>. It is no easy matter to explain why that stunningly quick transformation from Americans as proud members of the British Empire to Americans as revolutionaries occurred. Still, whatever else one might say about the movement toward independence, this much is clear: the British victory in the French and Indian War laid the foundation for the coming of the War of American Independence<sup>2</sup>. For Great Britain, victory in the French and Indian War was indeed a "Dangerous Triumph."<sup>3</sup>

Consider Britain's efforts to raise revenue in her American colonies. The fateful decision to tax the colonists came as a direct result of the French and Indian War which began with skirmishes on the colonial frontier in 1754 and in 1756 erupted into a general European conflict Europeans called the Seven Years' War. In 1755, the British national debt was £73,000,000. Although the people of the realm endured high taxes during the War, the government was still forced to borrow so much money that the national debt had almost doubled by January 1763. Merely servicing that massive £137,000,000 debt constituted a ruinous drain on the treasury. Britain's annual national budget was £8,000,000, and almost £5,000,000 of that sum went just to pay the interest on the national debt!<sup>4</sup>

The British government clearly faced an economic crisis brought on by the French and Indian War. And that crisis was exacerbated by the British government's decision to station about 10,000 troops on the colonial frontier to protect Britain's North American colonists from attacks by Indians or others. It cost almost £225,000 a year just to pay those troops; the total yearly cost of colonial defense ran well above £300,000.<sup>5</sup> Desperate for funds, the politicians kept taxes high in the mother country and instituted new taxes. The new excise tax on cider, however, produced "tumults and riots" in England's apple producing areas. New sources of revenue had to be found.

Not surprisingly, British officials looked across the Atlantic. They looked westward out of economic desperation and because they believed the colonists should be grateful for the protection and care the British had lavished on them, especially in the 'French and Indian War.'<sup>6</sup>

From the mother country's perspective, Britain fought the French and Indian War, as William Pitt, the Secretary of State, put it, "to reduce the Enemy to the necessity of accepting a Peace on terms of Glory & Advantage to His Majesty's Crown, and beneficial, in particular to his Subjects in America."<sup>7</sup> Pitt stressed that a successful conclusion to the War was essential to "the future Safety and Welfare of America."<sup>8</sup> The peace terms that ended the War in February 1763 offered tangible proof for Pitt's claim that the mother country was particularly concerned about the future safety and welfare of the King's American subjects. As one of the prizes of victory, the British government had the choice of acquiring either the island of Guadeloupe or New France, essentially modern-day Canada. Guadeloupe, an extraordinarily valuable sugar island, would have provided the British government with desperately needed income. Canada offered no immediate financial benefit and was seen as having little future economic potential. Yet the British took New France. They did that to eliminate what could be called "the French Menace," a menace that had so often embroiled the colonists - and of course Great Britain - in expensive and bloody colonial wars.<sup>9</sup>

Because Great Britain fought the French and Indian War in large measure to protect its North American colonies and would now be stationing extra troops there to defend the colonists, it seemed natural for British politicians to look to the colonies for added revenues. Moreover, British politicians were well aware that the taxpayers in Great Britain paid far more per capita in taxes than their colonial counterpart's did.<sup>10</sup> In the politicians' view, the colonists also deserved increased economic responsibilities in part to make amends for their despicable behavior during the French and Indian War. It was well known that many American merchants traded with the enemy during the War, which put bluntly means many colonists engaged in treason. In August of 1760, an exasperated William Pitt directed the governors in North America and the West Indies to stomp out the "illegal and most pernicious Trade, carried on by the King's Subjects...to... French Settlements... by which the Enemy is... enabled to sustain, and protract, this long and expensive War." Steps must, Pitt insisted, be taken to stop the colonists from acting "in open Contempt of the Authority of the Mother Country."<sup>11</sup>

Governor Stephen Hopkins of Rhode Island - a colony notorious as a center of illicit trade - offered an explanation for why the treasonous commerce flourished. The governor maintained that, even allowing for what they shipped to the British West Indies, the North American colonists produced huge surpluses of flour, beef, pork, fish and lumber. Hopkins observed: "How natural it is for the Proprietors of these [surplus] Commodities to seek some Market for them, and what Risques they will run to find it [,] I need not mention."<sup>12</sup>

George Spencer, a New Yorker employed to ferret out such illegal trade, became an unwilling example of how committed colonials were to keeping the treasonous commerce alive.

When Spencer asked a printer to publish a tract denouncing those engaging in the nefarious activities, the printer - saying he was afraid of reprisal - refused the job. The printer's fear was justified. What a modern-day historian called "[a]n organized mob" pulled Spencer out of his home, force alcohol down his throat until he became drunk, and then paraded him through the streets in a cart. For good measure, Spencer was beaten and pelted with "filth and offal." Adding injustice to insult, Spencer - not the members of the crowd - landed in jail on what he described as a trumped-up charge. According to his account, Spencer languished in jail for months because he had implicated two of the colony's Supreme Court justices in the treasonous trade.<sup>13</sup>

Governor Francis Bernard of Massachusetts also learned how determined the colonials were to profit by trading with the enemy in time of war. By all accounts Bernard diligently worked to squelch the treasonous trade, but he failed. In 1762, General Jeffrey Amherst commiserated with Bernard by telling him that "[t]he Measures you are taking to Bring the Guilty to due punishment are Everything that can be Expected from you, but I am afraid that this trade has already got to Such a height, that few Jurys will be found as free from connections as to be willing to Understand the Crime in its true light."<sup>14</sup> As Amherst prophesied, the illegal trade continued to flourish.<sup>15</sup> The colonists kept acting "in open Contempt of the Authority of the Mother Country."

Considering the benefits the colonists derived from the French and Indian War, the colonists' low tax burden, the traitorous actions of many colonists during the War, and the economic crisis the British government faced in 1763-1764 - all of which flowed directly from the French and Indian War - it made sense for British politicians to expect colonists to pay part of the cost of defending themselves. In addition to taxing the colonists, the British also decided to toughen up enforcement of the trade acts in the New World as well as in home waters. The ramifications of these economic transformations, which stemmed directly from the French and Indian War, made many Americans angry and raised questions about the benefits of belonging to the British Empire.<sup>16</sup>

The British, once again as a direct result of the French and Indian War, also angered colonists by increasing efforts to stop them from grabbing up Native American lands. In the colonial era, Native Americans were more likely to ally themselves with the French than the British. That was no minor problem. Right at the start of the War, Edmond Atkin, a South Carolinian, observed that: "[t]he Importance of Indians is now generally known and understood. A Doubt remains not, that the prosperity of our Colonies on the Continent, will stand or fall with our Interest and favour among them. While they are our Friends, they are the Cheapest and Strongest Barrier for the Protection of our Settlements; when Enemies, they are capable..., in spite of all we can do, to render these Possessions almost useless."<sup>17</sup>

Recognizing the truth of Atkin's observation and painfully aware that many Indians might support the French, the British government diligently labored to get Indians at least to be neutral in the War. For our considerations, the vital example is the Treaty of Easton concluded in

October 1758. The treaty negotiations, which drew some 500 Native Americans to the deliberations, were so important that the colonial governors of both Pennsylvania and New Jersey attended. From the Indian perspective, the crucial provision of the treaty stipulated that, if the Native American signatories maintained peace with the British, the British would stop their colonists from encroaching on Indian lands west of the Appalachian Mountains. According to Lt. Col. Henry Bouquet, the Treaty of Easton, which was duly ratified by His Majesty in Council, effectively "knocked the French in the head."<sup>18</sup>

The British, looking to the long-term as well as to the immediate military need, took their Treaty of Easton promises seriously. In 1761, as the French and Indian War still raged, Colonel Bouquet signaled the British government's intention to honor the Treaty of Easton; he issued a proclamation telling American colonists they could not settle or even hunt west of the Appalachians without permission. Two years later Britain established the famous Proclamation Line of 1763 which forbade colonists from seeking to acquire Indian lands west of a line which ran through the Appalachians.<sup>19</sup> Sir William Johnson, the British superintendent of Indian affairs, thus was sincere when he said he would welcome "a solemn public Treaty to agree upon clear and fixed Boundaries between our Settlements and their Hunting Grounds, so that each Party may know their own and be a mutual Protection to each of their respective Possessions."<sup>20</sup>

For their part, the colonists realized that, with the French effectively removed as the protector of the Indians, the opportunities for building their own western empire had brightened considerably.<sup>21</sup> So, colonists generally treated the Proclamation of 1763 as contemptuously as they treated Pitt's pleas to stop supplying the enemy in wartime. For example, in direct violation of the Proclamation, George Washington entered into a secret arrangement with William Crawford to survey and snatch up Indian lands. Telling Crawford to keep his words to themselves, Washington asserted: "I can never look upon the proclamation in any other light . . . than as a temporary expedient to quiet the minds of the Indians.... Any person therefore who neglects the present opportunity of hunting out good lands and in some measure marking and distinguishing them for their own (in order to keep others from settling them) will never regain it [the opportunity]."<sup>22</sup> So many others joined Washington in violating the Proclamation that an exasperated Lord Dunmore, Virginia's governor, lamented that Virginians "do and will remove [into Indian lands] as their avidity and restlessness incite them.... Nor can they [-the Virginians-] be easily brought to entertain any belief of the permanent obligation of Treaties made with these People, whom they consider, as but little removed from the brute Creation."<sup>23</sup>

As important as the issues of taxation and of Native American policy were, astute contemporary commentators pointed to another result of the French and Indian War as the *sine qua non* for the coming of the War of American Independence. In late 1773, Thomas Hutchinson, the star-crossed native son and royal governor of Massachusetts, proclaimed that "before the peace [of 1763] I thought nothing so much to be desired as the cession of Canada. I am now convinced that if it had remained to the French none of the spirit of opposition to the mother country would have yet appeared." Indeed, said Hutchinson, the effects of the acquisition

of Canada were "worse than all we have to fear from [the) French and Indians."<sup>24</sup> Josiah Tucker, the Dean of Gloucester, emphasized the same point even more emphatically. In a brilliant 1774 essay on "The True Interest of Great Britain set forth in Regard to the Colonies," Tucker proclaimed: "from the Moment in which Canada came into the Possession of the English, an End was put to the Sovereignty of the Mother-Country over the Colonies. They [in the colonies) had then nothing to fear from a foreign Enemy; and as to their own domestic Friends and Relations [in Britain], they had for so many Years preceding been accustomed to trespass upon their Forbearance and Indulgence, even when they most wanted their Protection, that it was no Wonder they should openly renounce an Authority which they never thoroughly approved of, and which now they found to be no longer necessary for their own Defense."<sup>25</sup> As both Hutchinson and Tucker realized, colonial fear of the French in Canada might well have dampened and quite possibly extinguished the idea of waging a war for independence, an idea that seemed ridiculous in early 1763 but which became a proclaimed reality on July 2, 1776. As Tucker and Hutchinson correctly stressed, the French "menace" - really the French and Indian "menace" - served as a constant reminder to colonists of the benefits of belonging to the British Empire.

Josiah Tucker probably went too far when he asserted that the British acquisition of Canada guaranteed that the British colonists in North American would become independent. Nevertheless, take away the French and Indian War and crucial elements that fueled the revolutionary movement vanish. Take away the French and Indian War and the accompanying treasonous trade of the colonists and there would have been no special reason for the British to try to gain firmer control over the colonies by enforcing the trade acts with uncharacteristic vigor. Take away the French and Indian War and the British government would not have faced the economic crisis that led to the calamitous decision to tax the colonists. Take away the French and Indian War and there would have been no Treaty of Easton and consequently no Proclamation of 1763. Take away the French and Indian War and New France would still have been a French possession sitting ominously astride the British colonies and serving as a constant reminder of the dangers of trying to break away from the British Empire.

Even granting that the well-documented history of the colonists' illegal activities and ruthless selfishness does not negate the fears Americans expressed in the 1760s and 1770s about the British endangering their constitutional rights, the fact remains: the French and Indian War produced the transformations in the British Empire that made the War of American Independence possible. In sum, take away the French and Indian War and there would have been no War of American Independence as we know it.

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### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Montose J. Moses, ed., Representative Plays by American Dramatists, 1765-1819 (New York, 1964; originally published 1918), 280-82. Moses reprints The Fall of British Tyranny (pp. 283-349); for the 1762 play, see The MILITARY Glory of Great-Britain an entertainment . . . September 29<sup>th</sup>, 1762 (Philadelphia, 1762), Evans Number 9188.

<sup>2</sup>The classic brief statement of this position, which has deeply influenced my view, comes from Lawrence Henry Gipson who, speaking specifically of the French and Indian War, declared that "[g]reat wars in modern times have too frequently been the breeders of revolution." (See Gipson's "The American Revolution as an Aftermath of the Great War for the Empire. 1754-1763." Political Science Quarterly 55 [March 1950]:86-104, with quotation from p. 86.) Gipson expanded on that theme in his The Coming of the Revolution. 1763-1775 (New York 1954) and in his monumental fifteen-volume study of The British Empire before the American Revolution (Caldwell, Idaho and New York, 1936-1970). In A People's Amy: Massachusetts Soldiers and the Society in the Seven Years' War (Chapel Hill, 1984), Fred Anderson explored how the very different experiences of the British and the Americans who fought together in the War helped "transform" Massachusetts from the British Empire's "most enthusiastic advocate" to "its most intractable opponent" (p. 223). He has recently gone much further in depicting the French and Indian War as an agent of change. Anderson opens his Crucible of War: The Seven Years' War and The Fate of Empire in British North American (New York, 2000) proclaiming: "[w]ithout the Seven Years' War, American independence would surely have been long delayed, and achieved (if at all) without a war of national liberation. Given such an interruption in the chain of causation, it would be difficult to imagine the French Revolution occurring as it did, when it did - or, for that matter, the Wars of Napoleon, Latin America's first independence movements, the transcontinental juggernaut that Americans call 'westward expansion,' and the hegemony of English-derived institutions and the English language north of the Rio Grande" (p. xvi). Having in the work itself essentially limited the coverage to the era of the Seven Years' War, he offered the more limited but still bold statement that the Seven Years' War was the American Revolution's "indispensable precursor and its counterpart influence in the formation of the early republic" - and beyond (p. 745).

<sup>3</sup> Bruce P. Lenman, "Colonial Wars and Imperial Instability, 1688-1793" in P.J. Marshall, ed., The Oxford History of the British Empire The Eighteenth Century (Oxford, 1998), 151-68, with quotation from p. 159.

<sup>4</sup> Allen S. Johnson, "The Passage of the Stamp Act," William and Mary Quarterly, 3d. Ser., 16 (Oct. 1959), 507. (Hereafter WMQ.)

<sup>5</sup> John Shy, "The American Colonies in War and Revolution. 1748-1783." in Marshall, ed., Oxford History of the British Empire, 307-8 and John Shy, Toward Lexington: The Role of the British Army in the Coming of the American Revolution (Princeton, 1965), 45-83; Gipson, Coming, 58; John L. Bullion, A Great and Necessary Measure: George Greenville and the Genesis of the Stamp Act 1763- 1765 (Columbia, Missouri, 1982), 21-23.

<sup>6</sup> Johnson, "Passage of the Stamp Act," 507-8; Lenman, "Colonial Wars," 161; Gipson, Coming, 55-59 with quotation from p. 58; Ian R. Christie and Benjamin W. Labaree, Empire or Independence 1760-1776 (New York, 1976), 29-32; Thomas C. Barrow, Trade and Empire: The British Customs Service in Colonial America. 1660-1775 (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), 177; Bullion, A Great and Necessary Measure, 15-26.

<sup>7</sup> Pitt to Governors of Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, North and South Carolina, 17 December 1760 in Gertrude S. Kimball, ed., Correspondence of William Pitt, 2 vols. (New York, 1906), 2: 367-70 with quotation from p. 367. Pitt (*ibid.*, pp. 365-67) sent the same message in slightly different form to the Governors of Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New York, and New Jersey.

<sup>8</sup> Pitt to Governors of Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, North and South Carolina, 7 January 1760 in *ibid.*, 234-37 with quotation from p. 236. Pitt (*ibid.*, pp. 231-34 with quotation on p. 234) wrote the same thing to the Governors of Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New York, and New Jersey.

<sup>9</sup> Gipson, "The American Revolution," 89-92, 102-4; Lenman, "Colonial Wars," 150-63; Shy, "The American Colonies," 301-7; Peter Marshall, "British North America, 1760- 1815" in Marshall, ed., Oxford History of the British Empire, 372-74; J.R. Ward, "The British West Indies in the Age of Abolition. 1748-1815" in *ibid.*, 418.

<sup>10</sup> Bullion, A Great and Necessary Measure, 23-25 and R. R. Palmer, The Age of the Democratic Revolution: .The Challenge (Princeton, 1959), 153-58. Palmer (p. 155) constructed an informative estimate on the annual tax burden in 1765 that showed people in Great Britain paying 26/, in Ireland 6/8 and in the six North American colonies he examined 1/ or less. The colonists and historians have, of course, pointed out that the Americans provided a number of economic benefits to the mother country despite the low tax burden the colonists had. For an instructive contemporary comment of 1764 on such benefits, see Harry A. Cushing, ed., The Writings of Samuel Adams, 4 vols. (New York, 1904-1908), 1:3-6.

<sup>11</sup> Pitt also lashed out at "this dangerous and ignominious Trade" because it led colonists to purchase foreign "Commodities" which worked "to the most manifest Prejudice of the Manufactures and Trade of Great Britain." Pitt to Governors in North America and the West Indies, 23 August January 1760 in Kimball, ed., Correspondence of William Pitt, 2: 320-21, with all quotations from p. 320.

<sup>12</sup> Hopkins to Pitt, 20 December 1760 in *ibid.*, 2: 373-78, with quotations from p. 377.

<sup>13</sup> Henry L. Gipson, The Great War for the Empire: The Culmination. 1760-1763 (New York, 1954) and Milton M. Klein, "The Rise of the New York Bar: The Legal Career of William Livingston," *WMQ*, 3d. Ser, 15 (July 1958), 348-49 with Spencer's statement and quotation on the nature of the crowd from p. 348.

<sup>14</sup> Amherst to Bernard of 10 June 1762 as quoted in Gipson, The Great War. . . 1760-1763, 81-82 with quotation from p. 82.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 78-82, 186-87 and Shy, "American Colonies," 306.

<sup>16</sup> On the toughening up, see the Order in Council of 4 October 1763 reprinted in Merrill Jensen, ed, English Historical Documents: American Colonial Documents to 1776 (London, 1955), 637-39. For additional examples of how the evolving nature of commerce might have made colonists question the value of being a part of the British Empire, see Marc Egnal, "The Economic Development of the Thirteen Continental Colonies. 1720 to 1775," *WMQ* 32 (April 1975): 191-222.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Gary B. Nash, Red, White, and Black: The Peoples of Early North America, 4th ed. (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey, 2000), 252

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 252-55; Henry L. Gipson, The Great War for the Empire :The Victorious Years. 1758-1760 (New York, 1957), 278-79 with the quotation from p. 279; Francis Jennings, Empire of Fortune: Crowns. Colonies and Tribes in the Seven Years War in America, (New York, 1988), 396- 403.

<sup>19</sup> Gipson, The Great War . . . 1758-1760, 279 and, for the Proclamation of 1763, see Jensen, ed., American Colonial Documents, 639-43.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in Francis Jennings, "The Indians'. Revolution," in Alfred F. Young, ed., The American Revolution: Explorations in the History of American Radicalism (DeKalb, Ill., 1976), 332.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 321-48.

<sup>22</sup> Washington to Crawford, 21 September 1767 in Douglas S. Freeman, George Washington: A Biography, 7 vols. (New York, 1948-57), 2: 467-71 with quotation from pp. 468-69. The full quote is: "I can never look upon that Proclamation in any other light (but this I say



between ourselves) than as a temporary expedient to quiet the Minds of the Indians and must fall of course in a few years especially when those Indians are consenting to our Occupying their lands. Any person therefore who neglects the present opportunity of hunting out good Lands and in some measure marking and distinguishing them for their own (in order to keep others from settling them) will never regain it . . . ."

<sup>23</sup> Quoted, with additions by the current author, in William T. Hagan, American Indians (Chicago, 1961), 27. The full quotation as given by Hagan is that Virginians "do and will remove as their avidity and restlessness incite them.... Nor can they be easily brought to entertain any belief of the permanent obligation of Treaties made with those People, whom they consider, as but little removed from the brute Creation."

<sup>24</sup> Hutchinson to Earl of Dartmouth of 14 December 1773 quoted in Gipson, Coming, 215.

<sup>25</sup> Robert L. Schuyler, Josiah Tucker: A Selection from His Economic and Political Writings (New York, 1931) reprints "The True Interest" (pp. 381-69) with quotation from pp. 337-38. Tucker also emphasized that the colonists had over the decades routinely and shamelessly disregarded legal restrictions in their greedy pursuit of "Self-Interest" (p. 359). On the theme of trading with the enemy, see also Tucker's 1775 comments in *ibid.*, 376, 396.