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The Seven Years’ War and the American Revolution: The Causal Relationship Reconsidered

by

Jack P. Greene

I

That there was a causal connection between the Seven Years’ War and the American Revolution has been so widely assumed as to become a scholarly orthodoxy. The close temporal relationship between the formal conclusion of the war in 1763 and the Stamp Act crisis in 1764–6, the first dramatic episode in the chain of events that would, a decade later, lead to separation, immediately raises the question of whether either the experience or the outcome of the war affected the events of the mid-1760s and beyond. For purposes of analysis, this question must be broken down into two parts. First, in what ways did the war contribute to those metropolitan actions that touched off the conflict? Second, how did the war affect the colonial response to those actions? Much scholarly energy has been devoted to both of these questions, albeit much of that energy has been animated by a desire to fix responsibility for inaugurating the dispute on one side of the Atlantic or the other. But no one has yet produced the comprehensive, systematic, and dispassionate analysis necessary to enable us to specify fully and persuasively the precise causal relationship between the Seven Years’ War and the American Revolution.¹ What follows is a brief and preliminary effort towards that objective.

II

Perhaps the single most important result of the war in terms of the metropolitan-colonial relationship was the vivid enhancement of awareness on both sides of the Atlantic of the crucial significance of the colonies to Britain both economically and strategically. Such an awareness was scarcely new and had indeed been powerfully manifest in the heightened concern with the colonies exhibited by metropolitan officials after 1748.² But the decision to undertake a major national effort to protect British interests in America and the long and expensive war that followed inevitably contributed to intensify both metropolitan and colonial sensitivities to the importance of America for Britain. Thereafter, no one who was ‘the least acquainted’ with either the colonies ‘or the concerns of the nation in them’ could possibly doubt that they ‘must absolutely be of the utmost conciquence to the defence,
wellfare & happiness of These Kindoms'. 'To be convinced of their importance at first sight', one had only to look at the 'sum total of the yearly produce of our plantations'. That sum, 'upon a moderate computation', amounted to between five and six million pounds sterling per annum, in addition to which the colonists employed between forty and fifty thousand seamen and nearly two thousand ships each year. To be sure, the colonial trade amounted to no more than 'one third Part' of Britain's foreign commerce, but the mere fact that all other branches of foreign trade could be obstructed while the colonial trade 'must still continue soley our Own' made it 'of greater advantage to us than all other Foreign Trades we are in possession of'.

The truth of this proposition seemed to be evident in both the growing wealth and international status of Britain and the obvious envy of its colonial possessions by its European rivals. 'Every body knows', said the New York lawyer William Smith, Jr., after the war, that the population, wealth, and power of Britain had been 'vastly inhaanced since the Discovery of the New World'. Simple comparisons 'of the number and force of our present fleets, with our fleet in Queen Elizabeth's time before we had colonies', of 'the antient with the present state of our towns and ports on our western coast, Manchester, Liverpool, Kendal, Lancaster, Glasgow, and the countries round them, that trade with and manufacture for our colonies, not to mention Leeds, Halifax, Sheffield and Birmingham', or of the difference 'in the numbers of people, buildings, rents and the value of land' within living memory, wrote Benjamin Franklin, were sufficient to indicate that to a very significant degree it had been the colonies that had made 'this nation both prosperous at home, and considerable abroad'. To what else other than its colonies could be attributed Britain's extraordinary rise from 'the third or fourth Place in the Scale of European Powers' to 'a Level with the most Mighty in Europe'? Why else would Britain's 'most daingerous Rivalls in Trade, and most implacable Enemies the French' make 'every effort in their power to wrest this inestimable Fountain of wealth & strength out of our hands'?

More and more during the war, commentators asserted that the American colonies had obviously 'become a great source of that wealth, by which this nation maintains itself, and is respected by others'. If they were indeed 'the great support, not only of the trade and commerce, but even of the safety and defence of Britain itself', then it followed that without them 'the people in Britain would make but a poor figure, if they could even subsist as an independent nation'. 'Every body is agreed', said one observer, that 'our existence as a ... commercial and independent Nation' as well as 'a free and happy people' depended upon America: 'by trade we do, and must, if at all, subsist; without it we can have no wealth; and without wealth we can have no power; as without power we can have no liberty'. The chain of logic was inexorable: trade was the very essence of both British greatness and British liberty, and the great extent to which that trade depended upon 'our dominions in America' necessarily meant that for Britain America was 'an object of such magnitude as' could never 'be forgot[ten] or neglected'.

If the war stimulated the emergence of a heightened realisation of the 'Infinite Advantage our American Collonys are of to these Kingdoms', it
also focused attention more directly than ever before upon a welter of problems that seemed to point to both the structural weakness of the empire and the fragility of metropolitan authority in the colonies. As Josiah Tucker had predicted at the very beginning of hostilities, the war turned out to be a rich ‘Harvest for Complaints’. Foremost among the problems revealed by the war was the difficulty of mobilising the military potential of the colonies. At best, the system of royal requisitions to individual colonies that was used throughout the war to supplement the men and supplies sent from Britain in ever larger numbers beginning in 1756 seemed to yield but spotty returns. Many colonies voted less than requested or encumbered appropriations with annoying restrictions, while a few failed to give any assistance at all and even refused quarters to metropolitan troops. To British commanders in the colonies, such behaviour was extraordinarily vexatious, and in their strident reports to London authorities they made few distinctions between those colonies that had and those that had not cooperated with them.

The delays we meet with, in carrying on the Service, from every parts of this Country, are immense’, the Commander-in-Chief, Lord Loudoun, complained to his superior, Cumberland, in August 1756. ‘In Place of Aid to the Service every impediment, that it is possible to invent’, he wrote to Halifax, head of the Board of Trade, a few months later, ‘is thrown in the Way’. Colonial legislators ‘assumed to themselves, what they call Rights and Priviledges, totally unknown in the Mother Country . . . for no purpose’, it seemed to Loudoun, ‘but to screen them, from giving any Aid, of any sort, for carrying on, the Service, and refusing us Quarters’. Reports of such self-interested behaviour reached London with sufficient frequency as to become commonplace even outside official government circles.

The great extent to which colonial legislators had already managed to undermine metropolitan authority by their assumption of such extravagant rights and privileges was a second and, from a long-range point of view, potentially even more worrying problem underscored for London authorities by the experience of the war. It was a rare governor who, like Charles Pinfold of Barbados, could at any time during the war write home that ‘Every thing proposed to me in England has been carried into Execution and with an Unanimity that exceeded the Example of former times’. Indeed, the common report was precisely the opposite. ‘At present I have His Majesties Commission and Instructions for my Government, and direction, in all public Concerns’, lamented Benning Wentworth from New Hampshire, ‘but from the incroachments Made by the Assembly, both are in a manner Rendered useless’. ‘Such is the defective State of the Governments’, echoed Thomas Pownall of Massachusetts, ‘that there can not on the Continent be produced an instance of the Governors being able to carry his Majesty’s Instructions into Execution where the People have disputed them’. Even in the new and more closely supervised colonies of Georgia and Nova Scotia, the legislatures were ‘industriously attempting to usurp the same power[s]’ as those already exercised with such ‘great Licence’ by their counterparts in the older colonies. Everywhere in the colonies, the ‘leading People’ appeared to raise disputes with metropolitan representatives merely to have a merit with the others, by defending their Liberties, as they call
them’. So long had the colonists thus been ‘suffered to riot in privileges’ that royal governors had become little more than ‘Cyphers’, ‘Pompous Titled Nothing[s]’ of very little use “to those who employ[ed]” them, while metropolitan authority had obviously been by far ‘already too much weakened’. 8

The same conclusion could be drawn from mounting evidence of colonial disregard for metropolitan economic regulations. For several decades prior to the war, complaints had filtered into London of a growing ‘illicit trade which all the colonies have run more or less into.’ In New York and New England and particularly in Rhode Island, it was charged, there was ‘scarce a man in all that country who’ was ‘not concerned in the smuggling trade’ in Dutch, French, and French Caribbean goods, a trade, moreover, that had long since been ‘sanctified with the name of naturalising foreign goods’. What had seemed so patently ‘destructive of the national interests’ of Britain in peacetime came to appear totally pernicious—and self-serving—during the war, which brought a marked increase in reports of colonial violations of the navigation acts. Military and naval commanders, royal governors, metropolitan customs officials: all described a brisk trade throughout the war not only with the neutral Dutch but with the enemy French in the West Indies, either indirectly by way of neutral ports or directly under the guise of flags of truce to exchange prisoners of war. The result was that the French islands were ‘provided with a Sufficient Stock of provisions’ and everything else they needed ‘in spite of all the Regulations’. Metropolitan efforts to curtail this trade were largely ineffective, and at the end of the war, one customs official estimated that smuggled molasses from the French West Indies into the northern colonies had increased 500 per cent during the war, while another observer asserted that nearly 90 per cent of the tea consumed in the colonies was being smuggled from the Netherlands. In the face of such reports few in Britain could any longer doubt by 1763 that ‘a spirit of Illicit trade’ prevailed ‘more or less throughout the Continent[al]’ colonies, in America and that there was ‘almost a universal desire in the People [there] to carry on a trade with foreigners not only in America but in Europe’. 9

But these were only the most flagrant examples by which the colonists acted ‘wholly in conformity to their own selfish or rapacious views’, and obstinately refused to do what was ‘necessary for the good of the whole’ during the war. Unscrupulous traders and land developers cheated Indians in utter disregard for either fairness or the safety of the older settlements and thus created a highly unfavourable disposition among the Indians to the ‘British Interest’. Colonial assemblies used metropolitan needs for military assistance to extract still further privileges from Crown officials and, in many cases, financed their war contributions by issuing massive amounts of paper currency, at least some of which was so inadequately secured as to depreciate rapidly and thereby to exacerbate fears among metropolitan mercantile interests that the colonists would seek to pay their debts in depreciated currency. In one area after another during the war, the colonists thus behaved in ways that seemed to make it perfectly obvious that they had but slight regard for either the interests or the authority of the metropolis. 10
At least since the beginning of the century, metropolitan officials and traders had exhibited what seemed to Americans an 'unnatural Suspicion' that the colonies would 'one Time or other' rebel and throw 'off their dependence on Britain'. Increasingly evident in the decade just prior to the war, such fears, Americans insisted, were both 'groundless and chimerical'. But colonial behaviour during the war with its many manifestations of a 'general disposition to independence' only seemed to belie their protestations and to provide growing evidence that they would seek 'a Dissolution' of the empire at the earliest opportunity.\textsuperscript{11} Not just the experience but the result of the war operated to heighten metropolitan fears of colonial independence. For it had been frequently argued by students of colonial affairs both before and during the war that only 'their apprehensions of the French' and their dependence upon Britain for protection kept the colonists 'in awe' and prevented their 'connection...with their mother country from being quite broken off'. To 'drive the French out of all N. America', Josiah Tucker had declared in 1755, 'would be the most fatal Step We could take'. By eliminating the one certain 'guarantee for the[ir] good behaviour' towards and 'dependence on their mother country', such a move, it was widely suggested, would both further 'their love of independence' and place 'them [entirely] above controul' by Britain, which they would subsequently ignore, rival, and perhaps even destroy.\textsuperscript{12}

Fear of such an eventuality was obviously not deep enough to cause metropolitan officials to return Canada to the French at the conclusion of the war, though many later observers from John Lind in 1775 until Lawrence H. Gipson in the twentieth century have argued that it was precisely the 'great change...in the strength and situation of the colonies' brought about by the removal of the French from North America in 1763 that was primarily responsible for the American decision for independence thirteen years later.\textsuperscript{13} Whether, given the rising awareness of the strategic and economic importance of the colonies to Britain, the many predictions of colonial independence actually filled metropolitan officials 'with Terror,' as William Smith, Jr., charged, the evidence, piled up during the war, that both stimulated and sustained such predictions, certainly contributed to further the disposition, already 'pretty general in the nation' prior to the war, 'to enquire into the affairs of the plantations' and to make sure that 'at a proper opportunity'—that is, at the conclusion of hostilities—'the settlement of America', that 'greatest and most necessary of all schemes', would become a serious 'Object... of Attention' in London.\textsuperscript{14}

Nor was the 'settlement of America' perceived only or even primarily in terms of solving the immediate problems arising out of the need to secure, organise, and administer the new territories; to finance the large American military establishment; and to begin to pay off the vast debt accumulated by Britain during the war, as historians have been wont to emphasise.\textsuperscript{15} Of far 'more fundamental importance' was metropolitan dissatisfaction with the state of British authority in the colonies. For the war had removed all doubt that in America, 'a Country long neglected' by the metropolis, 'many Disorders' had 'crept in, in some Instances dangerous and detrimental to the Colonies, and their British Creditors,... derogative of the just Rights,'
and many Prerogatives of the Crown', and totally subversive of that 'dependance which the Colonies ought to be kept in to the Government of the Mother Country'. In both the internal civil and external commercial spheres, the Board of Trade repeatedly asserted during and after the war in reiterating, with growing conviction, a conclusion it had already reached over the previous decade, that the authority of Britain 'and the Sovereignty of the Crown' stood 'upon a very precarious foot' and was 'in great Danger of being totally set aside'. Indeed, by the late 1750s and early 1760s, it seemed to be a valid question as to whether the colonists had not to a considerable degree already 'arrived at an Independency from the Government of the Mother Country', and the sense of urgency implicit in such remarks pervaded metropolitan counsels following the expulsion of the French from Canada in 1759. What the Treasury argued in October 1763 on behalf of proposals to tighten the trade laws was being said over and over about colonial civil administration: 'some effectual Remedy' was an 'immediate Necessity, lest the continuance and extent of... dangerous Evils' might 'render all Attempts to remedy them hereafter infinitely more difficult, if not utterly impracticable'. If remedial steps were not taken soon, Britain might eventually lose 'every inch of property in America'!

By the concluding years of the war, the question was no longer whether imperial administration would be reformed at the conclusion of the war but how. Many advocates of reform counselled a mild approach. Arguing that measures specifically calculated to 'cement friendships on both sides' would 'be of more lasting benefit to both countries, than all the armies that Britain can send thither', they contended that the most effective way to secure the dependence of the colonies was 'by promoting... their welfare,..., instead of checking their growth, or laying them under any other inconvenience', and warned against all 'violent innovations'. But the tide of metropolitan sentiment was running powerfully in a contrary direction. There was no desire either to oppress or stifle the colonies. 'The increase in our Colonies', said Secretary of the Treasury Charles Jenkinson in early 1765, 'is certainly what we wish', and most people seem to have recognised with Thomas Whateley that the 'Mother Country would suffer, if she tyrannized over her Colonies'. Yet, it was widely agreed, as Bute reportedly observed immediately after the Treaty of Paris in 1763, both that it was essential 'to bring our Old Colonies into order' and that the best way to accomplish that end was through the imposition of stricter controls. Thenceforth, in Jenkinson's words, the colonies were to be administered 'in such a manner as will keep them useful to the Mother Country'.

Thus, as Bernhard Knollenberg has shown, virtually every metropolitan measure undertaken in reference to the colonies not simply from 1763 but from the defeat of the French in Canada in 1759 was calculated to restrict their scope for economic and political activity. In even more detail, Thomas C. Barrow has demonstrated to what a great extent the new trade regulations of 1763-4, including the use of the navy and royal vice-admiralty courts as agencies of enforcement, an increase in the size of the customs establishment, and the introduction of a residence requirement for customs officials, were designed not only to produce a revenue but to destroy 'the long-
continued commercial independence of the American colonies' by eliminating all except certain specifically permitted commerce between them and Europe and making it more expensive to trade with foreign islands in the Caribbean. Similarly, the decision to exercise caution in the authorisation of settlement to the west of the Appalachians was intended not simply to prevent clashes between Europeans and Indians or to establish a foundation for better relations with the Indians but also, as former Georgia governor Henry Ellis remarked, to prevent settlers from 'planting themselves in the Heart of America, out of the reach of Government, and where, from the great Difficulty of procuring European Commodities, they would be compelled to commence Manufactur[s] to the infinite prejudice of Britain', a possibility that had worried observers since before the war.

In the civil sphere, metropolitan officials were less systematic and more tentative. They revealed no disposition to try to do away with representative institutions in the colonies. They were willing to entertain a variety of proposals for the extensive 'amendment of Government' in the colonies by act of Parliament, including the establishment of a single governor general for the colonies together with an annual congress of deputies from each colony, the resumption by the Crown of the charters of Connecticut and Rhode Island, and the creation of a permanent revenue to put royal governors 'upon a more respectable and independent Footing'. But, although the Board of Trade favoured the last two of these proposals, metropolitan officials did not immediately act upon any of them. Perhaps because of the complexity of the problem, they eschewed, for the time being at least, any effort to undertake the comprehensive alteration of the colonial constitutions recommended by many. But in dealing with the separate colonies after 1759 they rarely failed to act upon the conclusions, first reached by the Board of Trade between 1748 and 1756 and further reinforced by the experience of the war, that the colonies were 'not sufficiently obedient' and, as Granville told Franklin in 1759, had 'too many and too great Privileges; and that it' was 'not only the Interest of the Crown but of the Nation to reduce them'. To that end, metropolitan officials sought to correct as many as possible of the 'many Errors and unconstitutional Regulations & practices' that had 'taken place and prevailed' in all the old colonies by 'Clipping the Wings of the Assemblies in their Claims of all the Privileges of a House of Commons' and holding them to an 'absolute Subjection to Orders sent from' London 'in the Shape of Instructions', objectives they sought to accomplish primarily by strictly requiring suspending clauses in all colonial legislation of unusual character and disallowing all laws that appeared in any way to be 'injurious to the prerogative', detrimental to metropolitan authority, or conducive to the establishment in the colonies of 'a greater measure of Liberty than is enjoyed by the People of England'. If the Seven Years' War intensified metropolitan appreciation of both the value of the colonies and the weakness of metropolitan authority over them, it also contributed to three structural changes that would have an important bearing upon metropolitan calculations concerning the colonies after the war. First, the war brought Parliament more directly and intimately into contact with the colonies than at any time since the late seventeenth century.
The huge expenditures required for American defence as well as the smaller annual appropriations for the new royal colonies of Georgia and Nova Scotia helped to fix Parliamentary attention upon the colonies more fully than ever before and contributed to an increasingly widely held assumption that Parliament should be directly involved in reconstructing the imperial system after the war. Such an assumption was scarcely novel insofar as it applied to the commercial relationship between Britain and the colonies: since the 1650s Parliament had taken responsibility for regulating trade and other aspects of the economic life of the colonies. Prior to the war, however, administration had involved Parliament in the internal affairs of the colonies only in very exceptional circumstances. Yet, with their growing frustration over their inability to enforce colonial compliance with their directives during their reform attempts between 1748 and 1756 metropolitan authorities had been more and more driven to threaten Parliamentary intervention to force the colonies into line, and in 1757 the House of Commons, in an important precedent, intervened in the purely domestic affairs of a colony for the first time since 1733 when it censured the Jamaica Assembly for making extravagant constitutional claims while resisting instructions from London. By carefully informing all the colonies of the Commons' action in this case, metropolitan authorities made it clear that they were no longer reluctant to support similar actions against other colonies whenever necessary.

During the war, moreover, a chorus of proposals from both inside and outside the government called for 'the legislative power of Great Britain to make a strict and speedy inquiry ... to remedy disorders ... and to put the government and trade of all our colonies into' a 'good and sound ... state'. Not just the commerce but the internal civil affairs, it came to be very widely assumed, required Parliamentary attention. 'Nothing', declared Thomas Pownall, could 'restore the Authority of the Crown & settle the Rights of the People according to the true Spirit of the British Constitution but an Act of Parliament' because, William Knox added in spelling out the lessons of the war and immediately pre-war period, 'no other Authority than that of the British Parliament will be regarded by the Colonys, or be able to awe them into acquiescence.' Such sentiments revealed a well-developed conviction that in 'the perpetual struggle in every Colony between Privilege and Prerogative' the metropolitan government would thenceforth no longer hesitate to turn to Parliament to achieve what it would be unable to accomplish through executive action alone. As Isaac Norris, speaker of the Pennsylvania Assembly appreciated in trying to understand the new Grenville measures of 1764–65, the idea of resorting to the 'Power of Parliament to make general Colony Laws' and otherwise intervene in the internal affairs of the colonies was 'no new Scheme'. It had been often suggested during the decade prior to the war. But as Norris understood, it was 'the War in America' that had 'brought it to the Issue we now see and are like to feel both now and hereafter'.

Though some thought that the colonists would not resist any Parliamentary effort to 'new model the Government' and trade of the colonies, metropolitan officials were not blind to the possibility that even the august
authority of Parliament might be contested in America. ‘From their partial
Interests and Connection’, the colonists could in fact be expected to ‘give
all the Opposition on their power to . . . any . . . matter . . . for the General
Good’. During the war, metropolitan civil and military representatives
had taken note of the ‘slight [regard] people of this Country affect to Treat
Acts of Parliament with’, and Lord Loudoun had reported that it was
‘very common’ for colonists to say, defiantly, that ‘they would be glad to
see any Man durst Offer to put an English Act of Parliament in Force in
this Country’. But a second structural change brought about by the war
gave London authorities confidence that any opposition to Parliamentary
measures could be easily overcome. The idea of using royal troops in a
coercive way against the colonies had been considered during the late
1740s and early 1750s, but no significant body of troops was readily
available. Only with the rapid buildup of an American army beginning in
1756 did the metropolis have, for the first time in the history of the North
American empire, significant coercive resources in the colonies. During the
war, several governors, including Robert Hunter Morris of Pennsylvania,
had argued that it was ‘next to impossible without a standing force to carry
the Laws [of Parliament] into Execution’ and, like Thomas Pownall and
Henry Ellis of Georgia, he had urged the necessity of using the military to
reinforce civil authority. ‘A military force is certainly necessary to render
Government respectable, & the Laws efficacious’, wrote Ellis in June 1757,
& perhaps not more so in any country upon earth than this, which
abounds with ungovernable and refractory people’. Pownall agreed: ‘tis
necessary’, he wrote to Halifax less than a month later, ‘that the Military
should carry into effect those matters which the Civil thro it’s weakness
cannot’. Others wrote in a similar vein. Thus, in urging the quick adoption
of a plan to reduce the colonies to a ‘state of subordination and improvement’
ear the end of the war, customs comptroller Nathaniel Ware warned that ‘if
an effectual reformation be not introduced before those troops are withdrawn
which could have been thrown in [to the colonies] upon no less occasion
[than the war] without giving a general alarm, one may venture to pronounce
it impossible afterwards’. With the colonies ‘now surrounded by an army,
a navy, and . . . hostile tribes of Indians’, Maurice Morgann, adviser to
Shelburne, agreed, there would be no better ‘time (not to oppress or injure
them in any shape) but to exact a due deference to the just and equitable
demands of a British Parliament’.

The decision to keep a large contingent of troops in America following
the war was almost certainly not the result of the sort of calculated deception
suggested by Captain Walter Rutherford, a British officer in the colonies,
who proposed in 1759 that troops be retained in the colonies ‘apparently
for their defence, but also to keep them in proper subjection to the Mother
Country’. But neither, as some later historians have contended, were
security of the new conquests against their former possessors nor the
desirability of distributing troops ‘amongst the several Members’ of the
‘Empire, in proportion to their ability to support them’ the only considera-
tions behind this decision. As William Knox explained in a long memorandum
in 1763, ‘one great purpose of stationing a large Body of Troops in America’
was 'to secure the Dependence of the Colonys on Great Britain' by, another observer remarked, 'guarding against any Disobedience or Disaffection amongst the Inhabitants ...', who already begin to entertain some extravagant Opinions, concerning their Relations and Dependence on their Mother Country'. With such a large military force in the colonies,—7,500 troops in all—metropolitan officials at the end of the Seven Years' War could now proceed with the business of imperial reconstruction with reasonable confidence that they had the resources near at hand to suppress any potential colonial opposition.

But there seemed to be little reason to fear extended colonial resistance. For, people in Britain believed, the war had shown Americans to have little stomach for a fight. Not only had they proved to be 'execrable Troops', they had also shown themselves unwilling to stand up to military power. As Loudoun concluded from his successful use of the threat of force to overcome colonial opposition to providing quarters for troops in 1756–7, the colonists 'wou'd invade every Right of the Crown, if permitted, but ... if the Servants of the Crown wou'd do their Duty, and stood firm, they wou'd always Submit'.

Even if they were braver than they appeared during the war, however, the 'mutual jealousies amongst the several Colonies would always', Lord Morton observed, prevent a united resistance and thus 'keep them in a state of dependence'. With fourteen separate colonies in the continent in 1763, all with 'different forms of government, different laws, different interests, and some of them different religious persuasions and different manners', it was no wonder that they were 'all jealous of each other. Indeed, as Benjamin Franklin reported, their 'jealousy of each other was so great that' they would never be 'able to effect ... an union among themselves' and there was therefore absolutely no possibility that they could ever become 'dangerous' to Britain.

But perhaps the most important structural change produced by the war was not the increasing involvement of Parliament in American affairs or even the introduction of an army into the colonies but the elimination of France and Spain from eastern North America. Following contemporaries, historians have emphasised the importance of this development as a precondition for colonial resistance after 1763. Of far greater importance, in all probability, was its effect upon the mentality of those in power in the metropolis. For the destruction of French power not only made the colonies less dependent upon Britain for protection; it also left Britain with a much freer hand to proceed with its programme of colonial reform by removing the necessity that had operated so strongly during the first half of the war for conciliatory behaviour towards the colonies to encourage them to cooperate against a common enemy. Colonial leaders appreciated this point quite fully in the wake of the Grenville programme. Many people, found an anonymous Frenchman visiting the colonies in 1765, were saying that if the 'french ... were [still] in Canada the British parlem't would as soon be D[e]a[d as to offer to do what they do now'. John Dickinson agreed. The colonists, he declared in 1765, 'never would have been treated as they are if Canada still continued in the hands of the French'.

If the structural changes produced by the war—the intrusion of Parliament
into colonial matters, the presence of a metropolitan army, and the removal of international pressures for conciliating the colonies—provided metropolitan officials with favourable conditions for undertaking a sweeping reformation of the imperial system, while their heightened awareness of both the value of the colonies and the fragility of their authority over them served as a motive, they were pushed even more strongly in this direction by their own interpretation of the purposes of the war and the relative contributions of Britain and the colonies. For the belief was widespread in London that the war had been undertaken not on behalf of any specifically metropolitan objectives but for the protection of the colonies. As Shelburne put it in a speech in the House of Lords in December 1766, the ‘security of the British Colonies in N. America was the first cause of the War’. Britain’s generosity, in fact, seemed to contrast sharply with the colonies’ parsimony. Britain, wrote Thomas Whateley, had certainly ‘engaged in the Defence of her most distant Dominions, with more alacrity than the Provinces themselves that were immediately attacked’, while the colonists had repeatedly refused ‘to sacrifice their own partial Advantages to the general good’ and brazenly taken ‘advantage of their Countrys distresses’ to cram ‘their modes down the throat[s] of the Governor[s]’ in shortsighted and selfish disputes over privileges. In return for such generous treatment, metropolitan leaders expected the colonists to show both a deep appreciation and a strong sense of the great ‘obligation they owe[d] her’. Instead, they received nothing but ingratitude, the sting of which was made all the more painful by the fact that Britain had accumulated a huge debt of between £100,000,000 and £150,000,000 and a high annual rate of taxation as a result of the war and had even reimbursed the colonies for their own military appropriations by nearly £1,100,000. Nor was such recompense made any less galling by the colonists’ vaunted prosperity. While the parent society wallowed in debt and groaned under high taxes, its ‘vigorous Offspring’ in America seemed to be enjoying low taxes and a flourishing economy that enabled them to riot in opulence and luxury.

III

The colonial response to the war could scarcely have been more different. Scholars have traditionally emphasised the extent to which the war contributed to colonial discontent with British rule. Thus, Alan Rogers has recently argued that their experiences during the war made the colonists rebellious and filled them with anxieties about the power of the metropolis. ‘While the struggle to drive France from the North American continent was being waged’, he contends, ‘Americans from every social class experienced firsthand, or had some cause to fear the use of arbitrary [metropolitan] power’. Some of their discontent derived from Crown attempts to centralise Indian administration and still more from the overt condescension of British regulars towards American provincials and a discriminatory military structure that assigned American officers and soldiers to subordinate roles. Most, however, arose from the insistence by British military commanders that military necessity overrode all other considerations. ‘Granted sweeping
powers by the Crown', they 'imposed embargoes on shipping, ordered press
gangs into the street and countryside to seize men and property, forced
citizens to quarter soldiers in their homes, and insisted that the authority
of colonial political agencies was subordinate to their own military power'.

Well before the war, of course, the colonists had learned to be wary
of metropolitan power and intentions. 'From some hard usage, received in
former times', principally from 'the governors and other officers sent among
them', they had long 'entertained an opinion that Britain was resolved to
keep them low, and [was] regardless of their welfare', and their rejection of
the Albany Plan of Union in 1754 on the eve of the war can be interpreted
at least in part as an expression of this wariness. That the many examples of
objectionable behaviour by the metropolis and its representatives cited by
Rogers exacerbated these longstanding colonial fears is clear. Thus, Thomas
Pownall reported in December 1757 that Loudoun's high-handed tactics in
his efforts to quarter British troops in Massachusetts had created 'Mischevious
Suspicions & Suggestions' that Pownall was 'in league with the Army to
turn the Constitution of this Province into a Military Government'. Against
the background of the new aggressiveness towards the colonies exhibited
by London authorities during the decade preceding the war, moreover,
metropolitan behaviour during the war appeared even more ominous, and
some colonists, like William Smith, Jr., worried that the 'long hand of the
Prerogative' would 'be stretched over to us, more than ever, upon the
conclusion of the next general peace'. Nor did the colonists respond entirely
favourably to the rising chorus of suggestions both immediately before and
throughout the war for Parliamentary intervention in the internal affairs of
the colonies, and at least one colonial leader, Stephen Hopkins, the elected
governor of Rhode Island, reportedly declared in 1757 'that the King &
Parliament had no more Right to make Laws for us than the Mohawks'
and that whatever might be said 'concerning the Arbitrary Despotic Govern-
ment of the Kingdom of France, yet nothing could be more tyrannical,
than our being Obliged by Acts of Parliament To which we were not parties
to the making; and in which we were not Represented'.

Similarly, as Knollenberg has shown, the many restrictive policies
implemented by the metropolis during the later stages of the war following
the conquest of Canada in 1759 elicited considerable colonial discontent.
Colonial legislators resented the demonstrable increase in metropolitan
limitations upon the supervision of their law-making powers. By effectively
'strip[ping] us of all the Rights and Privileges of British Subjects', complained
Colonel Richard Bland, the Virginia lawyer and antiquarian, such limitations
threatened to undermine the customary constitutions of the colonies and 'to
put us under' a 'despotic Power' of the sort usually associated with 'a French
or Turkish Government'. At least in the northern colonies, colonial merchants
were equally unhappy with metropolitan efforts to enforce the trade laws
more systematically and especially with their attempts to suppress colonial
trade with enemy islands. Far from being 'pernicious and prejudicial' to
either Britain or the war effort, such trade, they argued, was 'of the greatest
benefit to the kingdom, and the main source from whence we have been
enabled to support the extraordinary demands for cash, that have been
made upon us in order to enable his majesty to carry on the present just and necessary, but most expensive war.' Even to interfere with, much less to suppress, a trade that was ultimately responsible for bringing the British nation annual profits of over 600 per cent and cash in the amount of £1,500,000 seemed to colonial traders incomprehensible. Because there had never been a total prohibition of trade between the home islands and France at any time during the war, moreover, it also seemed to be patently discriminatory against colonial merchants, who professed to find it explicable only in terms of the 'undue influence of the [British] West-Indians' and metropolitan partiality for their interests over that of the continental colonists. In addition, some colonists were sceptical about metropolitan intentions to keep a standing army in the colonies after the war. They wondered with Cortlandt Skinner of New Jersey why, 'when a few independent Companies' had been 'sufficient for the continent' for over a century when the French were in possession of Canada, Britain suddenly required a permanent garrison of 'so many regiments when every [European] enemy is removed at least a thousand miles from our borders' and worried that the army was really intended 'to check us'.

In the final analysis, however, the anxieties with which the colonists emerged from the war appear far less important than the high levels of expectations. For on balance the war seems to have been for the colonists a highly positive experience. For one thing, the war had brought large sums of specie into the colonies through military and naval spending and successful privateering and had been highly profitable for many people, especially in the northern colonies where most of the troops were stationed. But the psychological benefits the colonists derived from the war would seem to have been far more significant than these material ones. That so much of the war had been fought on colonial soil and that the metropolitan government had made such an enormous effort and gone to such a great expense to defend them were extraordinarily reinforcing of colonial self-esteem and gave rise to an expanded sense of colonial self-importance. Moreover, the colonists took great pride in the fact that they had themselves made an important contribution to the war. Historians have often taken at face value contemporary metropolitan opinion that, with a few notable exceptions, the colonies had not exerted themselves in voting men and money for the war, and that the requisition system through which the administration had sought to mobilise colonial contributions to the war was, in the judgment of George Louis Beer, 'largely a failure'. Yet, as John M. Murrin has recently pointed out, the subsidy policy adopted by the metropolitan government beginning in 1756 by which it reimbursed the colonies with specie voted by Parliament according to the amounts they actually expended for the war worked with 'reasonable efficiency'. 'By offering valuable rewards to specie-poor colonies, it actually stimulated competition among them in support of imperial goals', he argues: 'At an annual expense to Britain of £200,000 (later reduced to £133,000), the colonies raised about twenty thousand provincials per year through 1762, paying about half the cost themselves'.

The following table not only reinforces Murrin's point but shows that
the colonial contribution to the war was both more evenly distributed and far more substantial than historians have appreciated. Massachusetts and Virginia, the two colonies that subsequently took the lead in the resistance movement after 1763, were together responsible for half of total net expenditures, but Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, Connecticut, and, in terms of taxes per adult white male, even South Carolina all expended respectable sums. Besides the new colony of Georgia, only New Hampshire, North Carolina, Maryland and, to a lesser extent, Rhode Island did not vote substantial amounts and thereby place their inhabitants under significantly higher tax burdens than they had been used to before the war.

**COLONIAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE SEVEN YEARS' WAR**

**A. Expenditures**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Colony</th>
<th>Expenditures £</th>
<th>% of Total</th>
<th>Reimbursed by Parliament £</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
<td>818,000</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>351,994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>385,319</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>99,177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>313,043</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>75,311</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>204,411</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>51,321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>291,156</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>139,468</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>90,656</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>10,226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>39,000</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhode Island</td>
<td>80,981</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>51,480</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecticut</td>
<td>259,875</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>231,752</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>30,776</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>11,010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Hampshire</td>
<td>53,211</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>47,030</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>1,820</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Totals**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expenditures £</th>
<th>2,568,248</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reimbursed by Parliament £</td>
<td>1,068,769</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net Expenditures £</td>
<td>1,499,479</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**B. Tax Per Adult White Male**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Colony</th>
<th>Tax £</th>
<th>Colony</th>
<th>Tax £</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>10.94</td>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>7.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
<td>10.70</td>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>6.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>8.77</td>
<td>Rhode Island</td>
<td>3.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>7.52</td>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>1.91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Reimbursed Expenditures %**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Colony</th>
<th>% Reimbursed by Parliament</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>43.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
<td>43.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>25.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>24.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>25.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>47.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhode Island</td>
<td>63.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecticut</td>
<td>89.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Hampshire</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Net Expenditures %**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Colony</th>
<th>% of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>41.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>41.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>31.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the colonists, the knowledge that they had, for the first time in their histories, made such an important contribution to such a great and glorious national cause increased the immediacy and strength of their ties with Britain and produced a surge of British patriotism. They had long had, in Thomas Pownall's words, a 'natural, almost mechanical affection to Great Britain', an affection that was deeply rooted in ties of blood and interest, satisfaction with their existing prosperous condition, and pride in being linked to a great metropolitan tradition that, they believed, guaranteed them the same 'privileges and equal protection', the same 'liberty and free constitution of government', that were the joyous boast of Britons every-

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38. COLONIAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE SEVEN YEARS' WAR

39. The figures for total and per capita contributions are based on the assumption that the population of the colonies remained constant throughout the war, which is a reasonable approximation for the period. The table above shows the total expenditures, the percentage reimbursed by Parliament, the net expenditures, and the percentage of net expenditures. The figures for the tax per adult white male are based on the number of adult white males in the colony, as estimated by the British government. The figures for the reimbursement by Parliament are based on the amount of money that the British government paid to the colonies to cover their expenditures.
where and the jealous envy of the rest of the civilised world. The extraordinary British achievements in the Seven Years' War could only intensify this deep affection for and pride in being British, which came pouring out during the later stages of the war in a veritable orgy of celebrations, first, of the great British victories in Canada, the West Indies, and Europe; then of the accession of a vigorous, young, British-born king, George III, in 1760; and, finally, of the glorious Treaty of Paris in 1763, a treaty that made the British Empire the most extensive and powerful in the Western world since Rome. British national feeling among the colonists had probably never been stronger than it was in the early 1760s.40

The feeling of having been a partner in such a splendid 'national' undertaking, even if only a junior partner, not only intensified the pride of the colonists in their attachment to Britain, it also heightened their expectations for a larger—and more equivalent—role within the Empire, a role that would finally raise them out of a dependent status to one in which they were more nearly on a par with Britons at home. It also stimulated visions of future grandeur—within the British Empire. 'Now commences the Aera of our quiet Enjoyment of those Liberties, which our Fathers purchased with the Toil of their whole Lives, their Treasure, their Blood', ecstatically declared Reverend Thomas Barnard of Salem, Massachusetts, in one of many similar sermons celebrating the conclusion of the Seven Years' War: 'Safe from the Enemy of the Wilderness, safe from the griping Hand of arbitrary Sway and cruel Superstition; Here shall be the late founded Seat of Peace and Freedom. Here shall our indulgent Mother, who has most generously rescued and protected us, be served and honoured by growing Numbers, with all Duty, Love and Gratitude, till Time shall be no more'.

The expulsion of the French had at once both rendered the colonies safe and opened up half a continent for their continued expansion. Now that this vast and rich area had finally been 'secured to the British Government', the colonists confidently expected that as a matter of course liberty would be granted to his Majestys Subjects in' the 'Colonies to Settle the Lands on Ohio' and elsewhere in the west. Once these lands had been settled, prospects for Britain, and America, colonists predicted with assurance, would be almost without limits. 'The State, Nature, Climate, and prodigious Extent of the American Continent' obviously provided 'high Prospects in favor of the Power, to which it belongs'. With all of eastern North America for its granary, Britain could become one extended town of manufacturers, and this powerful Anglo-American partnership would enable the British Empire to 'maintain and exalt her Supremacy, until Heaven blots out all the Empires of the World.' Given their crucial role in these developments, the colonists had no doubt, as an anonymous pamphleteer had phrased it early in the war, that they would 'not be thought presumptuous, if they consider[ed] themselves upon an equal footing with' Englishmen at home or be 'treated the worse, because they will be Englishmen'. Conscious of the strenuous and critical character of their exertions during the war, they now thought that they had every 'reason to expect that their interest should be considered and attended to, that their rights ... should be preserved to them'. 'Glowing with every sentiment of duty and affection towards their
mother country’, they looked forward at war’s end to ‘some mark of tenderness in return’. As soon as the metropolitan government recognised their great ‘services and suffereings’ during the war, they felt sure, it would be compelled even ‘to enlarge’ their Priviledges’. 41

IV

The experience of the Seven Years’ War thus sent the postwar expectations of men on opposite sides of the Atlantic veering off in opposite directions. More aware than ever of the value of the colonies, increasingly anxious about the fragility of metropolitan authority over them, and appalled by their truculent and self-serving behaviour during the war, the metropolitan government was determined to bring them under tighter regulations at the end of the war and willing to use the authority of Parliament to do so. By contrast, the colonists, basking in a warm afterglow of British patriotism, minimised evidence accumulated before and during the war that metropolitan had other, less exalted plans for them, and looked forward expansively to a more equal and secure future in the Empire. At the same time, the removal of the Franco-Spanish menace from the eastern half of North America had both made the colonists somewhat less dependent upon Britain for protection and left subsequent British governments much freer to go ahead with a broad programme of reform, while the presence of a large number of royal troops in the colonies gave them confidence that they could suppress potential colonial resistance and seemed to make the caution and conciliation they had traditionally observed towards the colonies less necessary. In combination, these psychological consequences and structural changes produced by the war made the relationship between Britain and the colonies far more volatile than it had ever been before.

Given this situation, it was highly predictable that British officials in the 1760s would take some action, probably by bringing Parliamentary authority to bear upon the colonials in new, unaccustomed, and hence, for the colonists, illegitimate ways and that such action, so completely at variance with the colonists’ hopes and expectations, would be interpreted by the colonists as both a betrayal and a violation of the customary relationship between them and Great Britain. For the colonists, it was not only the new taxes and restrictive measures in themselves that so deeply offended them in the mid-1760s but the injustice, ingratitude, and reproach those measures seemed to imply. When they discovered through these measures that their obedience during the war would be rewarded not by the extension but the ‘loss of their freedom’, that, as the Massachusetts lawyer Oxenbridge Thacher exclaimed, they had been ‘lavish of their blood and treasure in the late war only to bind the shackles of slavery on themselves and their children’ and that Britain intended to treat all the colonies, regardless of whether they had contributed heavily to the war or not, without distinction, with ‘the rude hand of a ravisher’, they felt a deep sense of disappointment, even betrayal, as if, in the words of Richard Henry Lee, they had ‘hitherto been suffered to drink from the cup of Liberty’ only that they might ‘be more sensibly punished by its being withdrawn, and the bitter dregs of
Servility forced on us in its place’.42 Perhaps more than any other single factor, the sense of betrayal, the deep bitterness arising out of the profound disjunction between how, on the basis of their performance during the Seven Years’ War, they thought they deserved to be dealt with by the metropolis and the treatment actually accorded them, supplied the energy behind their intense reaction to the Grenville programme in 1765–6. For metropolitans, on the other hand, the colonists’ powerful resistance to the Grenville measures only operated to confirm ancient fears that the allegiance of these valuable colonies to Britain was highly tenuous, that their authority in the colonies was dangerously weak, and that the ungrateful colonists were bent upon escaping from their control and establishing their independence.

By contributing so heavily to the creation of the intellectual and psychological climate and a structural situation that produced these actions and reactions, the Seven Years’ War thus had a profound, if complex, bearing upon the emerging confrontation between Britain and its North American colonies and served as an important component in the causal pattern of the American Revolution.

NOTES
1. The only recent exception is John M. Murrin’s brief but penetrating ‘The French and Indian War, the American Revolution, and the Counterfactual Hypothesis: Reflections on Lawrence Henry Gipson and John Shy’, Reviews in American History, I (1973), 307–18.
8. Pinfold to Halifax, 31 May, 1757, Force Papers, IX, Box 7; Wentworth to Board of Trade, 15 Jan. 1758, Colonial Office Papers (hereafter, CO) C/927, Public Record


15. See for the classic statement of this view, which has been very widely held, Lawrence


28. Greene, ‘ “Posture of Hostility” ’, 26, 43; Morris to Pitt, 1758–59, Misc. Mss., Clements Library; Ellis to William Henry Lyttelton, 23 June, 1757, Lyttelton Papers, Clements Library; Pownall to Halifax, Force Papers, IX, Box 7; Knollenberg,


39. Section A of this table is based upon many sources. Except for the New Hampshire data, which is derived from William Henry Fry, New Hampshire as a Royal Province (New York, 1908), 412–15, the column marked expenditures is taken from ‘A State of the Debts incurred by the British Colonies of North America for the Extraordinary Expenses of the last wars . . . ’,[1766], Add. Mss., 35909, f. 169. The column designated reimbursements by Parliament has been pieced together from the Treasury Papers (T) in the Public Record Office: the 1756 grant of £115,000 (T 54/38, pp. 254–9); the 1757 grant of £50,000 (T 1/376, f. 81); the 1758 grants of £27,380 (Massachusetts) and £13,736 (Connecticut) (T 1/388, f. 20); the 1759 grant of £200,000 (T 61/38, p. 181); the 1760 grant of £200,000 (T 52/52, p. 244); the 1760 grant of £2,979 to New York (Journals of the House of Commons, 28 Apr. 1760, XXVIII, 894); the 1761 grant of £200,000 (T 52/54, pp. 109–11; Audit Office Papers 1/74/97; and T 1/423);
the 1762 grant of £133,333 (T 1/423, 110); the 1763 grant of £133,333 (T 52/55, p. 430). Net expenditures have been computed by subtracting reimbursements from expenditures. Part B. has been computed by dividing net expenditures by adult white male population figures for 1760.

