

*'A Posture of Hostility':
A Reconsideration
of Some Aspects of the Origins
of the American Revolution*

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There was no Posture of Hostility in America. But Britain put herself in a Posture of Hostility against America.

—BENJAMIN FRANKLIN, 1769¹

I

THE PAST QUARTER century has witnessed a sustained and vigorous discussion of the old but still absorbing problem of the origins of the American Revolution.² Despite many continuing disagreements over a variety of questions, this discussion has produced at least a rough consensus on three major points. First, with very few exceptions,³ there has been

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¹ Benjamin Franklin, Marginalia to *Good Humour* (London, 1766), ca. 1769, in Leonard W. Labaree, et al., eds., *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin* (New Haven, Conn., 1959-), 16:283. This essay is an elaboration of a number of points first argued in much briefer compass in Jack P. Greene, 'An Uneasy Connection: An Analysis of the Preconditions of the American Revolution,' in Stephen G. Kurtz and James H. Hutson, eds., *Essays on the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, 1973), pp. 65-80.

² For a discussion of recent literature, see Jack P. Greene, 'Revolution, Confederation, and Constitution, 1763-1787,' in William H. Cartwright and Richard L. Watson, eds., *The Reinterpretation of American History and Culture* (Washington, 1973), pp. 259-95.

³ The one important exception is Marc Egnal and Joseph A. Ernst, 'An Economic Interpretation of the American Revolution,' *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser. 29 (1972):3-32.

widespread agreement among historians that the American colonists were not sufficiently unhappy with any aspect of their relationship to Britain prior to the 1760s to have caused them to think in terms of separating from Britain. Indeed, through the middle decades of the eighteenth century the colonists seem rather to have been in the process of becoming ever more closely tied to Britain through strong bonds of habit, interest, and affection.⁴ Second, the vast majority of historians also seem to agree that what was chiefly responsible for creating widespread colonial discontent and eventually driving strategic segments of the population to resistance and rebellion was the metropolitan effort to tighten control over colonial economic and political life through parliamentary taxation and a variety of other administrative restrictions beginning around the end of the Seven Years' War. These efforts activated deep-seated fears within the colonies of a wanton exertion of metropolitan power and gradually led, between 1765 and 1776, to the alienation of colonial affections for Britain, a negative reassessment of the colonial connection with Britain, and broad support for independence. Third, students of the British side of the controversy have been slowly piecing together an explanation for why the metropolitan government persisted in measures so many Americans found so objectionable and resisted so vigorously. By challenging the supremacy of Parliament over the colonies, these scholars have suggested, colonial claims for exemption from parliamentary taxation beginning in 1764, and from any parliamentary legislation relating to the internal affairs of the colonies beginning in the summer of 1774, seemed to strike at the most cherished component of the Revolutionary Settlement of 1688–1715: the idea that the King-in-Parliament had absolute sovereignty over the whole of the British dominions.⁵ So

⁴ For an elaboration of this argument, see Greene, 'Uneasy Connection,' pp. 32–80.

⁵ On this point, see Jack P. Greene, 'The Plunge of Lemmings: A Consideration of Recent Writings on British Politics and the American Revolution,' *South Atlantic Quarterly* 67(1968):141–75.

powerful was this belief, so central was it to the reigning system of political perceptions within Britain, that no group or individual within the metropolitan political nation prior to 1776 seems to have been able even to take seriously American proposals for an empire with a common monarch and a series of coordinate parliaments, much less to seize upon them as an alternative between the extremes of subjection and independence.

One of the primary assumptions underlying this essay is that the current consensus on these three points is essentially accurate: that the colonies were well socialized to the old imperial system by the mid-eighteenth century; that they were driven to resistance and rebellion primarily by metropolitan measures undertaken between 1763 and 1776; and that their resistance seemed to virtually all members of the British political nation to be such a fundamental—and threatening—challenge to the existing imperial system as to push metropolitan leaders more and more in the direction of a coercive response and thereby to make colonial revolt and the disruption of the old British Empire increasingly probable. If I am correct in this assumption, then, I would submit, the salient question about the causes of the American Revolution is why the metropolitan government initially undertook the measures that set this process, this destructive dialectic between repression and resistance, in motion. It is this question that I propose to consider in this essay.

The theme of the essay is taken from Benjamin Franklin's marginalia in an anonymous London pamphlet of 1766 entitled *Good Humour*. In response to the author's charge that the colonists had adopted '*a posture of hostility* against Great Britain,' Franklin fumed: "There was no Posture of Hostility in America. But Britain put herself in a Posture of Hostility against America."⁶ My argument is that Britain began to put

⁶ Franklin, Marginalia to *Good Humour*, ca. 1769, in Labaree, ed., *Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, 16:283.

herself in a posture of hostility as early as 1748 and that, between that date and the outbreak of the Seven Years' War in 1756, the metropolitan government—distinctly and unequivocally—abandoned its long-standing stance of accommodation and conciliation towards the colonies for a policy of strict supervision and control, a policy that in both tone and content strongly resembled that usually associated primarily with the post-1763 era. Why this shift occurred when it did, what forms it took, what consequences it produced, and what bearing contemporary understanding of those consequences had upon subsequent metropolitan behavior towards the colonies and the eventual outbreak of Revolution are the questions that will be considered in the following pages.

II

The explanation for the shift in British policy towards the colonies is to be found in four separate conditions, one long-run, one medium-term, and two short-run. The long-run condition, which seems to have been by far the most important, was the phenomenal growth of the colonies in the decades following the Peace of Utrecht in 1713. Between 1710 and 1750, the extent of settled territory, the size of the population, the volume of immigrants, the number of African slaves imported, the volume of agricultural production, the amount of foreign trade, and the size of major urban centers all increased at an unusually rapid rate. Demographic growth was unparalleled. The free population rose by 160 percent between 1710 and 1740 and 125 percent between 1740 and 1770, while the slave population grew by 235 percent during the former period and 200 percent during the latter. Territorial and demographic growth in turn made it possible for the colonists both to send to Britain increasing quantities of raw materials, many of which were subsequently profitably reexported by British middlemen, and to purchase ever larger amounts of British manufactures, thereby providing an im-

portant stimulus to the development of British industry. During the eighteenth century, in fact, the colonial trade became 'the most rapidly growing section' and accounted for a significant proportion of the total volume of British overseas trade. Imports from the colonies (both continental and Caribbean) accounted for 20 percent of the total volume of English imports in 1700-1 and 36 percent in 1772-73, while exports to the colonies rose from 10 percent of the total volume of English exports during the former year to 37 percent during the latter. The colonial trade was thus a critical segment of the British economy and was becoming more important with every decade.⁷

For the British political nation, the extraordinary growth of the colonies was, however, a source not only of power and profits but also of acute anxiety, anxiety that was clearly manifest through the middle decades of the eighteenth century in the frequent expression of two related ideas. The first idea was that the colonies were of crucial importance to the economic and strategic welfare of Britain. 'The American Colonys,' Horace Walpole wrote the Duke of Newcastle in 1754, 'are great Favourites to this Country in Generall, and indeed very Justly, as being the principall sources of our Balance in trade, & consequently of our Riches & strength, by the great Quantity of shipping employed, of manufactures vended, and of the useful returns of their growth; in carrying a commerce thither from all parts of this Kingdom.'⁸ 'That the Riches and Strength of this Nation depend principally upon its Commerce with foreign Countries, and its own Colonies,' declared Otis Little, a native of Massachusetts, in 1748

⁷ Phyllis Deane and W. A. Cole, *British Economic Growth 1688-1969: Trends and Structure* (Cambridge, Mass., 1962), pp. 34, 86; population as well as import-export figures have been computed from 'Estimated Population of the American Colonies' and 'Value of Exports to and Imports from England, by American Colonies: 1697 to 1776,' *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1967* (Washington, 1960), Ser. Z, pp. 765, 757.

⁸ Walpole to Newcastle, June 18, 1754, Newcastle Papers: Additional Manuscripts 32735, ff. 485-90, British Library, London.

in the London pamphlet *The State of the Trade of the Northern Colonies Considered*, 'is a Fact that needs no Illustration.'⁹ 'Full one-third of the whole Export of the produce and manufactures of this Country,' wrote Sir Thomas Robinson, 'is to our Colonies, and in proportion as this diminishes or increases, the Estates of Landholders, and the business of the Merchant; the Manufacturer and the Artificier must diminish or increase.'¹⁰

The second idea was that the colonists secretly lusted after and might possibly be on the verge of trying to achieve their independence from Britain. At least since the closing decades of the seventeenth century, metropolitan officials and traders had intermittently voiced the fear that the colonies might eventually seek independence, set up their own manufactures, and become economic rivals rather than subordinate and complementary partners with Britain. By lending increasing plausibility to this fear, the extraordinary growth of the colonies along with the concomitant increase in their economic and strategic worth to Britain seems to have contributed to a significant rise during the late 1740s and the 1750s in the frequency and urgency of explicit expressions of anxieties within metropolitan circles over the possible loss of control over the colonies. John Bumstead has called attention to many such expressions in a recent article. Thus, he cites, among others, the Duke of Bedford's opposition in 1746 to a plan whereby American troops would have taken Canada on the grounds that an American conquest would have created an 'independence . . . in those provinces towards the mother country, when they shall see within themselves so great an army possessed in their own right by conquest, of so great a country.'¹¹ Bumstead's examples can be multiplied several

⁹ [Little], *The State of Trade of the Northern Colonies Considered* (London, 1748), p. 10.

¹⁰ Robinson to Holderness, Aug. 29, 1755, Leeds Papers: Egerton Manuscripts 3432, ff. 292-95, British Library.

¹¹ Bumstead, ' "Things in the Womb of Time": Ideas of American Independence, 1633 to 1763,' *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser. 31 (1974):533-64. The quotation

times over. Fears of colonial independence were everywhere manifest in Britain: in official reports prepared by the Board of Trade, in correspondence between metropolitan officials and royal governors, in parliamentary debates, and in a proliferating number of tracts, both published and unpublished, on the state of the colonies and the need for reforms in their administration. So widespread were such fears that Thomas Penn, the Pennsylvania proprietor, tried to discourage the establishment of the College of Philadelphia in 1750 partially on the grounds that it would lend plausibility to such fears. People in Britain thought that the colonists were going 'too fast with regard to these matters,' Penn wrote Gov. James Hamilton, 'and it gives an opportunity to those fools who are always telling their fears, that the Colonies will set up for themselves.'¹² So consequential had these burgeoning colonies become to Britain that any 'Apprehension of their being lost,' as Horace Walpole put it, could 'easily . . . create a consternation.'¹³

If the rapid and substantial growth of the colonies along with the corresponding increase in their importance to Britain was the single most important precondition behind the shift in British policy beginning during the late 1740s, there was a second, closely related, medium-term precondition: the threat of French or perhaps even Spanish conquest of such valuable possessions. The Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle, signed in October 1748, was widely understood as offering only a temporary respite from the decade of conflict between Britain and the Latin powers that had begun in 1739 with the War of Jen-

is from p. 544. See also the introduction to Jack P. Greene, *Great Britain and the American Colonies, 1606-1763* (New York, 1970), pp. xi-xlvii, for still other expressions of similar fears of colonial independence.

¹² Penn to Hamilton, Feb. 12, 1750, Thomas Penn Papers: Force Transcripts, 7E, Box 60, Library of Congress, Washington.

¹³ Walpole to Newcastle, June 18, 1754, Newcastle Papers.

kins's Ear.¹⁴ 'This respite,' said Gov. Jonathan Belcher of New Jersey, would merely give the French 'a fine opportunity of filling up and inlargeing their naval force, the neglect of which has been their great foible, but if they wisely correct that mistake, and overpower you at sea, as well as by land,' he asked, 'what then?'¹⁵ It was well known, as Gov. Henry Grenville of Barbados wrote his brother George in 1751, that 'the Designs and Views of France are not less Active or Ambitious here than in Europe.'¹⁶ The stakes in the prospective conflict were widely recognized to be no less than supremacy over the entire western, and even some of the eastern, world. It was all too evident, said an official report on the state of British defenses in Nova Scotia, 'how much the Shipping, Trade, and Maritime Power of Great Britain . . . would be diminished, and that of France aggrandiz'd' if England should ever happen to lose its colonies in North America 'to the French.' Such a loss, it seemed clear, would greatly alter 'the State of Power . . . to the Prejudice of England' and lay 'a sure foundation for a general and lasting Domination' of the French 'by Sea, as well as by Land.'¹⁷ As Peter Williamson would later remark during the early portion of the Seven Years' War, '*America*' was obviously 'an object of such magnitude as cannot be forgot or neglected—And indeed, unless it were to be the subject of a question, Whether we are to give up our existence as a nation, it never can be matter of speculation, whether *America* is to be defended or supported.'

¹⁴ On this point, see Max Savelle, *The Origins of American Diplomacy: The International History of Angloamerica, 1492-1763* (New York, 1967), pp. 386-435; Richard Pares, 'American versus Continental Warfare, 1739-63,' *English Historical Review* 51 (1936):429-65; and Patrice Louis-René Higonnet, 'The Origins of the Seven Years' War,' *Journal of Modern History* 40 (1968):57-90.

¹⁵ Belcher to [Charles Gray], Nov. 14, 1748, Gray-Round Archives D/DRg 4/65, Essex Record Office, Chelmsford, Eng.

¹⁶ Henry to George Grenville, Sept. 27, 1751, Stowe Collection, Box 25(33), Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, Calif.

¹⁷ 'Remarks on the Importance of the Province of Nova Scotia,' [1748], Mildmay Papers, D/DM 01/41, Essex Record Office.

Upon the American colonies, Williamson emphasized, depended not only Britain's 'existence . . . as a . . . commercial and independent Nation' but also the capacity of Britons 'to be a free and happy people.' 'By trade,' he said, '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,' and 'how much our trade depends on our dominions in *America*,' he declared, 'he must be a stranger to this country that does not know.'¹⁸

With so much at stake, there could be no question of allowing the colonies to be 'so exposed as to be easily lost for want of support from' home,¹⁹ and British officials were concerned following the peace of 1748 to strengthen colonial defenses in preparation for a renewal of hostilities. The areas of greatest vulnerability seemed to be the two ends of the chain of colonies stretching along the east coast of North America from the Strait of Canso in the north to the Altamaha River in the south. At the northern end, Nova Scotia relied for its defense entirely upon a small British military establishment that lived in perpetual fear of rebellion by the numerically dominant 'neutral' French in the Annapolis Valley or of attack from the superior French military force at Louisbourg on Cape Breton Island.²⁰ Despite more than fifteen years of government support, including major expenditures from parliamentary revenues, Georgia, at the southern end, was in an obvious state of decay, perhaps even an easy prey for the small Spanish garrison at nearby St. Augustine.²¹

Fear of colonial independence and fear of French and/or

¹⁸ [Williamson], *Occasional Reflections on the Importance of the War in America* (London, 1758), pp. 7-8.

¹⁹ Walpole to Newcastle, June 18, 1754, Newcastle Papers.

²⁰ John Bartlett Brebner, *New England's Outpost: Acadia before the Conquest of Canada* (New York, 1927), pp. 104-202.

²¹ Trevor R. Reese, *Colonial Georgia: A Study in British Imperial Policy in the Eighteenth Century* (Athens, Ga., 1963), pp. 74-88; W. W. Abbot, *The Royal Governors of Georgia 1754-1775* (Chapel Hill, 1959), pp. 3-8, 34-37.

Spanish conquest combined in still a third fear: that strong and rebellious colonies would sell their favors to the highest bidder among Britain's European rivals. Unless the 'British Nation . . . attended to the government of their Colonys in the manner they should,' warned Robert Hunter Morris, later governor of Pennsylvania, in the early 1750s, the colonies would grow so 'strong and wealth[*y*]' that it would 'be too Late for Britain in its declines and Surrounded with diligent rivals both in trade and power to check the disobediencies of a Set of people [in the colonies] who will then (if they have not already) have it in their power to turn the Ballance of trade and Consequently of Riches and power into . . . the scale of almost any nation in Europe.'²² Such warnings obviously played upon growing fears of losing the colonies and of the national impotence that might follow such a loss to excite suspicion against not only French and Spanish rivals but the colonists themselves.

The actual timing of the shift seems to have been accounted for by the temporary cessation of hostilities with the peace of 1748 and two additional short-run circumstances. The first was the end of the internal domestic political instability that had begun with the outbreak of war in 1739 and was intensified by the vigorous competition for power through the mid-1740s following the fall of Sir Robert Walpole in 1742. Having already won the confidence of George II and wooed many opposition leaders to the side of government, Henry Pelham finally managed to restore 'peace to the body politic' and establish his administration on 'a sound parliamentary basis' as a result of the government's overwhelming victory in the elections of 1747. 'For the next seven years,' until Pelham's death in March 1754 led, as the Earl of Waldegrave put it, to the expiration of 'our tranquility, both at home and abroad,' the 'stability characteristic of Walpole's ministry at its zenith

²² Morris, 'Some Consequences of the Crown's not having Revenues in America,' [1751-53], Robert Hunter Morris Papers, 1:2, New Jersey Historical Society, Newark.

was again the salient feature of English government.' Along with the end of the war with the Latin powers, this new freedom from domestic distractions meant that British political leaders were freer to devote significant attention to the colonies than at any time since the mid-1730s.²³

A second, and even more important, short-run condition that was crucial in determining the timing of this shift in policy and that itself contributed significantly to intensify the growing anxiety and heightened sense of urgency that lay behind it was the apparent breakdown of metropolitan authority in many of the colonies during the late 1740s. For the previous thirty years, metropolitan officials had held the colonial reins loosely. Seemingly, they were content to follow the advice of Newcastle's lieutenant Charles Delafaye, who urged in 1722 that supervision of the colonies be kept 'as Easy and mild as possible to invite people to Settle' there.²⁴ So long as profits were the primary objective of empire, there was every reason for metropolitan officials to take 'very great Care,' as the economic writer Joshua Gee counseled in 1729, not to regulate affairs in the colonies too closely lest 'the Planters be . . . put under too many Difficulties' and thereby be discouraged from going 'on cheerfully' and peacefully.²⁵ Preoccupied with domestic concerns and relations with continental European powers, they did not, in any case, often, as one of the colonial agents observed in 1747, have the 'leisure to consider Things, which arise at so great a Distance from us' as the colonies; and they rarely gave close or sustained attention to colonial problems unless they somehow were perceived as threatening to powerful economic interests within

²³ John B. Owen, *The Rise of the Pelhams* (London, 1757), pp. 316–20; John W. Wilkes, *A Whig in Power: The Political Career of Henry Pelham* (Evanston, Ill., 1964), pp. 200–5, 215.

²⁴ Delafaye to Francis Nicholson, Jan. 26, 1722, in Jack P. Greene, ed., *Settlements to Society 1607–1763: A Documentary History of Colonial America* (New York, 1975), pp. 231–32.

²⁵ Gee, *The Trade and Navigation of Great-Britain* (London, 1729), p. 100.

the home islands.²⁶ There were two important results of this posture of what Burke would later call 'a wise and salutary neglect.'²⁷ One was the relaxation of tensions that had characterized relations between metropolis and colonies for much of the period between 1660 and 1720. The second was the development of a functional balance between metropolitan authority and local power based upon the existence of undefined and unacknowledged ambiguities about the nature of the metropolitan-colonial relationship. These ambiguities permitted local leaders to achieve a large measure of de facto control over the internal governance of the colonies without calling into question long-standing beliefs within Britain in the supremacy of the metropolis over all aspects of colonial life.²⁸

But a number of corollary developments between 1720 and 1750 rendered this balance extremely precarious by making it increasingly difficult for metropolitan authorities to retain even an illusion that they had the colonies under any kind of firm control. With the administration showing so little interest in the details of colonial matters, metropolitan organs charged with overseeing the colonies atrophied. The Board of Trade, the only body for which the colonies were a primary concern, gradually became little more than a housekeeping operation, and a sloppy one at that.²⁹ When the Board reprimanded Gov. Gabriel Johnston of North Carolina in 1745 for not having corresponded with it or sent home any papers for 'now *above three years*,' it was acknowledging both its own inattention to such matters and its impotence to force John-

²⁶ Ferdinand John Paris to James Alexander, Feb. 13, 1747, Rutherford Collection: New Jersey Papers, Box 3: 122, New-York Historical Society, New York City. See also Greene, ed., *Great Britain and the American Colonies*, pp. xxxiv-xxxvii.

²⁷ Edmund Burke, *Speech . . . on . . . Conciliation with the Colonies March 22, 1775* (London, 1775), para. 30, l. 42.

²⁸ See Greene, 'Uneasy Connection,' pp. 45-65.

²⁹ Oliver M. Dickerson, *American Colonial Government 1696-1765* (Cleveland, 1912), pp. 61-67; Arthur H. Basye, *The Lords Commissioners of Trade and Plantations* (New Haven, 1925), pp. 24-31.

ston to account regularly to London.³⁰ Moreover, as James Henretta has suggested, the colonial bureaucracy, both in Britain and the colonies, became 'increasingly politicized' during these years, as the ministry expropriated administrative resources for political purposes. Patronage, not expertise or suitability, became the main criterion for appointments. These developments in turn helped to break the spirit of colonial governors and other royal officials in America.³¹ In all but a few cases, governors found themselves with insufficient resources to resist the strident demands for power from the colonial lower houses and in many instances simply capitulated to local interests. As the mid-eighteenth century approached, more and more of the governors were becoming thus 'creolized.'³²

By the late 1740s, these several developments seemed to have produced a much more ominous one: the breakdown of metropolitan political control in many of the colonies. From the dispatches and papers that had accumulated in the colonial office, especially after 1745, the situation in America appeared to be truly alarming. Metropolitan merchants complained that the legislatures of several colonies, in direct violation of metropolitan prohibitions, had issued large sums of paper money during the war and were subsequently refusing to enact measures to protect British debts against its rapid depreciation.³³ At the same time, West Indian sugar planters and metropolitan customs officials in the colonies charged that

³⁰ Board of Trade to Johnston, June 27, 1745, in William L. Saunders, ed., *The Colonial Records of North Carolina* (Raleigh, 1886-90), 4:756-57.

³¹ James A. Henretta, 'Salutary Neglect': *Colonial Administration under the Duke of Newcastle* (Princeton, 1972), pp. 323-25, 346-47.

³² On this process, see Greene, *Great Britain and the American Colonies*, pp. xxxvii-xxxix.

³³ There is no detailed published discussion of the campaign against colonial paper money, but see the brief section in Joseph Albert Ernst, *Money and Politics in America 1755-1775* (Chapel Hill, 1973), pp. 35-42. The campaign may be followed in Leo Francis Stock, ed., *Proceedings and Debates of the British Parliament Respecting North America* (Washington, 1924-41), 5:183-84, 187, 297-98, 304-21, 360-66, 448-50, 464-69, 472-76, 479, 481, 485, 488-89, 495-97, 500, 506-11.

merchants from the continental colonies were violating the Molasses Act of 1733 at will, to the severe economic detriment of the Caribbean sugar planters.³⁴ In both instances, colonial behavior clearly represented a blatant disregard for metropolitan authority.

A review of conditions in individual colonies seemed to reveal even greater cause for concern. The situation was most serious in New Jersey, where the total inability of the administration to restrain widespread rioting against the East Jersey proprietors after 1745 had produced, in Lord Chancellor Hardwicke's words, 'disorders and confusions' that had been 'carried almost to the height of revolution.'³⁵ In New Hampshire and North Carolina, legislative activity had been brought to a halt and civil government rendered tenuous as a result of the desperate efforts of the governors to strengthen executive power by altering the apportionment of representatives to the lower houses in those colonies.³⁶ The same result had been produced in Bermuda by Gov. William Popple's vituperative altercation with the local assembly over a number of issues concerning, as Popple put it, '*The Rights of the Prerogative, and the pretensions of the Assembly.*' So bitter had this dispute become that Speaker Cornelius Hinson, in company with several other members of the house, put a price on Popple's head, reportedly ostentatiously offering—in the public 'Parade in St. Georges'—the 'sum of Five Pounds, or Five Pis-

³⁴ Stock, ed., *Proceedings*, 5:460-63, 469-87, 556-60, 570.

³⁵ Hardwicke to Belcher, Aug. 31, 1751, in Philip C. Yorke, ed., *The Life and Correspondence of Philip Yorke, Earl of Hardwicke* (Cambridge, Eng., 1913), 2:27-29. The situation in New Jersey is described in Edgar J. Fisher, *New Jersey as a Royal Province 1738 to 1776* (New York, 1911), pp. 133-64; Donald L. Kemmerer, *Path to Freedom: The Struggle for Self-Government in Colonial New Jersey 1703-1776* (Cos Cob, Conn., 1968), pp. 201-36; and Gary S. Horowitz, 'New Jersey Land Riots, 1745-1755,' Ph.D. diss., Ohio State University, 1966, pp. 67-215.

³⁶ Jere R. Daniell, *Experiment in Republicanism: New Hampshire Politics and the American Revolution, 1741-1794* (Cambridge, Mass., 1970), pp. 26-33; Lawrence F. London, 'The Representation Controversy in Colonial North Carolina,' *North Carolina Historical Review* 11(1934):255-70.

toles' to a soldier if he 'wou'd Shoot the Governor.'³⁷ In New York, where Gov. George Clinton had been engaged in violent quarrels with the lower house over the extensive financial powers it had wrested from him and his predecessor during the early years of the Spanish and French war, the situation was marginally better but only because opposition leaders had not yet, in contrast to their counterparts in New Hampshire, North Carolina, and Bermuda, become so enraged with the governor as to cut off all further business with him.³⁸ In Jamaica, a powerful faction was challenging Gov. Edward Trelawny's right to remove judges,³⁹ while Barbados had only just been rescued from a 'poor distracted' state by the newly appointed governor, Henry Grenville, who hoped by prudent and disinterested efforts finally to reduce 'all Measures to a quiet & easy System.'⁴⁰

From all of these colonies and others—from all of the royal colonies except Massachusetts, Virginia, and the Leeward Islands—governors complained frequently, and in agonized tones, that they were powerless to carry out metropolitan directives against the opposition of local interests. They charged that 'too great power' was 'lodged in the Assemblies,' that the 'whole frame of Government [was] unhinged,' and that that 'political balance in which consists the strength and beauty of the British Constitution' had, in the colonies, been 'entirely overturned.' 'These evils,' said Gov. James

³⁷ Depositions of Robert Brewton, Sept. 27–28, 1750, Privy Council Papers (hereafter PC), 1/49/39, Public Record Office (hereafter PRO), London; Popple to Board of Trade, May 28, 1750, Colonial Office Papers (hereafter CO) 37/17, PRO; Henry C. Wilkinson, *Bermuda in the Old Empire* (Oxford, 1950), pp. 203–16.

³⁸ The best published study is Stanley Nider Katz, *Newcastle's New York: Anglo-American Politics, 1732–1753* (Cambridge, Mass., 1968), pp. 164–244.

³⁹ George Metcalf, *Royal Government and Political Conflict in Jamaica 1729–1783* (London, 1965), pp. 94–103; Trelawny to Philip Baker, Nov. 21, 1748, Misc. Mss., 475, Institute of Jamaica, Kingston.

⁴⁰ F. G. Spurdle, *Early West Indian Government: Showing the Progress of Government in Barbados, Jamaica and the Leeward Islands, 1660–1783* (Palmerston North, N.Z., 1964), pp. 91, 105; Henry Grenville to George Grenville, Feb. 21, May 18, 1747, Stowe Collection, Box 24 (1, 4), Huntington Library.

Glen of South Carolina, 'appeared to . . . be too big for correction during the War.'⁴¹ Once the war was over, however, an increasing number of governors sent home urgent appeals for metropolitan action to remedy the dangerous situation in which they found themselves. 'It is high time,' wrote Popple from Bermuda, 'that it should be known here, whether the King has any authority, or an Act of Parliament any force.' 'His Majesty,' echoed Clinton from New York, had been 'reduced to this state, either to support his authority in the hands of his Governor or to give it up to a popular faction' in the legislature.⁴²

Only if the colonial constitutions were entirely '[re]modelled, or at least newly promulgated' at home, the governors seemed to agree, could metropolitan authority ever be maintained. Nor, they warned, would 'Gentle Methods' succeed. The assemblies, wrote Popple from Bermuda, had 'been so long Accustomed to their own ways, by the Lenity of former Governours, That they neither regard, nor fear the Kings Authority, The Constitution, Law, nor Justice,' and they were openly contemptuous of the most sacred instruments of royal authority, the royal commissions and instructions to the governors being totally disregarded 'unless what is done under them, suits the humour, Interest, or Disposition of the Leading Men in the Assembly.'⁴³ A growing number of governors thought that the situation could be corrected only through the intervention of Parliament. Anything less than a determined 'resolution to consider fully the state of the Colonies, and make a thorough reformation to be settled by Act of Parliament,' Trelawny wrote his patron, Henry Pelham, from

⁴¹ Glen to Board of Trade, Oct. 10, 1748, CO 5/372, ff. 80-87; Trelawny to Pelham, Apr. 29, 1749, Trelawny-Pelham Mss., 306, Institute of Jamaica.

⁴² Wilkinson, *Bermuda in the Old Empire*, p. 209; Clinton to Newcastle, May 30, 1747, in E. B. O'Callaghan and Berthold Fernow, eds., *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York* (Albany, 1856-87), 6:350-51.

⁴³ Glen to Board of Trade, Oct. 10, 1748, CO 5/372, ff. 80-87; Popple to Board of Trade, Feb. 8, July 8, 1749, CO 37/6.

Jamaica in early 1749, would be 'ineffectual, productive of no lasting good, [and] but a meer transitory amusement.'⁴⁴

In the face of so many such reports, no wonder that to authorities at a distance in London the whole American empire from Barbados to Nova Scotia seemed to be on the verge of disintegration. At the precise moment at which the economic and strategic worth of the colonies was becoming increasingly clear and the French seemed to be preparing themselves to challenge Britain's hold over them, there thus appeared to be a grave—and general—crisis of metropolitan control over the American empire, and this crisis of control in turn helped to generate a serious crisis of confidence. Colonial officials in Britain responded to the peace of 1748 not with exaltation but with vague feelings of unease and anxious fears of the impending loss of the American colonies and the consequent decline of Britain itself. Such fears underlay, and provided the primary impetus for, the shift in colonial policy that would eventually lead to the rebellion of the colonies a little more than a quarter century later.

III

These four conditions—the growing consciousness in Britain of the extraordinary importance of the colonies to Britain's wealth and power and the corresponding fear of the long-term implications of their rapid expansion, the worry that they might be lost to a rival European power, the reestablishment of domestic political stability within Britain in 1747, and the apparent breakdown of metropolitan authority all over the empire during the late 1740s—as well as the interaction among them thus seem to be the primary reasons for the redirection of British colonial policy beginning in the late 1740s. The Board of Trade had responded to the last of these conditions as early as 1745 by showing signs of a vigor it had

⁴⁴ Trelawny to Pelham, Apr. 29, 1749, Trelawny-Pelham Mss., 306, Institute of Jamaica.

not demonstrated since the early decades of the century. But it received little support from the administration during the war, and it was not until 1748, when Lord Monson, president of the Board, died, and the war was concluded, that the systematic attention called for by the situation was actually given to colonial affairs. For the next eight years, from 1748 until the revival of hostilities with France in 1756, metropolitan officials engaged in a vigorous effort to deal effectively with the many outstanding problems relating to the colonies. This effort fell into two distinct periods. The first lasted from the fall of 1748 through the winter of 1751-52 and was a period of activity and frustration.

The key figure in both periods was the new president of the Board of Trade, George Dunk, Earl of Halifax, who took office in November 1748 and served until 1761. The Duke of Newcastle had first proposed to replace Monson with his brother-in-law, the Duke of Leeds, who wanted 'some office which required little attendance and less application.' But Halifax eventually received the appointment after the Duke of Bedford, then in charge of the colonies as secretary of state for the Southern Department and one of the people most alarmed by the seeming deterioration of metropolitan authority in the colonies, insisted that the 'care and inspection' of the colonies had become 'business of the highest national concern' and, in a classic piece of understatement, argued vigorously that it would be 'Highly improper, considering the present Situation of things [in the colonies], to have a non-efficient Man at the head of that Board.'⁴⁵ By making it clear that colonial offices would no longer automatically be exploited for strictly political purposes, Halifax's appointment signaled the beginning of a new era in metropolitan-colonial relations, an era characterized less by changes in ideology

⁴⁵ See Dickerson, *American Colonial Government*, p. 39; Bedford to Newcastle, Aug. 11, 1748, and to Halifax, Sept. 3, 1748, Newcastle Papers, Add. Mss. 32716, ff. 38-39, 337-38.

and policy than by a radical discontinuity in the posture and tactics of metropolitan governance. A 'man regular in his duties, temperate in his habits, and a strict observer of decorum,'⁴⁶ Halifax brought a degree of energy and 'Spirit' to the Board that for the first time in many decades inspired governors of distant colonies with hopes of firm metropolitan support. 'The Spirit which Lord Halifax exerts for securing the Colonies,' wrote William Shirley, governor of Massachusetts, 'seems to be *providentially rais'd up* at this crisis for the Welfare of the Nation.'⁴⁷

Inspired and driven by Halifax, the members of the Board worked with great diligence throughout the rest of 1748 and on through 1749 and 1750 in an attempt to define the problems facing it and to work out a system of priorities for dealing with them. The number of meetings increased each year: from 78 in 1747 to 113 in 1748, 131 in 1749, and 140 in 1750, while the average attendance per meeting jumped from 3.8 in 1748 to 5.2 in 1749. This renewed diligence on the part of the Board demanded as well more attention for colonial affairs from the Privy Council, in which the percentage of meetings devoted to colonial affairs rose from fifty-eight percent in 1748 to sixty-nine percent in 1749 and over seventy percent in 1751.⁴⁸ The Board gave top priority to the problem of strengthening the defenses of the northern colonies against French Canada by converting Nova Scotia, hitherto little more than a nominal British colony with a small military garrison presiding over a much larger population of supposedly neutral French, into a full-fledged British colony. The Board produced a series of impressively detailed memoranda and reports arguing that if the French made 'themselves Masters of Nova Scotia, which is a Country fruitfull of all

⁴⁶ *Memoirs of Richard Cumberland Written by Himself* (London, 1806), pp. 99–100.

⁴⁷ Shirley to Secretary Williard, Nov. 28, 1749, Massachusetts Archives, 20:566–70, Massachusetts Archives, Boston.

⁴⁸ Basye, *Lords Commissioners*, pp. 220–21; Wilkes, *Whig in Power*, p. 200; Privy Council Register, George II, PRO.

kinds of Grain and Provisions, and the Key of the Northern Continent of America, they would be in a Condition to . . . reduce all the English Colonies' on the continent to submission.⁴⁹ On the basis of these reports, Bedford was able to obtain a parliamentary subsidy for Nova Scotia similar to the one extended to Georgia for the previous fifteen years. With the appointment of Edward Cornwallis as the first civilian governor of the colony in April 1749, the subsidized settlement of the colony began in earnest. At the same time, the Board was less successful in its efforts to respond to the clamors of British merchants against colonial paper currencies. Its bill, introduced into the House of Commons on March 3, 1749, to restrain the further issuance of paper money in the colonies and to prevent such currencies from being legal tender, failed to pass before the end of the session.⁵⁰

If Halifax and his colleagues gave highest priority to the settlement of Nova Scotia and the restraint of colonial paper money, they were by no means neglectful of the many problems relating to the internal governance of the colonies. Initially, the Board's approach to these problems was almost entirely piecemeal and ad hoc, as it sought to find an appropriate solution for the particular difficulties of each colony. But its actions all tended in the same general direction: towards much closer supervision over and more intimate involvement with colonial affairs. Demonstrating an impressive attention to detail, the Board read the dispatches and papers transmitted from the colonies with far greater alacrity and care than it had in the past and made increased use of its legal counsel, Matthew Lamb, and the attorney general and solicitor general to scrutinize colonial laws to determine if they

⁴⁹ 'Remarks on . . . Nova Scotia,' ca. 1748, Mildmay Papers, D/DM 01/41, Essex Record Office.

⁵⁰ Henretta, *Salutary Neglect*, pp. 286-92; Brebner, *New England's Outpost*, pp. 134-202; Stock, ed., *Proceedings*, 5:298, 365.

were suitable for confirmation. Demanding more prompt reports and more diligence from these law officers, the Board recommended an increasing number of unsuitable laws, laws 'inconsistent with . . . [the royal] Instructions [and] tending . . . to the Destruction of His Majesty's Prerogative and of all Order of Government,' for disallowance by the Privy Council.⁵¹

In the colonies themselves, the Board insisted that royal governors adhere as strictly as possible to their instructions from the crown and was quick to censure those who, like James Glen of South Carolina, had passed 'several Laws derogatory to His Majesty's Prerogative, and contrary to His Instruction to you.'⁵² Although the Board conceded, as it wrote Edward Trelawny in Jamaica, that 'Exigencys do sometimes occur in the Administration of Government to make a Deviation from His Majesty's general Instructions expedient & indeed necessary,' it emphasized 'that to justify such Deviations the Necessity must be very apparent and such Deviations cannot be too seldom practiced.'⁵³ The Board tried to put some teeth in its demands for strict adherence to instructions by including in the 1749 currency bill a clause to declare void all colonial 'Acts or Orders . . . repugnant to the Orders or Instructions of His Majesty . . . null and void, and of no Force whatsoever.' But this clause provoked such an outburst of opposition from several colonial agents that the administration agreed to 'reserve' it for future consideration.⁵⁴ In the meantime, the almost invariable refusal of all colonial assemblies to comply with the instructions meant that the only effects of the Board's careful scrutiny of colonial legislation

⁵¹ Board of Trade to Glen, Dec. 20, 1748, CO 5/402, pp. 184-89.

⁵² Board of Trade to Glen, Dec. 1, 1749, CO 5/402, pp. 223-26.

⁵³ Board of Trade to Trelawny, Nov. 10, 1749, CO 138/19, p. 119.

⁵⁴ Stock, *Proceedings*, 5:298, 304-7, 313-21, 365; *A Bill to Regulate and Restrain Paper Bills of Credit in the British Colonies and Plantations in America; and for the Better Enforcing his Majesty's Orders and Instructions throughout the Said Colonies and Plantations* ([London, 1749]), pp. 6-7; William Bollan, Petition to House of Commons, and Bollan to Willard, Apr. 6, 1749, Massachusetts Archives, 20:501-07.

and gubernatorial conduct was to deepen discord in the colonies by intimidating the governors into taking unyielding stands that were unacceptable to local interests. After 1748, governors had to contend not only with recalcitrant legislators and other powerful leaders in the colonies but also with a group of metropolitan officials who, given the conditions that had developed over the previous thirty years, were demanding a standard of conduct that was wholly unrealistic. Henceforth, governors had to keep one eye on their adversaries in the colonies and the other closely on their superiors at home.

The position of the governors in each of the major trouble spots—in Bermuda, New Hampshire, North Carolina, New York, and New Jersey—was rendered even more difficult by the Board's inability to secure prompt action on its respective problems. Overwhelmed by a tremendous volume of business, the Board either put the governors of those provinces off with promises to consider their problems 'as soon as other Affairs will permit' or altogether ignored their plaintive letters while it made a 'very careful and particular Examination' into the matters at issue.⁵⁵ During these early years, the Board managed to produce long and impressive reports on the two colonies with the most serious problems, New Jersey and New York. In these reports, the Board analyzed the existing situation in detail and argued powerfully for 'a declaratory Law' to 'reestablish . . . the proper and Ancient Constitution of Government' by 'reinstating in the Gov[ernor] those 'original and necessary powers' that would alone enable him to achieve 'the careful and strickt maintenance of the just prerogative, which is the only means those Colonies can be kept dependent on the mother Country.' Also in these reports, the Board recommended sending troops to quiet the riots in New Jersey and revived ancient demands for 'a general perpetual

⁵⁵ See Board of Trade to Glen, Dec. 20, 1748, and to Benning Wentworth, Dec. 14, 1749, CO 5/402, pp. 184-89, CO 5/941, pp. 226-29.

Revenue Act' in each colony that, by rendering the governors financially independent of the legislatures, would enable them more effectively to represent the crown and to 'maintain . . . [some] power over their Assemblies.'⁵⁶

But the Board had no authority to enforce its recommendations. Although the Privy Council followed its suggestions for the disallowance of a number of colonial laws and the ministry in 1751 pushed through Parliament a bill, sponsored by the Board, to prohibit the further issuance of legal tender paper money in the four New England colonies,⁵⁷ neither of the reports on New Jersey and New York received ministerial support sufficient to secure its implementation. Rumors circulated on both sides of the Atlantic that the delays in dealing with the problems in these and other colonies were the result of the ministry's determination 'to settle a general plan for establishing the Kings Authority in all the plantations' before dealing with any of them in particular;⁵⁸ in anticipation of such an event, several favor seekers and aspiring imperial statesmen, including James Abercromby, Henry McCulloh, Robert Hunter Morris, and Thomas Pownall, submitted elaborate plans for the overhaul of both metropolitan administration and the colonial constitutions.⁵⁹ But no such plan ever received serious ministerial attention. However desperate the situation in the colonies might appear to Halifax and others who were well informed about it, the 'Great Men' seemed 'never [to] want a pretence to protect the dispatch of Business,' notwithstanding that many of the colonies seemed to be in a virtual 'State of rebellion.'⁶⁰

⁵⁶ These reports, dated June 1, 1750, and Apr. 2, 1751, are printed in William A. Whitehead et al., eds., *Archives of the State of New Jersey*, 1st ser. (Newark, 1880-1949), 7:466-528, and O'Callaghan, ed., *New York Colonial Documents*, 6:614-39.

⁵⁷ See Ernst, *Money and Politics*, pp. 37-42; William Bollan to Speaker, July 12, 1751, Massachusetts Archives, 21:17-20.

⁵⁸ Cadwallader Colden to George Clinton, Feb. 12, 1750, Clinton Papers, Box 10, William L. Clements Library, Ann Arbor, Mich.

⁵⁹ Bumstead, ' "Things in the Womb of Time," ' pp. 545-55, contains a brief discussion of some of these proposals.

⁶⁰ Colden to Clinton, Feb. 12, 1750, Clinton Papers, Box 10, Clements Library;

Except for the Nova Scotia settlement, the Currency Act of 1751, and a desk full of unheeded reports, Halifax and his colleagues at the Board had little to show for three years of diligent application. Not a single one of the convulsed situations Halifax had found when he assumed direction of the colonial office in the fall of 1748 had been resolved. To make matters worse, the Board's aggressive behavior towards the governors was even then in the process of escalating relatively minor problems in South Carolina, Jamaica, and the Leeward Islands into major ones.⁶¹ If anything, metropolitan control over the colonies must have seemed to be even more tenuous at the beginning of 1752 than it had four years earlier.

The result was wholesale frustration in both the colonies and the colonial office. After 'daily' expecting commands from the crown that would have enabled them to deal with the difficult situations under their jurisdictions,⁶² colonial governors had no more than vague promises from a body that, it was becoming increasingly clear, was unable to deliver on them. The endless delays, punctuated only at infrequent intervals by perfunctory and evasive letters from the Board, drove the governors to distraction and despair. Gabriel Johnston of North Carolina thought it a matter of wonder in September 1751 that he had 'been able to observe any regularity at all or indeed to keep up [even] the face of Government' in view of the long wait for some form of metropolitan determination on the bitter conflict that had rent North Carolina since

John Thomlinson to Theodore Atkinson, Mar. 4, 1750, Belknap Papers: Atkinson-Thomlinson Correspondence, Force Transcripts, 7E, Box 2: 177-79, Library of Congress; Ferdinand J. Paris to James Alexander, July 4, 1749 in Whitehead, ed., *New Jersey Archives*, 7:295.

⁶¹ See Metcalfe, *Royal Government and Political Conflict in Jamaica*, pp. 98-120; Spurdle, *Early West Indian Government*, pp. 160-65; R. Nicholas Olsberg, ed., *The Colonial Records of South Carolina: Ser. 1: The Journals of the Commons House of Assembly 23 April 1750 - 31 August 1751* (Columbia, S.C., 1974), pp. 17-28; George Thomas to Board of Trade, Jan. 21, May 22, 1754, Mar. 18, 1755, CO 152/28.

⁶² See Benning Wentworth to Board of Trade, Mar. 23, 1751, CO 5/926; Board of Trade to Clinton, Sept. 1, 1750, in O'Callaghan, ed., *New York Colonial Documents*, 6:586-87, the first letter to Clinton since June 29, 1748.

1746. Nor did he think he could do so much longer. 'Five years,' he lamented, 'is a long time for such a wild uncivilized Country as this to be kept in suspense on matters so essential to the very being of Government.'⁶³ In the same month, George Clinton complained from New York that he was no clearer about how he was 'to dispose of matters here than I was four years agoe.'⁶⁴

That 'matters of [such] moment' had been, as one observer put it, 'delayed for years . . . after [he] . . . had done his part' was equally dispiriting to Halifax, and the number of meetings of the Board declined to 110 in 1751 and average attendance to 3.8, a level comparable to that under Monson's tenure.⁶⁵ Halifax himself became increasingly restive. Threatening to resign unless his 'office was so circumstanced as to render my Endeavours for the Publick Effectual,' he pushed extremely hard, beginning in the summer of 1750, to have himself appointed a separate secretary of state with broad jurisdiction over and full responsibility for the colonies.⁶⁶ Although he failed in this effort because of the opposition of George II and the two existing secretaries of state, he finally succeeded in early 1752 in securing enlarged powers for the Board of Trade. An order in council of March 11 gave the Board exclusive jurisdiction over the appointment of all governors, councilors, attorneys general, and secretaries in the colonies and made those officers directly responsible to the Board.⁶⁷

⁶³ Johnston to Board of Trade, Sept. 16, 1751, in Saunders, ed., *Colonial Records of North Carolina*, 4:1075-76.

⁶⁴ Clinton to Robert Hunter Morris, Sept. 14, 17, 1751, Robert Hunter Morris Papers, 1:25, New Jersey Historical Society.

⁶⁵ James Abercromby to William Pitt, Nov. 25, 1756, Chatham Papers, PRO 30/8: 95, ff. 197-208; Basye, *Lords Commissioners*, p. 221.

⁶⁶ Halifax to Newcastle, Aug. 12, 1750, Newcastle Papers: Add. Mss. 32722, f. 110.

⁶⁷ Order in Council, Mar. 11, 1752, in John R. Bartlett, ed., *Records of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in New England* (Providence, 1856-65), 5:351-52.

The enlargement of the Board's powers marked the beginning of a second phase in the metropolitan effort to come to grips with the apparently declining power of the parent state in the colonies. This period, lasting until the outbreak of the Seven Years' War in 1756, was one of renewed activity—and failure. Armed with its new powers and building upon its experiences over the previous four years, the Board embarked upon an even more vigorous campaign to bring the colonies under closer metropolitan control. It immediately moved to secure more up-to-date information on the colonies by insisting that governors both provide new answers to the formal queries hitherto only irregularly required by the Board and send home all public papers promptly,⁶⁸ and in 1755 it sought to establish more regular communications with the colonies by setting up a packet boat system.⁶⁹ The Board also moved to strengthen further the defenses of the continental colonies. It continued to support the settlement of Nova Scotia and succeeded in obtaining the conversion of Georgia into a regular royal colony in 1754.⁷⁰

Halifax also seems to have sought more effective personnel for appointments both to the Board and to colonial offices. For the Board, he preferred energetic people like Charles Townshend, who served from 1749 to 1754, or James Oswald, who became a member in 1752. But Board appointments continued to be strongly influenced by political considerations and the burden of its work to fall upon the shoulders of three or four of the eight active members. Halifax himself was the only member who ever attended more than ninety percent of the meetings in any given year; the other most active members, Townshend, Oswald, James Grenville, Thomas Hay,

⁶⁸ Thomas Hill to governors, June 10, 1752, and John Pownall to governors, April 6, 1754, CO 324/15, pp. 326–27, 398–401; Board of Trade to Benning Wentworth, July 5, 1754, CO 5/941, pp. 354–56.

⁶⁹ Pownall to governors, Sept. 18, 1755, CO 324/15, pp. 435–37.

⁷⁰ Abbot, *Royal Governors of Georgia*, pp. 34–56; Henretta, *Salutary Neglect*, pp. 329–30.

Viscount Dupplin, came to no more than sixty percent to eighty percent of the meetings, while some members, like Newcastle's friends Thomas Herbert and Andrew Stone, attended no more than between one and ten meetings per year.⁷¹ At least in part because Halifax was unable to resist the patronage demands of his superiors, the caliber of his initial appointees to colonial governorships was not noticeably higher and in some cases obviously lower than that of earlier appointees. Sir Danvers Osborne of New York committed suicide shortly after his arrival, while Charles Knowles of Jamaica, John Reynolds of Georgia, and William Denny of Pennsylvania proved to be such maladroit politicians that each was either encouraged to resign or cashiered after a stormy tenure in office. Robert Dinwiddie of Virginia, Charles Lawrence of Nova Scotia, Robert Hunter Morris of Pennsylvania, and Arthur Dobbs of North Carolina all performed significantly less well than Sir William Gooch of Virginia and William Shirley of Massachusetts, the most successful of the previous generation of governors.

Following these early mistakes, however, Halifax and his colleagues do seem to have done consistently better during the last half of the 1750s: William Henry Lyttelton of South Carolina, Charles Pinfold of Barbados, Sir Charles Hardy of New York, Thomas Pownall of Massachusetts, Henry Ellis of Georgia, George Haldane of Jamaica, Francis Bernard of New Jersey, Francis Fauquier of Virginia, and James Hamilton of Pennsylvania all served capably, managing to walk the narrow line between their metropolitan superiors and the local political establishment without giving major offense to either. In fairness to the earlier appointees, however, it should be emphasized that they were held to a much stricter standard than either their predecessors or their immediate successors—and they were given even fewer resources to work with. As Henretta has shown, the movement towards greater con-

⁷¹ Basye, *Lords Commissioners*, pp. 221–23.

centration of American patronage in the hands of metropolitan officials continued unabated under Halifax until, by the early 1760s, colonial governors everywhere had fewer offices at their disposal and correspondingly less opportunity to build a strong base for support of their administration than at any previous time in the history of the colonies.⁷²

The standards to which the governors were expected to adhere had been mostly worked out over the previous four years and revolved around the Board's dictum, laid down in June 1752, requiring every governor 'strictly to adhere to your Instructions and not to deviate from them in any point but upon evident necessity justified by the particular Circumstances of the case.'⁷³ With the appointment of each new governor thereafter, the Board systematically reviewed the instructions, revising old clauses and adding new ones in an effort to tighten the bonds of metropolitan control. By the end of 1755, the instructions for eight of the sixteen major colonies had been thus overhauled.⁷⁴

The Board's insistence upon the governors' strict adherence to their instructions was, however, only a general policy designed to achieve a number of more specific goals the Board had come to believe were essential for the retention of the American colonies as viable parts of the empire. One of the most important of those goals was to check the power of the lower houses of assembly. The Board never seems to have entertained any thought of governing the colonies without assemblies. In both of the new royal colonies of Nova Scotia and Georgia, it insisted upon the establishment of representative government, in the former case even against the opposition of the governor on the spot. Until an assembly had

⁷² See Henretta, *Salutary Neglect*, pp. 297, 310-17; Halifax to Newcastle, Dec. 28, 1754, Newcastle Papers: Add. Mss. 32737, 505-06.

⁷³ Board of Trade to governors, June 3, 1752, CO 324/15, pp. 318-23.

⁷⁴ This process may be followed in W. L. Grant and James Munro, eds., *Acts of the Privy Council of England, Colonial Series* (London, 1908-12), 4:passim; Instructions to John Reynolds, Aug. 6, 1754, CO 5/672, pp. 106-32.

been incorporated into the government of the colony, the Board declared in reference to Nova Scotia in 1756, 'this infant Colony can not be truly said to be upon a permanent and lasting Establishment.'⁷⁵ But the Board did hope to reduce the power of the assemblies in the older colonies by depriving them of the right to establish new constituencies, apportion representatives, determine their own tenures, settle accounts, appoint local officers, and exercise a wide variety of other 'privileges and powers, which, tho' of long usage enjoyed by some . . . Assembly, are inconsistent with all Colony Constitution[s] whatever, contrary to the practice of the Mother Country in like Cases, and to the express directions of His Majesty's Commission.'⁷⁶

To that end, the Board continued to review colonial legislation carefully, to secure the disallowance of objectionable statutes, and to insist strenuously, and with few exceptions, upon the inclusion of suspending clauses in an ever wider variety of colonial laws.⁷⁷ It also recommended, though unsuccessfully, that the legislatures of all the colonies follow the example of the Virginia Assembly in reducing all earlier statutes into 'a Clear and well digested Body of Laws' that, as happened in the Virginia case, could be carefully pruned of improper statutes by metropolitan authorities.⁷⁸ To decrease the extraordinary financial powers of the lower houses, the Board urged governors to secure laws creating a permanent revenue that would support the entire civil list independent

⁷⁵ Board of Trade to Charles Lawrence, Mar. 25, July 8, Oct. 9, 1756, Mar. 10, 1757, CO 218/5, pp. 276-83, 290-91, 296-97, 309-13.

⁷⁶ See John Pownall to John Reynolds, June 5, 1755, CO 5/672, pp. 344-45.

⁷⁷ See, for example, Charles Knowles to Board of Trade, June 27, 1753, Jan. 12, 1754, CO 137/25, ff. 375-77, 27, ff. 1-20; Board of Trade to Privy Council, Oct. 15, 1754, CO 138/20, pp. 41-79.

⁷⁸ See Board of Trade to Privy Council, Aug. 6, 1751, CO 5/1366, pp. 479-509; Privy Council Register, Jan. 21, 1751, PC 2/102, pp. 459-60, PRO; Leonard W. Labaree, ed., *Royal Instructions to British Colonial Governors, 1670-1776* (New York, 1935), 1:167. The Virginia episode is treated in Gwenda Morgan, "'The Privileged of Making Laws': The Board of Trade, the Virginia Assembly and Legislative Review, 1748-1754," *Journal of American Studies* 10(1976):1-15.

of further legislative appropriations. The famous thirty-ninth article in the instructions to Osborne in 1753, 'better calculated,' said Horace Walpole, 'for the latitude of Mexico and for a Spanish tribunal, than for a free, rich British settlement,'⁷⁹ actually forbade him to pass any taxation measures until the New York Assembly had voted 'a lasting and permanent Revenue for the support of Government.'⁸⁰

In addition to striking at the power of the colonial assemblies, the Board also pursued a variety of other policies designed to achieve the same general objectives. After 1752, it sought, whenever the opportunity arose, to rationalize the court systems of individual colonies and to alter the ordinary terms of judicial tenure from good behavior to royal pleasure.⁸¹ It also endeavored to prevent the emission of any further legal-tender paper currency by adamantly insisting that the colonies south of New England comply with the provisions of the Currency Act of 1751, even though it did not actually apply to them⁸² and made preliminary investigations aimed at checking the further engrossment of land by large owners, especially in Virginia, New York, and Jamaica.⁸³ It also sought to extend its jurisdiction over the private colonies, demanding that the corporate colonies of Rhode Island and Connecticut transmit their laws to the Board for information and seeking to force the proprietors of Pennsylvania and Maryland to follow the example of the Board in attempting

⁷⁹ Sir Lewis Namier and John Brooke, *Charles Townshend* (New York, 1964), p. 37.

⁸⁰ Labaree, ed., *Royal Instructions*, 1:190-93; Peter Collinson to Cadwallader Colden, Apr. 5, 1753, *The Letters and Papers of Cadwallader Colden*, New-York Historical Society, *Collections* (New York, 1918-37), 53:381.

⁸¹ See Labaree, ed., *Royal Instructions*, 1:367; Instructions to Arthur Dobbs, June 17, 1754, CO 5/324, pp. 46-64.

⁸² See Jack P. Greene, *The Quest for Power: The Lower Houses of Assembly in the Southern Royal Colonies, 1689-1776* (Chapel Hill, 1963), pp. 113, 119.

⁸³ See Jack P. Greene, 'The Case of the Pistole Fee: The Report of a Hearing on the Pistole Fee Dispute before the Privy Council, June 18, 1754,' *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 66(1958):399-422; *A Short Account of the Interest and Conduct of the Jamaica Planters* (London, 1754), pp. 5-8; Thomas Pownall to [Halifax], July 23, 1756, Force Papers, 9, Box 7, Library of Congress.

to curtail the authority of the lower houses in those colonies. In the case of Pennsylvania, the Board actually managed to gain a major voice in the selection of governors.⁸⁴ Finally, in response to continued complaints from West Indian interests about violations of the Molasses Act by traders from the northern colonies, the Board toyed with the idea of recommending that Parliament revise that act in such a way as 'to raise a Revenue out of this Trade.'⁸⁵

The outbreak of hostilities between the Virginians and the Canadians along the Ohio in 1754–55 provided an opportunity for Halifax to try to achieve still another of his ideas for augmenting metropolitan authority in America. The Board had proposed to send troops to quell the riots in New Jersey as early as January 1749.⁸⁶ Immediately upon securing enlarged powers for the Board in 1752, Halifax pressed for the appointment of a 'Governor General' for North America. Also holding the joint governorship of New Jersey and New York, this officer was to lead a military force to reduce 'those Two Provinces now in a state little better than that of actual Rebellion to his Majesty's Obedience.' By proposing to give this person command of all American forces, Halifax also hoped to take a major step in the creation of a continental military union that might help the colonies to put forth a

⁸⁴ See Richard Partridge to William Greene, Mar. 7, 1754, Official Letters from Rhode Island Agents 1746–1769, 17, John Carter Brown Library, Providence; Thomas Richardson to Partridge, May 18, 1752, Thomas Richardson Letter Book, 1751–61, p. 2, Newport Historical Society, Newport, R.I.; Partridge to Roger Wolcott, June 24, 1752, Wolcott to Board of Trade, Dec. 20, 1752, *Wolcott Papers*, Connecticut Historical Society, *Collections* 16 (Hartford, 1916): 181–82, 217–18; William Penn to Richard Peters, June 29, 1753, Feb. 21, 1755, Penn Letter Books, 3:230, 4:30–46, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia; William S. Hanna, *Benjamin Franklin and Pennsylvania Politics* (Stanford, Calif., 1964), pp. 93–95.

⁸⁵ See William Bollan to Josiah Willard, July 20, 1752, to Massachusetts Speaker, Apr. 19, 1754, Massachusetts Archives, 21:73–77, 163–64; 'Memorial of the Sugar Planters,' 1750, William Smith, Jr., Papers, 191, New York Public Library; Draft of a Bill, Feb. 7, 1752, Sharpe Mss., 20, Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington; Bollan to Willard, Aug. 12, 1754, Ezekiel Price Papers, 1754–1788, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.

⁸⁶ Robert Hunter Morris to James Alexander, Jan. 23, 1749, in *Calendar of the Stevens Family Papers* (Newark, N.J., 1940), 1:126–27.

united effort in the event of a war with French Canada.⁸⁷ This plan got nowhere in 1752 for want of ministerial backing, but the proposal for a unified military command under the jurisdiction of a single person immediately accountable to London gained steady support following Braddock's defeat and the Albany Congress. In January 1756, the ministry, as part of the decision to send additional British troops to America to aid the colonists, created the post of 'Captain General of the King's Forces in North America' with full military authority over 'the Governors of all His Majesty's Provinces.'⁸⁸ The appointment of two royal commissioners for Indian affairs in 1754 was a slightly earlier and similar move to shift responsibility for Indian diplomacy from individual colonial governments to officials directly responsible to Whitehall.⁸⁹

Although the main purpose of this concentration of authority over military and Indian affairs in officials under the immediate control of the metropolis was clearly to achieve a more effective military effort against the French, various proposals, at the very beginning of the war, suggested other more sinister uses for the large contingent of British troops being sent to America. In letters to both Pitt and Halifax, one anonymous writer urged the establishment of a series of military posts 200 miles west of the ocean to be garrisoned by British troops and paid for by a tax on colonial land levied by the metropolitan Parliament. 'I am sorry to say it,' this writer declared, but 'by the great lenity shewn them these 50 Years past' the colonies could not 'be brought under any

⁸⁷ Halifax to Newcastle, Mar. 2, 1752, and Halifax's Memorandum on a Governor General for the Colonies [Mar. 1752], Newcastle Papers, Add. Mss. 32726, ff. 207, 229. See also Alison Gilbert Olson, 'The British Government and Colonial Union, 1754,' *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser. 17(1960):22-34.

⁸⁸ See Bollan to Massachusetts Speaker, Sept. 19, 1754, and Halifax to Shirley, May 11, 1756, Massachusetts Archives, 21:195-97, 482-83; Newcastle to Hardwicke, Sept. 21, 1754, Newcastle Papers, Add. Mss. 32736, ff. 554-56; Cabinet Minute, Jan. 7, 1756, Leeds Papers, Egerton Mss. 3426, ff. 101-02. See also Stanley M. Pargellis, *Lord Loudoun in North America* (New Haven, 1933).

⁸⁹ John R. Alden, 'The Albany Congress and the Creation of the Indian Superintendencies,' *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 27(1940):193-210.

other Dominion.' Only a 'good land Army at their Back to check them, & always Ships of War ready at their ports to stop all their Trade & support' could prevent them from 'dis-pising' all those regulations that 'in their Mother Country may be thought for their good and preservance.'⁹⁰

IV

Few people in Britain in 1756 were yet persuaded of the necessity for such draconian measures, but the results of the accelerated effort to tighten metropolitan control over the colonies after 1752 had done little to allay the fears that lay behind their proposal, fears, as one writer put it, that without the 'Colonys in America' Britain would lose the 'greatest part of' its 'Riches and Glory' and become, once again, 'a small state not more respectable than Danemark, Sweden, [or] Switzerland.'⁹¹ The metropolitan effort had been in many places welcomed by royal officeholders and others who had long been alarmed by the imbalance of the colonial constitutions in favor of the lower houses. Such people hoped now finally to receive those 'especial Directions' from the King and that firm support from metropolitan authorities that would finally tip the political balance in their long and exhausting battles against local interests in their favor.⁹²

But the revitalized metropolitan initiative after 1752 ran into stiff opposition in America, as the lower houses and other powerful local interests in one colony after another failed to demonstrate 'a proper obedience to' the crown's 'Royal will and pleasure' as represented by orders from the Board of Trade or even from the Privy Council. Very often, in fact,

⁹⁰ W.M. to Halifax, Mar. 10, 1756, Chatham Papers, PRO 30/8/95, Pt. 1, ff. 157-160. See also Josiah Tucker to Rev. Thomas Birch, Sept. 1, 1755, Add. Mss. 4326-B, ff. 64-67, where the wisdom of containing the colonies east of the Appalachian Mountains is discussed.

⁹¹ W.M. to Pitt, Nov. 16, 1756, Chatham Papers, PRO 30/8/95, Pt. 1, ff. 194-95.

⁹² Jonathan Belcher to Board of Trade, June 27, 1749, in Whitehead, ed., *New Jersey Archives*, 7:293.

they treated such orders with contempt. Rarely did they go so far as the Bermuda Assembly, which reportedly declared that the Board was nothing more than 'a particular province . . . for the regulation of Trade' with 'nothing to do with the rights & priviledges of Assemblys' and refused to pay any 'regard to any Determination' from that body.⁹³ But they universally looked upon metropolitan efforts to curtail their authority as attacks upon 'the Known and established Constitution' in the colonies and a violation of the traditional and long-standing relationship between metropolis and colonies as it had gradually been worked out over the previous century.⁹⁴ Even with its increased power and its new assertiveness, the Board of Trade could not effectively cope with such opposition. It could intimidate its governors into a faithful observance of their instructions. But that only reduced their room for maneuver when, in the absence of effective support from home, they needed all the latitude possible to accomplish the difficult assignments demanded of them. In this situation, no wonder that Gov. Benning Wentworth of New Hampshire confessed to suffering from 'depressed . . . Spirits' and an 'Anxiety of mind' that had thrown him into 'violent disorders';⁹⁵ that Charles Knowles complained from Jamaica that he had been 'driven to such a state of desperation for want of proper Support' that he was 'entirely unable to discharge the Duty of the Trust reposed in me';⁹⁶ or that Sir Danvers Osborne, faced with the insurmountable task of persuading the New York Assembly to agree both to a severe diminution of its powers and a permanent revenue, 'strangled [himself] in his handkerchief' before he even initiated the attempt.⁹⁷

⁹³ Board of Trade to Charles Hardy, Mar. 4, 1756, in O'Callaghan, ed., *New York Colonial Documents*, 7:39-40; Popple to Board of Trade, Dec. 1, 1749, CO 37/17.

⁹⁴ See Board of Trade to Privy Council, Oct. 15, 1754, CO 138/20, pp. 41-79.

⁹⁵ Wentworth to Board of Trade, Aug. 17, Oct. 29, 1754, CO 5/926.

⁹⁶ Knowles to Board of Trade, Jan. 2, 1756, CO 137/29, f. 107.

⁹⁷ James DeLancey to Board of Trade, Oct. 15, 1753, in O'Callaghan, ed., *New York Colonial Documents*, 6:803-4.

Not that the metropolitan campaign did not achieve some limited successes. By taking extraordinary pains, the Board of Trade managed in the new civil governments of Georgia and Nova Scotia 'to check all Irregularities and unnecessary Deviations from the Constitution of the Mother Country in their Infancy' and to make them models of colony government that, it hoped, would eventually be emulated by the older colonies.⁹⁸ In addition, by 1756 political conditions in North Carolina, New Hampshire, New Jersey, and Bermuda were much improved from the chaotic circumstances of the late 1740s. With the possible exception of North Carolina, however, these results owed more to local developments than to metropolitan initiatives.⁹⁹ Indeed, the Board's jealous defense of the prerogative and its zealous attacks on the powers of the assemblies had contributed importantly to the development of additional problems in the Leeward Islands, Virginia, South Carolina, Pennsylvania, Georgia, and Massachusetts and had been in major part responsible for throwing Jamaica into total civil chaos.¹⁰⁰ No less than their predecessors a decade earlier, new governors who went to the colonies in the mid-1750s still, despite the vigorous metropolitan efforts after 1748, found their powers reduced to 'within as narrow limits as possible,' their office quite 'divested of that Authority & Influence which ought to Accompany it,' and, with no

⁹⁸ [John Pownall], 'General Propositions,' Shelburne Papers, 61:559-66, Clements Library.

⁹⁹ See Arthur Dobbs to Board of Trade, Jan. 1, 1755, in Saunders, ed., *Colonial Records of North Carolina*, 5:312-13; Dobbs to Alex McAulay, Mar. 17, 1755, Dobbs Papers, D.O.D. 162/72, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, Belfast; Board of Trade to Privy Council, Apr. 16, 1755, CO 5/324, ff. 85-87; Theodore Atkinson to John Thomlinson, Nov. 19, 1752, Belknap Papers (Atkinson-Thomlinson Correspondence), Force Trans., 8E, Box 2, Library of Congress; Board of Trade to Privy Council, Mar. 18, 1754, and to Belcher, July 5, 1754, in Whitehead, ed., *New Jersey Archives*, 8:196-99, 294-96; Pople to Board of Trade, May 5, 1756, CO 37/18.

¹⁰⁰ See, in addition to the items cited in note 61, Robert Hunter Morris to [?] Lyttelton, [post-Oct. 1755], R. H. Morris Papers, Box 3, Rutgers University Library, New Brunswick, N.J.; P.C. Register, Apr. 19, 1753, PC 2/103, pp. 387, 396-97, PRO; William Shirley to Board of Trade, Oct. 22, 1753, Feb. 10, Apr. 19, 1754, CO 5/886.

patronage in their hands, themselves without 'any adequate Means to restore it to its proper Weight.'¹⁰¹

By the time the outbreak of the Seven Years' War forced them to suspend their reform activities, Halifax and his cohorts were painfully aware that their campaign to amplify metropolitan authority in the colonies was a failure. Especially in the older colonies, both on the continent and in the islands, metropolitan control was not significantly greater in 1756 than it had been eight years earlier when the whole campaign had begun. Unable to accomplish its objectives with the prerogative powers at its command, the Board of Trade from the late 1740s on had been increasingly driven to threaten the intervention of Parliament.¹⁰² Defeats by the French early in the war had, moreover, persuaded many people of the 'necessity not only of a Parliamentary Union, but taxation [by Parliament], for the preservation of His Majesty's Dominions . . . , which the several Assemblies' had 'in so great a measure abandon'd the defence of, and thereby lay'd His Majesty's Governm[en]t at home under a necessity of taking care of it for the State, by suitable assessm[en]ts upon the Colonies.'¹⁰³ Except in the case of the Currency Act of 1751, however, metropolitan ministries had proven reluctant to involve Parliament in its reform efforts. But in 1757, the House of Commons, acting with the full approval of the colonial office, actually did intervene in the purely domestic affairs of a colony for the first time since 1733 and thereby created an important precedent when it censured the Jamaica

¹⁰¹ William Henry Lyttelton to Halifax, Oct. 18, 1756, W. H. Lyttelton Letter-book, 1757-1759, Lyttelton Papers, 6(ii), Worcester County Record Office, Worcester, Eng.; Thomas Pownall, 'State of the Government of Massachusetts Bay as it stood in the Year 1757,' CO 925/2.

¹⁰² See, among many examples, Board of Trade to Benning Wentworth, Aug. 6, 1755, CO 941, pp. 363-73.

¹⁰³ See Charles Townshend to Newcastle, Nov. 7, 1754, Newcastle Papers: Add. Mss. 32737, ff. 57-58; William Shirley to Sir Thomas Robinson, Feb. 4, 1755, in C. H. Lincoln, ed., *Correspondence of William Shirley* (New York, 1912), 2:123-24; Robert Dinwiddie to Robinson, Feb. 12, 1755, in Robert A. Brock, ed., *The Official Records of Robert Dinwiddie* (Richmond, 1883-84), 1:493.

Assembly for making extravagant constitutional claims while resisting instructions from London. That metropolitan authorities were quite willing to take similar actions against other colonies was clearly revealed by the pains they took to inform all of the colonies of the Commons's action in the Jamaica case.¹⁰⁴

V

The metropolitan program of reform between 1748 and 1756 engendered among the colonists considerable, if mostly only temporary, individual, group, and local dissatisfaction with specific metropolitan actions. But it did not produce either the sort of generalized discontent that might have brought the colonists to rebellion or a significant predisposition towards revolution among them. The impact of most of its components was too local to invite collective opposition, and the program as a whole was sufficiently diffuse and contingent as to conceal from those not at or near the center of metropolitan administration its general thrust and implications. Not until the Stamp Act had brought representatives from several colonies together and put earlier metropolitan actions in a new perspective did colonial leaders begin to perceive that, as Christopher Gadsden wrote from Charleston in December 1765 following his return from the Stamp Act Congress, the 'late attacks on different parts of the Constitution in different places . . . in New York on one point, in our province on another, in Jamaica on a third, in Maryland on several' had 'the appearance of design' and were 'very alarming.'¹⁰⁵

The result was that the whole program could be interpreted by the colonists as nothing more than some additional

¹⁰⁴ *Journals of the House of Commons* (London), 27:910-11 (May 23, 1757); John Pownall to governors, June 3, 1757, CO 324/6; 'Some Instances of Matters relating to the Colonies in which the House of Commons have interfered,' 1757, Hardwicke Papers, Add. Mss. 35909, ff. 275-80.

¹⁰⁵ Gadsden to Charles Garth, Dec. 2, 1765, in Richard Walsh, ed., *The Writings of Christopher Gadsden 1746-1805* (Columbia, S.C., 1966), p. 67.

episodes in the ongoing efforts of metropolitan administrators, 'except in some short and shining Periods, to establish,' as John Dickinson later wrote, 'a Prerogative in America quite different from that in Great Britain.' Such efforts and the 'invidious Distinction' they sought to create between Britons in the home islands and those at home had long been a source of disquiet among the colonists. By the 1750s, they may even have come to seem less threatening than they had been fifty or a hundred years earlier when the colonists had had less experience in coping with them.¹⁰⁶ Yet, despite the fact that colonial leaders in most instances had effectively frustrated metropolitan designs between 1748 and 1756, the new aggressiveness in metropolitan behavior clearly exacerbated this traditional disquiet by stirring ancient colonial fears that metropolitan authorities were intent upon gaining 'some extraordinary Power over the Colonies.' By the mid-1750s, some were beginning to worry with William Smith, Jr., the New York lawyer and historian, that the 'long hand of the Prerogative' would 'be stretched over to us, more than ever, upon the conclusion of the next general peace,' while others, disturbed by the rising volume of threats of parliamentary intervention into colonial affairs, were anxious lest 'Parliament, with whom there is no contending . . . take it into their Heads to lay the Foundation of a regular Government amongst us, and taking it out of the Hands of the Assemblies, by fixing a Support for the Governor, and the other Officers of the Crown, independent of an Assembly.'¹⁰⁷ A climate of

¹⁰⁶ Dickinson to William Pitt, Dec. 21, 1765, in Edmund S. Morgan, ed., *Prologue to Revolution: Sources and Documents on the Stamp Act Crisis, 1764-1766* (Chapel Hill, 1959), p. 120; Jack P. Greene, 'Political Mimesis: A Consideration of the Historical Roots of Legislative Behavior in the British Colonies in the Eighteenth Century,' *American Historical Review* 75 (1969):337-60.

¹⁰⁷ William Bollen to Josiah Willard, July 20, 1752, Massachusetts Archives 21: 73-77; Smith to Thomas Clap, [1757/1759], as quoted in William Smith, Jr., *The History of the Province of New-York*, ed. Michael Kammen (Cambridge, Mass., 1972), 1:xxxiv; Archibald Kennedy, *Serious Considerations on the Present State of the Affairs of the Northern Colonies* (New York, 1754), pp. 23-24.

mutual suspicion came to surround all dealings about the colonies. By the mid-1750s the Board of Trade had decided that it was necessary to 'affect great Privacy and Secrecy . . . in all their Measures . . . to prevent any Information which their Lordships think improper' from falling into the hands of the colonial agents or other representatives of colonial interests who might oppose the Board's programs.¹⁰⁸ At the same time, colonial leaders were counseling each other to take 'great care to act so as to give no just offense to our Superiors' in London.¹⁰⁹

In this atmosphere, no one on the outside could know precisely what metropolitan intentions were. The French ambassador did not find outrageous assurances from the government that Braddock's forces were being sent to the colonies primarily to restrain the colonies, 'which for a long time had not complied to the orders of the English government.'¹¹⁰ Well-informed observers on the spot in London similarly had no qualms about crediting rumors that 'it was intended by some Persons of Consequence that the Colonies shou'd be govern'd like Ireland, keeping up a Body of standing Forces, with a Military Chest there' and abridging 'their legislative powers, so as to put them on the same foot that Ireland stands by Poyning's Law,' which, of course, prevented passage of any law by the Irish Parliament prior to its being 'first assented to by the King & Privy Council of England.'¹¹¹

However exaggerated such rumors might have been, the efforts of Halifax and his colleagues between 1748 and 1756 clearly constituted a major transformation in metropolitan

¹⁰⁸ Robert Charles to David Jones, William Smith, Jr., Papers, 191, New York Public Library; William Bollan to Josiah Willard, Mar. 5, 1755, Misc. Bound Mss., 1749-55, Massachusetts Historical Society.

¹⁰⁹ Isaac Norris to Charles Norris, Oct. 7, 1754, Isaac Norris Letter Books, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

¹¹⁰ Mirepoix to Rouillé, Jan. 16, 1755, as cited by Higonnet, 'Origins of the Seven Years' War,' p. 88.

¹¹¹ Bollan to Willard, Mar. 5, 1755, Misc. Bound Mss., 1749-55, Massachusetts Historical Society.

behavior towards the colonies, the general thrust of which involved a dramatic shift from an essentially permissive to a fundamentally restrictive philosophy of colonial administration. The deep fear that Britain might soon lose 'every inch of property in America' that underlay and animated this transformation resulted in the widespread conviction within metropolitan circles that, as Lord Granville, President of the Privy Council throughout the 1750s, told Benjamin Franklin in 1757, the colonies had 'too many and too great Priviledges' and that it was 'not only the Interest of the Crown but of the Nation to reduce them' to 'An absolute Subjection to Orders sent from' the metropolis 'in the Shape of Instructions.'¹¹² In pursuit of such goals, metropolitan authorities between 1748 and 1756 revived and/or developed and attempted to implement a wide range of policies and measures, many of them the very ones colonials found so objectionable between 1759 and 1776, that seemed to threaten or actually to violate fundamental aspects of the traditional relationship between Britain and the colonies as the colonists had come to perceive that relationship over the previous century.

Yet, the causal significance of this shift in metropolitan posture and policy for the American Revolution lies much less in the relatively localized and transitory pockets of discontent it created in the colonies than in its almost total failure to achieve any of the objectives for which it had been undertaken. For this failure served both to intensify metropolitan fears that the colonies would sooner or later get completely out of hand and to increase—almost to the point of obsession—metropolitan determination to secure tighter control over the colonies. The diminution of this reform effort during the Seven Years' War was only temporary, as metropolitan officials merely bided their time until the 'present na-

¹¹² Malachy Postlethwayt, *Britain's Commercial Interest Explained and Improved* (London, 1757), 1:424-25; Benjamin Franklin to Isaac Norris, Mar. 19, 1759, *Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, 8:293.

tional difficulties' had been 'settled' and 'some bounds' could finally be set to the inflated privileges of the colonies.¹¹³ Moreover, in their subsequent efforts 'to remedy [colonial] disorders before they' became 'too obstinate,' metropolitan authorities had the benefit of two important lessons they had learned from their earlier failure. The first was that only a sweeping reformation of 'the government and trade of all our colonies' would be effective: the kinds of ad hoc and local solutions that had been attempted between 1748 and 1756 clearly had not worked.¹¹⁴ The second was that any such comprehensive reconstruction would have to be undertaken by Parliament. 'No other Authority than that of the British Parliament,' it had become vividly apparent during Halifax's early tenure, would either 'be regarded in the colonys or be able to awe them into acquiescence.'¹¹⁵

Whether even the authority of Parliament would be accepted in the colonies seems not to have been doubted in London. At least one prominent colonial, Gov. Stephen Hopkins of Rhode Island, reportedly declared as early as 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 Government of the Kingdom of France, yet nothing could be more tyrannical, than our being Obligated by Acts of Parliament To which we were not parties to the making; and in which we were not Represented.'¹¹⁶ That such notions were not limited to Hopkins was confirmed by the Earl of Loudoun, the King's first commander-in-chief of forces in America, who reported in December 1756 that it was 'very common for the people in the Lower and more inhabited Country [in America] to say' that

¹¹³ Benning Wentworth to Board of Trade, Dec. 23, 1755, CO 5/926.

¹¹⁴ Postlethwayt, *Universal Dictionary* (London, 1757), 1:373.

¹¹⁵ 'Hints Respecting the Civil Establishment in Our American Colonies,' [1763], Shelburne Papers, 69:508, Clements Library.

¹¹⁶ Deposition of Samuel Freebody, Sept. 15, 1758, R.I. Mss., 12:21, Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence.

'they would be glad to see any Man durst Offer to put an English Act of Parliament in Force in this country.'¹¹⁷ But the issue had never been put to the test, and in the absence of any overt colonial resistance to the authority of Parliament metropolitan officials could comfortably continue to assume both that Parliament had an undoubted 'right to [re]moddle the Constitution[s]' of the colonies and that its regulations would be effectively obeyed.¹¹⁸

VI

The conclusions drawn from the experience by the metropolitan political nation, not the many specific local and largely unconnected grievances they generated among the colonists, are thus the primary reasons why the reforms of 1748-56 must be assigned a central place in the causal pattern of the American Revolution. We need not argue that revolution was logically inevitable thereafter or that, in response to different empirical conditions, metropolitan officials might not have reverted to their earlier philosophy of salutary neglect. But, by contributing to build sentiment for still more restrictive and, the officials hoped, more effective measures when a favorable opportunity presented itself, metropolitan experiences between 1748 and 1756 helped to stiffen that 'posture of hostility' that had been so apparent in metropolitan behavior towards the colonies since 1748, would so powerfully continue to inform that behavior between 1759 and 1776, and would ultimately constitute the primary animating force in driving large and strategic segments of the colonial population to resistance, rebellion, and independence.

¹¹⁷ Loudoun to Halifax, Dec. 26, 1756, Loudoun Papers 2416C, Huntington Library.

¹¹⁸ Robert Hunter Morris to William Pitt, [1758-59], Miscellaneous Mss., Clements Library.

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