"Things in the Womb of Time":
Ideas of American Independence, 1633 to 1763

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In January 1776 Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* appeared, the first thoroughly reasoned argument for immediate American independence from Great Britain. Paine was not an original thinker. His strength as a political pamphleteer was his ability to articulate more clearly—and in memorable, ringing phrases—what others had said and were thinking. Paine asserted that "I have never met with a man, either in England or America, who hath not confessed his opinion, that a separation between the countries, would take place one time or other."1 Allowing for the pamphleteer's overstatement, Paine's observation of the perception of inevitability was accurate. Indeed, even before the crisis of the 1760s, the prospect of American independence had been a matter of frequent comment. The discussion of separation from Britain, especially after 1750, had provided a pool of arguments and a specification of conditions under which the event might happen, given the appropriate occasion.

In some respects, the recent insistence of historians upon the reluctance of the Americans to consider independence, coupled with the reaction against so-called "whig" history that viewed everything in the colonial period as prologue to revolution, has obscured the obvious.2 While colonial developments must be seen on their own merits and not as acts of proto-revolution, many contemporary participants and observers regarded Anglo-American conflict leading to American independence as a central theme, particularly of the late colonial period. Moreover, this conviction helped produce a climate of opinion that had

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some influence in shaping British policy after the Peace of Paris. The strong undercurrent of concern about, and anticipation of, eventual American separation from the Empire in the years before 1763 has seldom been properly recognized. In part this is because the discussion rarely became a clearly focused debate. Instead, occasional comments of a variety of theorists, statesmen, and pamphleteers have been buried in forgotten writings. Moreover, the subject of American independence was usually raised in order to refute its likelihood. Most writers made reference to unnamed “theys,” who feared such developments and then presented arguments against such anxieties. Seen in isolation, such refutations would seem to support the notion that few really believed in the eventuality. Perhaps so. But the persistence of the denials, increasing in number, force, and coherence in the years immediately before 1763, suggests that many were prepared to entertain the possibility. In effect, these denials added up to little less than a prophecy waiting to be fulfilled.

Strong arguments could be adduced for eventual separation. The history of Greek and Roman colonization had suggested to men of the seventeenth century that colonies could become independent of the metropolis, and the eighteenth century added concrete areas of concern. Economic thinkers committed to mercantilistic ideas worried that colonies that ceased to remain sources of primary materials and became manufacturing centers would break their ties with the mother country. Colonial governors and British statesmen, struggling continually against the pretensions of American assemblies to legislative preeminence, feared that assemblies which were miniature Parliaments would cast off their “dependence” upon the British Parliament, and some saw independence as the result. The growth of the colonies’ population increased their

8 One author who did recognize the theme was George Louis Beer, *British Colonial Policy, 1754-1765* (New York, 1907), 160-180. I am deeply indebted to his pioneer work.

4 This, for example, is the position taken by the editors of the *Franklin Papers* in their discussion of Franklin’s Canada pamphlet, *The Interest of Great Britain with Regard to her Colonies:* “While he [Franklin] discusses the argument that the retention of Canada might lead in time to the independence of the older colonies, he does so only to refute the charge, and he urges that fair and considerate treatment by Great Britain would effectively prevent any move toward separation.” Leonard W. Labaree *et al.*, eds., *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin* (New Haven, Conn., 1959- ), IX, 59.

5 It is not clear that the many who wrote about the problems of American “dependence” all saw “independence” as the only alternative. Nor did everyone understand by “independence” what Tom Paine meant in 1776. But while the nuances of the terms are uncertain, the implication of American autonomy and separatism was clearly meant.
ability to fight their own battles, and the removal of the French threat in Canada was held by many to be fraught with danger to the imperial relationship.

In the minds of all who pondered the possibility of independence was the matter of timing. Paine was again not far wrong when he argued that "all men allow the measure, and vary only in their opinion of the time." Here conceptualization played a major role. The British, after all, had not developed a very clear idea of Empire. What they had were less theories than metaphors. As John Brooks has pointed out, British statesmen saw the colonial relationship in highly personalized terms. The most common concept was that of the family. The metropolis became the "mother country," and the colonies her children. Most writers agreed that when the colonies had grown to "maturity," they must be treated as independent equals. This was what usually happened in the family: children grew up and made their own way in the world. Not all observers agreed, however, on the point when maturity was reached or on the stage of development of the colonies at any given time before 1763. Were they still infants? Were they now out of swaddling clothes and capable of doing some things for themselves? No one, not even Paine, argued that the colonies were full-grown, but in what stage of childhood were they?

Perhaps equally important, lurking in the background was the question of how one dealt with growing children. David Hume indicated the problem very well in his account of a conversation with Lord Bathurst in the early 1770s: "Nations, as well as Individuals, had their different Ages, which challeng'd a different Treatment. For Instance, My Lord, said I to the old Peer, you have sometimes, no doubt, given your Son a Whipping: and I doubt not, but it was well merited and did him much good: Yet you will not think proper at present to employ the Birch: The Colonies are no longer in their Infancy." Hume himself thought the colonies still "in their Nonage," not yet ready for full adulthood. But given the prevalence of the metaphor, how a parent disciplined delinquent children and when they were recognized as grown were questions that, by the time of the Stamp Act, had become perhaps as vital for British statesmen as any economic or political theories.

6 Common Sense, 61.
7 Richard Koebner, Empire (Cambridge, 1961); Klaus E. Knorr, British Colonial Theories, 1570-1850 (Toronto, 1944).
10 Edwin G. Burrows and Michael Wallace, "The American Revolution: The
Before 1763 only a few individuals on either side of the Atlantic were openly predicting American independence in a foreseeable future. Nevertheless, in the writings of imperial reformers of the 1750s and of political pamphleteers of the early 1760s, the specter had been raised, thoroughly discussed, and not laid to rest. No informed individual by 1763 could claim ignorance of the issues. Each time a writer refuted the possibility of separation, he added to the list of conditions under which it might occur. Implicit in denials that the Americans were populous enough, or powerful enough, or prosperous enough, or unhappy enough, was the thought that someday they might become so. Circumstances could change. Observers had argued in the years before 1763 that they were changing, and fear that such was the case was a central factor in British policy in the 1760s.

Almost from the first settlement of America, there had been sporadic discussion of the possibility of colonial separation, although it would take a century for scattered comments to attain some unity and coherence. As early as 1633 George Downing sought to silence English critics by categorically denying that New England would renounce Charles I, arguing that “it is a causeless fear without precedent that a colony planted in a strange land was ever so foolishly besotted as to reject the protection of their natural prince.”11 Others in the seventeenth century were less certain. Thomas Hobbes, in the Leviathan, described two types of “Plantations or Colonies”:

They are either a Common-wealth of themselves, discharged of their subjection to their Soverain that sent them, (as hath been done by many Common-wealths, of ancient time,) in which case the Common-wealth from which they went, was called their Metropolis or Mother, and requires no more of them, than Fathers require of the Children, whom they emancipate and make free from their domestique government, which is Honour and Friendship; or else they remain united to their Metropolis, as were the Colonies of the people in Rome; and then they are no Common-wealths themselves, but Provinces, and parts of the Common-wealth that sent them.12

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 11 Beer, British Colonial Policy, 170.

Also employing the metaphor of the family, James Harrington recognized in a primitive way that colonies, like children, passed through stages of development. "For the Colonies in the Indies," he wrote, "they are yet babes, that cannot live without sucking the breasts of their mother-Cities, but such as, I mistake, if when they come of age, they do not wean themselves; which causeth me to wonder at Princes that delight to be exhausted in that way." Thus the two giants of English political theory in the mid-seventeenth century employed concepts of an imperial family and ultimate separation, relying upon classical precedents to support their views.

The question of colonial independence soon left the realm of abstract political theory and became part of the concrete course of events. Much of America, particularly the New England colonies, became virtually independent states during the English Civil War, and Oliver Cromwell and the later Stuarts alike sought to restore them to a proper dependency. A deep-seated suspicion of New England's ambitions and objectives affected the making of British colonial policy. Warnings of an independent colonial spirit came regularly from officials in both England and America. Reports such as one in 1709 that in Massachusetts "some of the leading men already begin to talke of shaking off their subjection to the Crown of England" were to a large extent merely exercises in self-justification and bureaucratic paranoia. In part they also reflected the real difficulties of governing colonists who were divided by an ocean from the metropolis. In New York, Gov. Robert Hunter formulated such concerns as a constitutional issue that would be raised continually in the eighteenth century. New York's Assembly, wrote Hunter to the secretary of state in England, insisted upon "all the previledges of a House of Commons, and Stretching them even beyond what they were ever Imagined to be there, should the Counsill by the same Rule lay Claire to the rights and priviledges of a house of Peers, here is a body politik Coordinate with (and claiming equal powers) and Consequently Independant of the Great Counsill of the Realme." Legislative in-

13 James Harrington, The Oceana of James Harrington, esq. (Dublin, 1731), 20. This was subsequently quoted by John Adams in Novanglus. See Charles Francis Adams, ed., The Works of John Adams, IV (Boston, 1851), 104.
14 Beer, British Colonial Policy, 166ff.
15 Roger Mompesson to the earl of Nottingham, July 4, 1709, ibid., 167-168.
16 French officials had similar comments about the population of Acadia, and in 1704 one report to Paris noted that the Acadians "lived like true republicans, not acknowledging royal or judicial authority." John Bartlet Brebner, New England's Outpost: Acadia before the Conquest of Canada (New York, 1927), 47.
17 Beer, British Colonial Policy, 166-167.
dependence seemed to Hunter and other governors quite consistent with the general colonial tendency to autonomy, and they easily became convinced that their struggles with the assemblies were part of this larger problem.\footnote{18}

Colonial officials were not alone in worrying about potential American separation. A number of British writers, particularly although not exclusively economists, devoted attention to the possibility after 1688. Charles D’Avenant, friend of Shaftesbury, self-proclaimed Old Whig, and pioneer economist, turned in one of his major works, *Discourses on the Public Revenue*, to the plantation trade and prospective colonial independence.\footnote{19} The colonies were a useful place to which to exile troublemakers, said D’Avenant, and “this can be no damage to the state, if they consist of men turbulent and unquiet at home, unless it can be made out, that they acquire abroad such riches, power and dominion, as may render them, in process of time, formidable to their mother country.” He went on to contend that the colonies “are a spring of wealth to this nation,” and insisted “that it must be through our own fault and misgovernment, if they become independent of England.” Corrupt governors, “supine negligence,” and mistaken measures “may indeed drive them, or put it into their heads to erect themselves into independent commonwealths.”\footnote{20}

To assure imperial harmony and prosperity D’Avenant urged that the colonial commercial growth be encouraged and that military, especially naval, power be retained in English hands, unless its use by the colonists were absolutely necessary for their defense. Like many other British commentators, he concluded, “Colonies are a strength to their mother kingdom, while they are under good discipline, while they are strictly made to observe the fundamental laws of their original country, and while they are kept dependent on it.” Although this sentence verged on the family metaphor, D’Avenant preferred to see empire in terms of the human body. If not kept dependent, colonies were “worse than members lopped from the body politic, being indeed like offensive arms wrested from a nation, to be turned against it as occasion shall serve.”

\footnote{18} Perfectly employing the family metaphor, Hunter indicated his preference for future colonial policy: “In the Infancy of the Colonies the Crown was lavish of privileges as necessary for their nursing, but a full grown boy makes commonly but Indifferent use of that Indulgence requisite toward a Child.” *Ibid.*, 167n.

\footnote{19} D’Avenant or Davenant (1656-1714) was a son of the poet reputed to have sheltered Milton. He served as commissioner of the excise from 1678 to 1689. *Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. “Davenant, Charles.”

But he emphasized that he did not believe that growing and prosperous colonies were a danger to Britain, at least while they remained British in blood and trade. "Nothing," wrote D'Avenant, "but such an arbitrary power as shall make them desperate, can bring them to rebel." D'Avenant did not pause to consider whether such views might contribute to putting ideas of independence into colonial heads, yet they constituted, in effect, an unintended invitation to rebellion. If the colonists became desperate—if they could demonstrate or at least convince themselves that the power of Britain was arbitrary—the unthinkable could occur.

D'Avenant anticipated much of the eighteenth-century writing on colonial policy before the Stamp Act, particularly by critics of the government. One such work—and one that the colonists were able to employ in opposing arbitrary power—was Cato's Letters, written between 1720 and 1723 by John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon. The authors of Cato's Letters devoted an entire number (106) to the themes that D'Avenant had raised a generation earlier. After justifying the possession of colonies in familiar mercantilist terms, Cato moved on to indict the government for colonial mismanagement. The limitations of Cato's position were clearly stated in the opening sentence of the critique: "I would not suggest so distant a Thought, as that any of our Colonies, when they grow stronger, should ever attempt to wean themselves from us; however, I think too much Care cannot be taken to prevent it, and to preserve their Dependencies upon their Mother-Country." The government's policy was wrong only because it did not maintain the plantations in a properly dependent relationship.

Employing the family metaphor, Cato recognized a potential thrust toward independence, especially when the colonial children found it to their advantage to separate from "those who use them ill." After all, wrote Cato, "All Nature points out that Course. No Creatures suck the Teats of their Dams longer than they can draw Milk from thence, or can provide themselves with better Food: Nor will any Country continue their Subjection to another, only because their Great-Grandmothers were acquainted." Cato saw two ways to keep colonies from "throwing off their Dependence." One was to keep the act out of their power

21 Ibid.
through the use of force. The other was to keep it out of their will “by using them well” and by permitting them to become prosperous in ways not prejudicial to the mother country.24

Force would not do. Neatly combining the “country” objections to standing armies and political corruption, Cato observed that the maintenance of a body of troops sufficient to overawe the colonists, under the direction of governors who were out to make their fortunes, would be disastrous. Yet the mainland colonies, if not prevented by forceful methods, would naturally grow and prosper and must in a century become populous states. It was therefore essential that the interests of colonies and mother country be kept in harmony. This was no easy task, said Cato, for “the Interest of Colonies is often to gain Independency; and is always so when they no longer want Protection, and when they can employ themselves more advantageously, than in supplying Materials of Traffick to others: And the Interest of the Mother-Country is always to keep them dependent, and so employed.”25 Cato thus provided a theme for the imperial relationship of the eighteenth century, one which before 1763 was perhaps more clearly recognized by British politicians and colonial experts than by the American colonials. The fundamental interests of colonies and mother country were naturally in conflict; the two major areas of confrontation were commerce and war. Colonies remained dependent only while military and economic considerations demanded such status. When these circumstances changed, Cato implied, the colonies and the metropolis would be set on a collision course.

Like Cato, most British mercantilist writers tended to deny the likelihood of American separation, provided certain conditions were met. Joshua Gee in The Trade and Navigation of Great-Britain Considered (1729) worried that the colonies would “set up for themselves, and cast off the English Government” only if colonial manufacturing were encouraged. Daniel Defoe argued in A Plan of the English Commerce (1730) that fears of colonial independence were “preposterous” because of the economic dependence of the colonies on Great Britain. Colonial prosperity did not alarm him, because it meant increased trade and “in particular an Encrease of the Consumption of our Manufactures.”26

24 Ibid., 7.
25 Ibid., 8-9.
26 Joshua Gee, The Trade and Navigation of Great-Britain Considered (London, 1729), 71. Gee (1698-1748) served as agent of Pennsylvania for some years and was active in colonial speculations. [Daniel Defoe], A Plan of the English Commerce. Being a Compleat Prospect of the Trade of this Nation, as Well the Home Trade as the Foreign (London, 1728), 361-363.
Nevertheless, both Gee and Defoe found concern over colonial separatism sufficiently widespread to require detailed refutation.27

The few colonials who dealt with the independence issue before the 1740s concentrated, like their British counterparts, on denial. Jeremiah Dummer in 1721 defended his native New England against charges that “their encreasing Numbers and Wealth, join’d to their great Distance from Britain, will give them an Opportunity in the Course of some Years, to throw off their Dependence on the Nation, and declare themselves a free State, if not curb’d in Time, by being made entirely subject to the Crown.”28 Dummer was responding to a periodic rethinking of colonial administration that had culminated in 1721 in a major report to the Board of Trade.29 Significantly, the report, like most such official productions, argued for greater dependence without openly raising the question of independence. But Dummer, who was close to several officials on the Board of Trade, recognized that the Board’s efforts to secure greater dependence rested implicitly on concern about potential independence. Dummer ridiculed such fears, arguing that poverty and differences among the colonies “in their Forms of Government, in their religious Rites, in their Emulation of Trade, and consequently in their Affections,” made it impossible for them “to unite in so dangerous an Enterprize.” Turning to the family image, he went on to add, “I may say, without being ludicrous, that it would not be more absurd to place two of his Majesty’s Beef-Eaters to watch an Infant in the Cradle, that it don’t rise and cut its Father’s Throat, than to guard these weak infant Colonies, to prevent their shaking off the British Yoke.”30

27 In 1729 Martin Bladen (1680-1746), the leading voice on the Board of Trade, had argued in a memorandum to the duke of Newcastle that Nova Scotia settlement would provide defense against French encroachments and would “drain great Numbers of Inhabitants from New England, where they are daily aiming at an independency and very much Interfere with the Trade of their Mother Kingdom.” A few years later Bladen defended the sugar duties in Parliament as something near absolute prohibition, “for in the way the northern colonies are, they raise the French islands at the expense of ours, and raise themselves also to[o] high, even to an independency.” James A. Henretta, “Salutary Neglect”: Colonial Administration under the Duke of Newcastle (Princeton, N. J., 1972), 96.


30 Dummer, Defence of the Charters, 36-37.
A decade after the publication of Dummer's *A Defence of the New-England Charters*, another colonial, James Logan of Pennsylvania, produced a lengthy manuscript essay on the state of the British plantations in America. Logan had long years of American experience in government and commerce which he attempted to impart to Robert Walpole, who was "too busily employ'd another way to mind Such Trifles." Although Logan's "Memorial"—an insightful analysis of the imperial relationship by a knowledgeable colonial—was mainly concerned with French encroachments on British territory, it concluded with a critique of British colonial policy in terms of the possibility of American separation. Logan saw the very multiplicity of colonial governments as a product of Britain's "Natural Policy to keep the several Colonies under distinct and independant Commands, the more effectually to Secure them from a Revolt from the Crown." This was one of the earliest arguments that colonial disunity was deliberately fostered by imperial policy. But, continued Logan, "those who Apprehend any probability of [revolt] for Several Ages to come, or while the Mother Country's in Europe Maintain their Power at Home, indulge their Political Speculations without any just foundation." America would remain dependent for some time, so long as the colonies were "treated with Tenderness and Humanity and not Considered only as Slavishly Subservient to the Interest of the Countrey they came from." Only oppression to the point of making them incapable of self-support, wrote Logan, could provoke the desperation that would fuel rebellion.\(^{31}\)

Logan offered interesting reasons to support his confidence in continued colonial loyalty. In the British plantations there were no noble and ancient families to lead a rebellion, and no large revenues to finance one. Moreover, he added, "while Canada is so near, they cannot Rebel." Emphasizing the French threat, Logan held that "it will Probably be the true Interest of both Britain and France to have each other's Colonies on the Continent Supported as the most Effective Check that could be thought of, to retain them on both sides in a sight of their Duty." Cato and others in England had stressed colonists' need for British military protection, but Logan gave a new twist to the argument. In so doing he added yet another condition to the list of those that might make separation possible. If French Canada were conquered, a substantial reason for subservience would be removed. Thus introduced

into the discussion of independence, the Gallic question would emerge as critical after the conquest of Canada in 1759.\textsuperscript{32}

The decade of the 1730s was one of relative peace for England and her colonies, quieting many of the issues that had raised concern about independence. Conflict with assemblies, commercial rivalry, and military maneuvering did not cease, but the absence of great international struggle made them seem less urgent. In times of peace, assemblies could defy governors, and merchants break the navigation acts, without endangering the security of the Empire. Although Walpole’s policies were not directly designed to pacify the colonists and their critics, they had such an effect. But the warhawks in Britain eventually triumphed, and the Empire entered a period of almost uninterrupted warfare that would unmistakably reveal and continually exacerbate the many strains between colonies and mother country.\textsuperscript{33} Increasingly, men contemplated the possibility of American independence, and their anxieties, formerly expressed in scattered comments, acquired more coherent form, sharper focus, and far greater force.

In the 1740s the connection between the exigencies of war and eventual American independence became more clearly articulated. The governor of New York in 1741 reminded a recalcitrant Assembly that some in England thought the colonies eager for independence, leading the Assembly to answer that “We dare Vouch That not one single Person in it [the Assembly] has any such Thoughts or Desire, for under what Government can we be better Protected, or our Liberties and Properties so well secured?”\textsuperscript{34} In Massachusetts, Gov. William Shirley warned the Board of Trade that illicit trade with the French “must be highly destructive . . . and finally weakening the Dependance which the British Northern Colonies ought to have upon their Mother Country.”\textsuperscript{35} Two years later Shirley attempted to gain British support for the New England attack on Louisbourg by arguing that if the colonies became restless and wanted independence, the Cape Breton fortress would be a useful check upon them. He added the disclaimer that

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 127-128. Benjamin Franklin, one of the major participants in the latter debate, made a copy of Logan’s “Memorial” and was familiar with its arguments.


\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., \textit{British Colonial Policy}, 1711.

independence "seems to me from the observation I have been able to make up on the Spot, at the Distance of some Centuries farther off than, I have heard, it does to Some Gentlemen at home." Yet Shirley unwittingly advanced arguments for the gentlemen at home. One such Cassandra at the center of British policy-making was the duke of Bedford, who expostulated to Newcastle in 1746 that it would be undesirable for colonial troops, so successful at Louisbourg, to take Canada on their own. An American conquest, said the duke, would create an "independence . . . in those provinces towards their mother country, when they shall see within themselves so great an army possessed in their own right by conquest, of so great an extent of country." When the British decided not to employ their own troops, the invasion was cancelled.

After Aix-la-Chapelle had restored the territorial status quo in America, the problem of American separatism focused in discussions by Josiah Tucker, one of the most influential economic thinkers of the midcentury in England, who predicted in 1749 that the British colonies in America would revolt if the time should come when they felt themselves economically self-sufficient. For the present, however, he thought the imperial relationship mutually beneficial. About the same time, the Massachusetts-born Otis Little produced *The State of Trade in the Northern Colonies Considered*. In Britain to lobby for Nova Scotia settlement and a hard-money currency, Little argued for Nova Scotia in terms of expanding colonial markets: "By enlarging the Trade, and increasing the Number of Inhabitants in the Northern Colonies, their Demand and Abilities to pay for British goods would be proportionable." Almost as a matter of course, Little met the objection to colonial prosperity, that "great Care ought to be taken, lest those Colonies grow too powerful, and set up a Government of their own," by denying the existence of any such colonial ambition "whilst they enjoy the Freedom of English Subjects under so happy a Constitution."

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40 (London, 1748), 13, 11. For Little (1711/12-ca. 1754) see my biographical sketch in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, III, forthcoming.
Not everyone was as sanguine as Little about the constitutional happiness of the colonies. George Clinton, governor of New York, struggling with his Assembly, told the legislators in a speech written by Cadwallader Colden that in demanding "all the Privileges and Rights, of the House of Commons of Great Britain" they not only assumed the right to be a branch of the kingdom's legislature but denied "Dependence and Subjection on the Crown and Parliament." Clinton added that the Assembly must either admit the authority of Parliament over it or "you must think yourselves independent of the Crown of Great-Britain."

Governor James Glen of South Carolina was less theoretical in letters to the duke of Bedford. "Here," wrote Glen, "levelling principles prevail; the frame of civil government is unhinged; a governor, if he would be idolized, must betray his trust; . . . to preserve the dependence of America in general, the Constitution must be new modelled." In its report on New York affairs to the Privy Council in 1751, the Board of Trade echoed Clinton and Glen: "There is nothing so essentially necessary to the preservation of his Maj'ty's Govern't in the American provinces, as the careful and strict maintenance of the just prerogative, which is the only means by which those Colonies can be kept dependant on the mother Country, or the Governors themselves representing the Crown, maintain any power over their Assemblies, or any agreement with them." The Board of Trade offered no solutions beyond "maintenance of the just prerogative," but the concern that its report represented produced a new round of attempts by colonial experts, mostly self-styled, to remodel the colonial constitution. War, reform, and American separatism were inextricably bound together in these efforts.

Proposals for constitutional reform in the colonies were hardly novel or unusual. What was different in the 1750s was the clear articulation of the choice facing the British: institute reform (usually by strengthening the prerogative) or risk American separation. In two pamphlets of 1750 and 1751 Archibald Kennedy of New York called for British


42 Eugene Irving McCormac, Colonial Opposition to Imperial Authority during the French and Indian War, University of California Publications in History, I (Berkeley, Calif., 1914), 9.


action. The first of these, *Observations on the Importance of the Northern Colonies under Proper Regulations*, urged improved trade and, while not very specific about means, made explicit the consequences of inaction. If the British did not improve American trade, the colonies would have to manufacture, and “where People in such Circumstances are numerous and free, they will push what they think is for their Interest, and all restraining Laws will be thought Oppression; especially such Laws, as according to the Conceptions we have of English Liberty, they have no Hand in the contriving or making.” Kennedy opposed restrictions on trade, for “Liberty and Encouragement are the Basis of Colonies.”45 He concluded his pamphlet by reprinting almost in entirety the passages from *Cato’s Letters* on potential American independence. The following year Kennedy called for colonial union by act of Parliament in a pamphlet misleadingly entitled *The Importance of Gaining and Preserving the Friendship of the Indians to the British Interest, Considered*. His intent, he wrote, was to offer hints for improving the constitution of the colonies in hopes that there “are those amongst us, of Capacity, Leisure and publick Spirit, sufficient to model them into a proper Shape, for the perusal” of Parliament.46 An appended anonymous letter from Philadelphia, written by Benjamin Franklin, endorsed Kennedy’s call for colonial union but preferred a voluntary one “entered into by the Colonies themselves” to “one impos’d by Parliament.”46 Franklin’s letter testified to the close contact many of the American reformers had with one another.47

Kennedy’s efforts at colonial reform tended to employ the carrot rather than the stick, as his use of Cato suggests. But in his recognition of the possibility of American separatism he was well in tune with many who were less tolerant of American sensitivities. James Abercromby, for example, concluded his reform proposals of 1752 (circulated in manuscript in Britain) by arguing that the colonies were too divided to throw off their dependency, but might do so if measures were not taken to settle the question “whether they are to remain subjects or become confederates.”48 Perhaps the clearest synthesis of these warnings and

46 [Archibald Kennedy], *Observations on the Importance of the Northern Colonies under Proper Regulations* (New York, 1750), 10, 12.
47 The circle of acquaintanceship and correspondence included William Douglass in Boston, Kennedy and Colden in New York, Franklin in Philadelphia, and John Mitchell in Virginia. Except for Franklin, all were Scotsmen. Douglass, Colden, and Mitchell had attended the University of Edinburgh.
counsels in the 1750s was provided by Henry McCulloh, a Scotsman who had spent many years in government service in America, mostly in South Carolina. As a lower official involved in collecting a colonial revenue, McCulloh had found himself constantly squeezed between the complaints of governors whom he regarded as incompetent and the demands of colonial legislatures which he thought pretentious. Under fire from several directions, he had retired to Britain to recoup his position. At the close of 1751 he submitted to the earl of Halifax a lengthy manuscript on colonial affairs, summarizing his thoughts and expressing his grievances. Halifax seemed a particularly likely patron, since he was president of the Board of Trade and known to be interested in many of the problems the treatise considered. Halifax apparently brushed McCulloh away, but the manuscript ultimately appeared as four separate pamphlets in 1754, 1755, and 1757. The original essay is perhaps more worthy of detailed consideration than the pamphlets, for it is more coherent and better organized.

McCulloh's main theme was that in the English colonies, unlike the French, there was "a continuing Clashing of Interest" and "alternatively both the Rights of the Crown and the liberties and properties of the Subject invaded and that in too many Cases without a possibility of redress." His aim was to reform colonial administration "so as to have an immediate dependance on their mother Country," while bridling governors and officers of the crown. Denying that he sought either "to


50 Additional Manuscripts, 11514, 1-220, British Museum. I have in preparation a more detailed study of the pamphleteering activities of McCulloh briefly summarized here.

51 Lord John Russell, ed., Correspondence of John, Fourth Duke of Bedford, II (London, 1842), 150. McCulloh was recommended to Bedford by William Beckford, later Pitt's chief London lieutenant in the Commons. The pamphlets were General Thoughts on the Construction, Use and Abuse of the Great Offices: with a View to Some Further Discourses on the Same Subject (London, 1754); The Wisdom and Policy of the French in the Construction of their Great Offices, So as Best to Answer the Purposes of Extending their Trade and Commerce, and Enlarging their Foreign Settlements. With Some Observations in Relation to the Disputes Now Subsisting between the English and French Colonies in America (London, 1755); A Miscellaneous Essay Concerning the Courses Pursued by Great Britain in the Affairs of the Colonies: With Some Observations on the Great Importance of Our Settlements in America, and the Trade Thereof (London, 1755); Proposals for uniting the English Colonies on the Continent of America, So as to Enable Them to Act with Force and Vigour Against their Enemies (London, 1757). Although published anonymously, all the pamphlets include large sections from the 1751 manuscript known to be by McCulloh.
invade the Liberties of his Majestys American Subjects or to restrain the prerogatives of the Crown," McCulloh declared that "the only Design of this Essay is to demonstrate the necessity of keeping the Colonies within due Bounds and in a proper dependence on their Mother Coun-
try . . . and to the protecting of the Subjects from Acts of power in the Governours of the Plantations." In the background, of course, was McCulloh's concern with the French threat to the British colonies.

Instead of disparaging French government in America, McCulloh suggested that it be emulated. He was particularly impressed with the French administrative organization, which provided a regular plan of control for colonial officials and made the crown the unchallenged center of colonial government. The British constitution had been formed before colonies existed, and therefore "provision for the Government of our distant Colonies . . . was left to be done by us—according as the nature and circumstance of our Affairs require the same to be Amended or Altered." McCulloh saw many weaknesses in the administration of British America. Governors ignored royal instructions and could not easily be brought to answer for their actions. Charter colonies had assumed "Powers altogether inconsistent with that dependance which they owe to their Mother Country." The absence of an "established Rule of Action," and limitations on the rights of colonial assemblies generally, produced a situation in which "the Governours have too often formed themselves with particular parties in Order by their Interest and Support to enlarge his prerequisites and profits, and the moment he becomes the head of such a Party he must then enter into their Views and Measures, and if needfull, make the business of the Crown, Subservient thereto." The result was that colonial governments were frequently prompted "to Act in Opposition to His Majesties measures."

McCulloh's analysis was not simply critical; he also had some positive suggestions. Colonial administration and trade regulation needed reform by act of Parliament. Regular rules and proceedings through a Council of Trade should be adopted, following the French system. Suggesting that the sugar duty be reduced by one-third to increase trade and provide revenue for colonial defense, McCulloh also recommended parliamentary enactment of a stamp tax to raise a fund which would "be Applied only to the Security and Advantage of the Colonies under the Manage-

52 Add. MSS, 11514, 11, 12, 13-14, Brit. Museum.
53 Ibid., 17. This was an important theme in the writings of the 1750s which I hope to expand in another piece.
54 Ibid., 70-71, 85, 109, 123-126.
ment of the said Council of Trade. Part of the justification of these measures was military. If England acted through parliamentary reform, said McCulloch in 1751, France could be beaten.

In later publications McCulloch linked the French menace to the dangers of colonial union and independence. Attributing the information to an unnamed French officer, he wrote in 1755 of a French scheme "to use their utmost endeavours to make themselves Masters of the English Islands in the West-Indies, and to encourage the English Colonies on the Continent of America to unite and form a Republican Government; . . . Such Schemes appear at present to be wild and extravagant, yet there are many things in the Womb of Time, which may favour the ambitious Views of France in such Enterprises." Unless abuses were corrected, prophesied McCulloch, the result would be the "Foundation of a kind of Independency in the Colonies on the Continent of America."56

Although no "Commonwealthman," McCulloch was not an unyielding supporter of the royal prerogative. In his 1751 manuscript and in a subsequent pamphlet he emphasized that

Experience hath shown, that it is extremely difficult to enforce the Execution of any Law made contrary to the general Bent and Disposition of the People; but how much more so must it be to enforce a Law made here, and to put in Execution in America, not only contrary to the general Bent and Disposition of the People, but likewise contrary to the very Genius and Constitution of some of their Governments; wherefore, in passing Laws of this Nature, 'tis most humbly submitted, whether it may be more proper, and better answer the End thereby proposed, so to form the law, as that the People there should not have too great a Temptation to resist, and act contrary to it.57

McCulloch thought he understood what Americans were willing to

55 Ibid., 163, 173, 179. While any effort to attribute specific colonial reforms to particular individuals is fraught with danger, it is worth emphasizing that McCulloch was pushing for the principal provisions of both the Sugar Act and the Stamp Act as early as 1751. Recent efforts to reduce the importance of McCulloch's later influence upon these measures—Franklin B. Wickwire, British Subministers and Colonial America, 1763-1783 (Princeton, N. J., 1966), 111-113, for example—have not recognized the early date of McCulloch's first proposals.


57 Add. MSS, 11514, Brit. Museum; Miscellaneous Essay, 86.
accept in the 1750s, and perhaps he was right.\footnote{McCulloh opposed the Stamp Act as finally promulgated, partly because it failed to meet his specifications. See Jack P. Greene, "'A Dress of Horror': Henry McCulloh's Objections to the Stamp Act," Huntington Library Quarterly, XXVI (1962-1963), 253-262.} He sought reform to mitigate the threat of American independence.

The mid-1750s brought a new sense of urgency to imperial matters, and continued uncertainty among imperial politicians. The French were challenging Britain in the Ohio backcountry and elsewhere in America. Many reformers were calling for colonial unification, and the Albany Congress of 1754 produced a specific proposal. One of the major reasons for British lack of enthusiasm for the Albany Plan of Union was the concern, voiced to Newcastle by the Speaker of the House of Commons, that a bill for colonial union would encourage considerable debate over the "ill consequence to be apprehended from uniting too closely the northern colonies with each other, an Independence upon this country to be feared from such an union."\footnote{Alison Gilbert Olson, "The British Government and Colonial Union, 1754," WMQ, 3d Ser., XVII (1966), 31. As Olson points out, "1754 was a year in which English fear of an American revolt was enjoying one of its periodic revivals." Ibid. William Knox subsequently saw 1755 as the date when "a general disposition to independence of this country prevailed throughout the whole." Extra Official State Papers, II (London, 1789), 11.} Such fears of colonial independence soon made their way to America. A London correspondent reported in the Maryland Gazette that "some persons have been apprehensive, that our Colonies and Plantations in America might in Time shake off their Dependence upon us, and set up for themselves." Another London observer whose comments were printed in America explained the British dilemma well: "The Americans are doubtless too thirsty after power; and perhaps we are too suspicious of its uses. . . . Could we not upon mature consideration find some method of arming them with power without alluring them by the specious bait of independence?"\footnote{Maryland Gazette, July 10, 1755; New York Gazette, or Weekly Post-Boy, Jan. 19, 1756.}

Those who advocated an all-out military effort against the French sensed that the mother country was constrained by fear lest the colonies become too powerful. When he pressed for an invasion of Canada in 1755, Governor Shirley attempted to assuage such concerns:

Apprehensions have been entertain'd, that they [the colonies] will in time unite to throw off their Dependency upon their Mother Country,
and set up one General Government among themselves; But if it is consider'd, Sir, how different the present Constitutions of their respective Governments are from each other; how much the Interests of some of them clash, and how opposite their Tempers are; such a Coalition among them will seem highly improbable, at all Events, they could not maintain such an Independency, without a Strong Naval Force, which it must forever be in the Power of Great Britain to hinder them from having. 61

Most of the same arguments were employed by the anonymous author of *The State of the British and French Colonies in North America*, published in London that same year.

The author of the *State* was appalled by colonial selfishness and disunity. “The colonies have, in reality, in many cases,” he wrote, “acted as if they thought themselves so many independent states, under their respective charters, rather than as provinces of the same empire: which consideration necessarily requires a union of the parts, for security of the whole.” If the colonies would not themselves unite, it was in the power of Parliament to unite them. Why, indeed, had not Parliament acted already? His answer was that disunion was part of a continuing British policy of *divide et impera* initiated by former administrations for fear of “the danger, in an united state, of their throwing off dependence and setting up for themselves.” This would not happen, however, unless the colonies were rich, united in their interests, and “driven to that extremity, by usage which would make Britons themselves impatient of subjection.” Even under these conditions, rebellion could not succeed as long as the colonies lacked a fleet and Britain had “one to restrain them.” In such circumstances, however, the situation would be highly dangerous, for if the colonies did revolt, they would not do so “with design to set up for themselves,” but “would be under a necessity to seek the protection of some other power.” The unidentified other power obviously was France. Genuinely independent former colonies would continue to trade with Britain, but if they were to fall under French “protection,” Britain would be deprived “intirely of those rich branches of commerce, and both their wealth and power would be turned against her.” 62 All this fit very well with the scheme of McCulloh’s anonymous French officer.

According to the author of the *State*, nothing more confirmed the colonies in the opinion that Britain sought to “keep them low” than

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the governors and other officers sent to America. Needy persons had filled their purses and enriched themselves in trade, while acting prejudicially to the colonies and sending home false information. The anonymous writer cited Father Charlevoix and Cadwallader Colden in support of his charges, which had overtones of both Cato and McCulloh. Adopting the family metaphor, the author concluded that "want of care in the parents begat want of care in the children: and this was the rise of the present disorders in the colonies." Harmony between Great Britain and her colonies was essential, and "a good mother seldom fails to have good children." The colonists did not think of themselves as aliens who had forfeited their British rights by removal to America; they acknowledged the king and enriched the power and dominion of Britain, so that "they ought not to be thought presumptuous, if they consider themselves upon an equal footing with us, or treated the worse, because they will be Englishmen." As happened so often, the family metaphor and political vocabulary became confused. What sort of family did the author envision, where "good children" dependent upon their parents were also equals? In the end, the concept of the family dominated over the "rights of Englishmen." The author of the State employed the metaphor to provide an ultimate perspective on the colonial situation:

Britain the political parent of her colonies (like a natural one, who intends to raise a progeny for advantage, strength and power) in their infancy should indulge, nourish, and support them. As they encrease and become capable of helping themselves and benefiting their mother country, they should be taught the obligations they owe her: that all their particular and hereditary rights and privileges, are derived from her: that they are bound to obey her laws; and that restraints laid on them are intended for mutual advantage.63

The concept, while perhaps muddled, was clearly paternal.

Like Henry McCulloh, the author of the State wanted colonial union by act of Parliament and increased colonial revenues from sugar duties or a land tax to support the war effort. Citing an unnamed American correspondent, he argued that "none of these taxes . . . would be much disliked in America." The French must first be subdued, but after victory the British should "apply seriously to reform abuses within, and put the Colonies on a footing which may prevent their falling into the same unhappy circumstances any more."64

63 Ibid., 59-64, 129.
64 Ibid., 146-147.
Discussion of potential American independence was not confined within the British Empire. Between 1753 and 1761 the Swedish botanist Peter Kalm, who had toured America in the late 1740s, published his three-volume *En Resa Til Norra America* in Stockholm. Kalm saw British restrictions on colonial commerce and the increasing number of non-British colonists, who had “no particular attachment to Old England,” as centripetal influences. “I have been told by Englishmen, and not only by such as were born in America but also by those who came from Europe,” wrote Kalm, “that the English colonies in North America, in the space of thirty or fifty years, would be able to form a state by themselves entirely independent of Old England.” He saw the French menace as the principal factor preventing “the connection of the colonies with their mother country from being quite broken off,” and questioned whether England ever seriously intended to conquer Canada, as the proximity of the French deterred the colonies from seceding.  

As Kalm indicated, most of these observations reflected opinions given him by the colonials whom he had met in his travels.

One of Kalm’s hosts (and undoubtedly one of his informants) was Dr. John Mitchell, whose *The Contest in America between Great Britain and France* was published in London in 1757. Like many another physician in America in the eighteenth century, Mitchell was a Scotsman with an Edinburgh education. He had considerable intellectual and scientific pretensions, and an extended acquaintance with others who shared them. It was he who had recommended Kalm to Benjamin Franklin. Given such intellectual interchange, it was hardly surprising that many colonials could agree on what constituted critical imperial issues, including the fear of American independence. In the preface to *The Contest* Mitchell criticized “the false and groundless notion that seems to influence many people’s opinions and conduct with regard to the colonies, . . . the fear of their rebelling, and throwing off their dependance on Britain.” He cited Joshua Gee on this point and added some more contemporary arguments. Current experience invalidated

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fears of American independence. How could the colonists withstand "the whole force and naval power of Britain" if they could not successfully resist "a few ragamuffins in Canada"? British concern over possible American independence, which Mitchell assumed to be global, was most "dangerous," especially when coupled with a policy which permitted the continuation of French power in order to keep the colonies "in awe." In perhaps the first direct refutation of the argument that it was in Britain's best interest to let France retain Canada, Mitchell disparaged the view that the French would "become an auxiliary to Britain, to preserve its colonies, trade and commerce!" Much more likely, "if our colonies were inclinable to rebel, France would both encourage them to it, and support them in it; which she may easily do by having an influence over them." Mitchell did not object to the presence of France in North America, however, so long as it was kept within bounds.\textsuperscript{68}

Although he denied the possibility of American separation in the foreseeable future, Mitchell was quite prepared to produce arguments that fit with British fears. He was also willing to suppose that the Americans might eventually seek independence. Therefore, the colonies must be established on "such a footing, as to secure their dependance hereafter, when it may be in danger perhaps." Power was not the source of jealousy, but manufactures were critical. Manufacturing competition, Mitchell insisted, would be "the first cause of a rupture between Britain and her colonies, if ever any such thing happens." The conclusion that Mitchell drew from this assertion was an interesting one, anticipating in part the position Franklin would take three years later in his famous Canada pamphlet. The colonies would grow in population, and so some other employment besides manufacturing must be provided. Mitchell suggested encouragement of raw materials such as hemp, flax, silk, and naval stores. This would give Britain what it needed, promote colonial prosperity, and keep the colonies in a dependent economic status. Lurking in the background as a clinching argument, but not taken by Mitchell to its logical conclusion, was the notion that since manufactures were the product of labor, and commodities were the product of land, the more land America had the better. Mitchell went so far as to contend that the French not be permitted to prevent the Americans from expanding, but he did not insist that Britain's true interest was to acquire all of Canada.\textsuperscript{69} Franklin and others would add that refinement later.

\textsuperscript{68} Contest in America, xxi-xxii.
\textsuperscript{69} Ibíd., xxiii-xxvii. William Franklin, accompanying his father in England, sent Isaac Norris a copy of Mitchell's book in late 1757. Labaree \textit{et al.}, eds., \textit{Franklin
Mitchell’s work was only one of a number of tracts on America published in London at this time.\textsuperscript{70} To most Englishmen, the colonies were the reason for the French war and were expected to be a central theater of it. Clearly the colonies had to be defended, and justifications for defending them were often linked with proposals for reforming them. One example among many was \textit{A Letter to a Member of Parliament, on the Importance of the American Colonies, and the Best Means of Making Them Most Useful to the Mother Country}, published in London in 1757. Although the Letter’s main aim was to justify the expense of settlement in Nova Scotia, the writer made a number of wide-ranging observations and suggestions on American affairs. None of these was original, and their appearance in this pamphlet indicates the wide currency of certain ideas. Instead of a “pernicious” duty on foreign molasses, the author wanted a reasonable one, which he was sure would be met by Americans with “a Cheerful Obedience.” A penny sterling per acre tax on waste lands in America would prevent land speculation. Reform in Nova Scotia particularly and in America generally was necessary, he concluded, “to eradicate the unnatural Suspicion of their [the colonies] becoming one Time or other independent; with as much Reason, a Man may refuse to build or repair a valuable House, etc, for fear of its being burned.”\textsuperscript{71}

Discussion of potential American independence had become so commonplace that when teen-aged Arthur Young produced a potboiler on America in 1759 in return for £10 credit from his bookseller, all the old arguments were trotted out. Young particularly cannibalized Mitchell’s \textit{The Contest}. An expanded and secure American territory should be encouraged to grow needed agricultural produce rather than engage in manufacturing, and Young’s list of suggested products improved even on Mitchell’s lengthy one. With a proper commercial policy, Young added, British fears of American independence would prove foolish.\textsuperscript{72}

The year 1759 saw the British victorious everywhere. Quebec and Guadeloupe both fell, stimulating debate on the nature of the impending

\textit{Papers}, VII, 281n. Martin Bladen had earlier made this argument for Nova Scotia. See n. 27.

\textsuperscript{70} For a general discussion of the publications see Lawrence C. Wroth, \textit{An American Bookshelf 1755} (Philadelphia, 1934), esp. 20-32.

\textsuperscript{71} \textit{Letter to a Member of Parliament}, 12, 17, 23.

\textsuperscript{72} Arthur Young, \textit{Reflections on the Present State of Affairs at Home and Abroad} (London, 1759), 10ff. For Young’s dealings with his bookseller see M. Betham-Edwards, ed., \textit{The Autobiography of Arthur Young with Selections from his Correspondence} (London, 1898), 24.
peace and the future of the Empire in America. The wide-reaching discussion in the British press from 1759 to 1761, which has usually been labeled the "Canada-Guadeloupe" debate, provided an opportunity to collect and focus all the arguments of the past century relating to America. The leading pamphleteers and polemicists did not miss their opening, and most self-styled colonial experts had their say either in print or in memorials to the ministers. It is simply untrue, therefore, that in the years immediately preceding the Stamp Act the British had not given serious thought to the American colonies and to colonial policy. Nor is it true that the British thinking proceeded in naive ignorance of the explosive possibilities in America. A number of pamphleteers dealt in the years 1759 to 1761 with the subject of potential American separation. Most still denied the possibility, but there were open predictions of independence, and the denials often conveyed a new spirit of American defiance.

Although not the opening shot of the debate over Canada, the work that triggered the discussion of American independence appeared in January 1760 as Remarks on the Letter Address'd to Two Great Men.73 The Letter Addressed to Two Great Men, on the Prospect of Peace (1759) had insisted that since North America had been the center of the war, all territory taken there by the British should be retained at the peace. More important, the Letter had argued that Canada was essential to colonial security and that the bartering of territory on the American continent for European advantage would be strongly criticized by the colonies. Although written by a dependent of a leading politician out of power, the Letter seems to have reflected fairly accurately the leanings of the ministry.74

The authorship of the answering Remarks on the Letter is uncertain. Contemporaries attributed it either to William Burke, a courtesy "cousin" of Edmund and since September 1759 secretary and register for Guade-


74 The standard bibliography of the debate is Clarence Walworth Alvord, The Mississippi Valley in British Politics: A Study of the Trade, Land Speculation, and Experiments in Imperialism Culminating in the American Revolution, II (Cleveland, 1917), 253-264, supplemented by C. E. Fryer, "Further Pamphlets for the Canada-Guadeloupe Controversy," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, IV (1917-1918), 227-230. These bibliographies are extremely limited, hardly reflecting the extent of the debate. Alvord's listing of 65 pamphlets can be more than doubled, and both he and Fryer omitted all consideration of the newspaper and periodical controversies.
loupe, or to Charles Townshend, the brilliant but erratic young politician who was known as an American specialist. Whoever the author, he responded vehemently to the insistence of the Letter to Two Great Men that the colonies would oppose a decision to return Canada to the French. He hoped this opinion was misinformed, but if it were correct—"if our American Colonies should be so absurd and ungrateful to tell us, after all the Blood and Treasure expended in their Cause, that we do nothing, if we do not make Conquests for them"—then, the author added truculently, "they must be taught a Lesson of greater Moderation." He then advanced arguments for retaining the sugar islands rather than the continental territory. The basic thrust of the position was commercial; the West Indies produced goods not in competition with Britain, while the continental colonies produced the same goods as Europe, and a continual unfavorable trade balance would eventually lead them to manufacturing in competition with the mother country. Almost as an afterthought, the author added a point that was evidently in general circulation. As the American colonies prospered, he said, "the Necessity of a Connection with England, with which they have no natural Intercourse by Reciprocity of Wants, will continually diminish." The ultimate result was obvious, and to retain Canada would only contribute to "the risque, and that perhaps in no very distant Period, of losing what we now possess." Even if Britain could retain all Canada, it should not do so, for a "Neighbour that keeps us in some Awe, is not always the worst of Neighbours."

By the spring of 1760 three basic positions had emerged on the issues of British conquests and the forthcoming peace treaty. One emphasized territorial gains in North America. The nation had gone to war over American questions, and the French had to be eliminated from the continent for the security of the colonies. A second position focused on the Caribbean. Its arguments were largely commercial and naval, based upon traditional mercantilist notions of the value of colonies for their

75 The Letter was probably penned by John Douglas (1721-1807), later bishop of Salisbury, who at this time was in the employ of William Pulteney, the earl of Bath. See DNB s.v. "Douglas, John." For ministerial views see the duke of Newcastle's letter to the earl of Hardwicke, Oct. 31, 1759, in Philip C. Yorke, The Life and Correspondence of Philip Yorke, Earl of Hardwicke, II (Cambridge, 1913), 242, and Max Savelle, The Diplomatic History of the Canadian Boundary, 1749-1763 (New Haven, Conn., 1940), 92-98. The problem of the authorship of the Remarks and subsequent pamphlets expanding its arguments is a complex one with which I hope to deal in another place. For an attribution to Burke see London Chronicle, May 15-17, 1760; for one to Townshend see Sentiments Relating to the Late Negotiation (London, 1761), 12.

raw materials and upon concern about the possibility of American manufacturing. It less dismissed the concern for American security than turned the argument on its head; to eliminate the French would be dangerous to the Empire. Advocates of a third position, not yet well defined, wanted all conquests retained. Whatever the argument, the discussants displayed a good deal of hostility, latent and overt, to the American continental colonies.\textsuperscript{77}

The time seemed ripe for a strong statement from an American perspective, and this Benjamin Franklin sought to provide. Franklin had some assistance from Richard Jackson, a wealthy Englishman who served as agent for several colonies and in 1762 entered Parliament.\textsuperscript{78} In England as agent for the Pennsylvania Assembly in its dispute with Thomas Penn, Franklin had for some months been publicly although anonymously concerned over the willingness of many Englishmen to sacrifice North American victories to other considerations.\textsuperscript{79} Privately, he was also disturbed by “the Prevailing Opinion . . . among the Ministers and great Men here” that “the Colonies have too many and too great Privileges; and that it is not only the Interest of the Crown but of the Nation to reduce them.”\textsuperscript{80} Closely connected with the concern about possible American separation, this “prevailing opinion” had found expression in the debate over the conquered territories. Franklin was therefore anxious not only to argue for the security of North America, but to counter America’s critics, whose charges, if not checked, could provide the rationale for attempts at tighter and more systematic imperial control. The pamphlet Franklin produced in 1760 clearly recognized a relationship between fears of separatism and future imperial policy.

As an answering pamphlet in an ongoing controversy, \textit{The Interest of Great Britain Considered, With Regard to her Colonies} used arguments that were to some extent predetermined. Franklin had to respond to a number of deftly made points, many of them implicitly or explicitly hostile to the American colonies. He began by taking notice of the comments

\textsuperscript{77} This paragraph will be fully elaborated in my forthcoming study of the debate.
\textsuperscript{80} Franklin to Isaac Norris, Mar. 19, 1759, in Labaree \textit{et al.}, eds., \textit{Franklin Papers}, VIII, 293.
of the *Remarks on the Letter* regarding security. North America was
different from Europe because it was thinly settled, and therefore Euro-
pean rules could not be applied. If Canada were returned to France,
forts would prevent French conquest but not the depredations of Indians
or the expense of defending America in yet another war. Only retention
of Canada could assure complete security. Franklin insisted that the
colonies were at present perfectly contented, but “the safety of a con-
siderable part of the state, and the interest of the whole are not to be
trusted to the wisdom and vigor of future administrations, when a
security is to be had more effectual, more constant, and much less ex-
pensive.” Moreover, he suggested, “They who can be moved by the
apprehension of dangers so remote as that of the future independence of
our colonies” could scarcely be relied upon for sound decisions. To those
who feared the rise of American manufactures, Franklin answered that
“a people spred thro’ the whole tract of country on this side the Missis-
sippi, and secured by Canada in our hands, would probably for some
centuries find employment in agriculture, and thereby free us at home
effectually from our fears of American manufactures.” Only the poor
without land provided cheap labor for manufacturing.81

Franklin then addressed himself to an argument that obviously
bothered him, although it had taken up little space in the *Remarks on
the Letter*. As he summarized it, the claim was that “our present colonies
are large enough and numerous enough, and the French ought to be left
in North America to prevent their increase, lest they become not only
useless but dangerous to Britain.” Franklin agreed that America would
increase greatly in population, perhaps outnumbering the British in a
century. Until then, however, Britain would supply the colonies with
manufactures and thus increase its trade and naval power. Repudiating
the corporate metaphor, Franklin insisted that the human body and the
body politic were different, since the human body had finite limits of
growth, while the state could grow indefinitely. The conclusion he
reached from this argument was expressed, almost inevitably, in terms
of the family: “The mother being of full stature, is in a few years equal’d
by a growing daughter: but in the case of a mother country and her
colonies, it is quite different. The growth of the children tends to encrease
the growth of the mother, and so the difference and superiority is longer
preserv’d.”82 Equality of population would occur sooner but for the fact

81 The pamphlet is printed in its entirety *ibid.*, IX, 59-100, and for convenience
 citations will be to this reprint. Quotations on pp. 71, 73. See also 61-62, 66-69,
71-72, 73-74.
that American expansion would stimulate British growth as well.

Having disposed of the argument of inutility, Franklin denied that the growth of the colonies would make them dangerous. The continental colonies were fourteen separate states with "different forms of government, different laws, different interests, and some of them different religious persuasions and different manners." Unity had been unattainable in the face of a common enemy; what reason then to fear lest the colonies unite to oppose a nation they loved so well and with which they had so many ties of "blood, interest and affection"? So far Franklin sounded like a typical colonial. He then turned, however, to "Commonwealth" arguments. Only the "most grievous tyranny and oppression" could bring about colonial union. He cited European cases where this had happened, leaving the implication that the British had better not be oppressive. "While the government is mild and just, while important civil and religious rights are secure," he wrote, "such subjects will be dutiful and obedient." If checking American population growth were to become a goal of British policy, Franklin added sarcastically, why not an act of Parliament "enjoining the colony midwives to stifle in the birth every third or fourth child"?83

This echo of Swift was hardly in the best spirit of dutiful obedience to the British government.

In his most famous aphorism from the Canada pamphlet Franklin wrote, "The waves do not rise, but when the winds blow." Eight years later he used the phrase as motto for a piece on the causes of the American discontents.84 But in a sense it might equally well have been the motto for The Interest of Great Britain itself. In the course of countering the Remarks on the Letter, Franklin only increased the apprehensions of his English readers, for he converted a relatively brief reference to American independence into a major issue in the crucial debate over Canada. The length and sheer virtuosity of his defense of the Americans against the charge of separatism gave credence to the accusation. And Franklin's arguments were not designed to assuage British fears of the growth of colonial population and power. Franklin not only emphasized growth, but defiantly appended to the pamphlet his "Observations concerning the Increase of Mankind, Peopling of Countries, etc." As a subsequent pamphleteer (probably the author of Remarks on the Letter) legitimately commented, Franklin did not "seem in any part of his long treatise to disown what I all along advance, that Canada joined to what we have in America will prove our destruction, but he only shifts it off to a greater

83 Ibid., 90, 91, 94.
84 Ibid., 91 and n.
distance." In this sense, *The Interest of Great Britain* became virtually an antidefense of the American position.  

Franklin was quickly answered by a pamphlet attributed to William Burke. *A Copy of a Letter from a Gentleman in Guadalupe, to his Friend in London* focused almost exclusively on the independence issue, showing that denials like Franklin's only stimulated greater anxieties. *A Copy of a Letter* fully recognized the ambiguity of Franklin's argument, and turned it against the American full force. If Canada could make the American colonies as rich and powerful as Franklin insisted, they would soon rival Great Britain. The author waxed lyrical about the extent, climate, soil, lakes and woods, and raw materials of America. "Such a Country at such a Distance could never remain long subject to Britain," he insisted. The colonists had been taught the art of war, "and they can furnish themselves with every thing in a few Years, without the Assistance of Britain." Even in the face of the French menace, the Americans had grumbled and complained against Britain, and without the French to check them, "you must keep a numerous Standing Army to over awe them." Everything strengthened the ability to revolt of "a People who must become more licentious from their Liberty and more factious from the Distance of the Power that rules them." The pamphlet concluded its jeremiad in ringing phrases:

... One must be very little conversant in History, and totally unacquainted with the Passions and Operations of the human Mind, who cannot foresee those Events as clearly as any Thing can be discovered, that lies concealed in the Womb of Time; it is no Gift of Prophesy, it is only the natural and unavoidable Consequence of such and such Measures, and must appear so to very Man whose Head is not too much affected with popular Madness or political Enthusiasm.

A later extension of this pamphlet dealt with other issues, but reiterated the fear of independence.  

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85 *Reasons for Keeping Guadalupe at a Peace, Preferable to Canada, Explained in Five Letters, from a Gentleman in Guadalupe, to his Friend in London* (London, 1761), 60. For examples of scholarly discussion of *The Interest of Great Britain Considered* see Verner W. Crane, "Certain Writings of Benjamin Franklin on the British Empire and the American Colonies," *Papers of the Bibliographic Society*, XXVIII (1934), 1-27; Gerald Stourzh, *Benjamin Franklin and American Foreign Policy* (Chicago, 1954), 68-80; and Labaree et al., eds., *Franklin Papers*, IX, 47-59. Because the importance of the independence theme is not usually stressed, the provocative nature of the pamphlet is frequently missed.

86 (London, 1760), 8-9.

87 See n. 85.
A final defense of the Americans was presented in 1761 in John Rutherfurd’s *The Importance of the Colonies to Great Britain, with some Hints towards Making Improvements to their Mutual Advantage: And upon Trade in General*. Like Henry McCulloh a Scotsman, Rutherfurd had been a collector of quitrents in North Carolina, and was in Britain seeking reinstatement to that office from which Gov. Arthur Dobbs had suspended him four years earlier. Unlike McCulloh, however, Rutherfurd was less concerned with political than with commercial arrangements. He dealt with commerce in terms of the threat of American independence, putting all Franklin’s arguments into this effort. Rutherfurd denied that if Canada were retained, the Americans would manufacture for themselves “and throw off their dependence on the mother country.” Such a possibility, he said, was “an object at too great a distance to be dreaded” and not so easily accomplished as some imagined. The colonies were jealous of each other, and while interest on money was high and land cheap, labor would be expensive. Moreover, “we can be certain, that so long as the American planter can find vent for the produce of his lands to enable him to purchase British manufactures, it will never occur to him to manufacture, because in every respect it will be contrary to his interest.” The ready availability of inexpensive land was essential. Rutherfurd argued that the poor in Europe learned trades because land was dear and employment scarce, and admitted that “when the Americans come to be in the same situation, that their lands (whatever be the extent thereof) are so much improved, that their poor in order to get bread must also manufacture, there will be an end of their dependance.”

Inducements to the colonists to grow agricultural products were required, and Rutherfurd appended to his pamphlet a translation of a French essay on hemp production.

*The Importance of the Colonies to Great Britain* was the last significant statement on general imperial policy in the public debate over Canada and the forthcoming peace treaty. After Rutherfurd, the pamphleteers and journalists turned to domestic politics and to consideration of the proposed terms of peace. But the Canada debate had provided a final synthesis of a century of concern over American independence on the eve of British efforts to rationalize the administration of their newly enlarged empire.

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It is impossible to reconstruct completely the frame of mind of either Britons or Americans on the relationship of colonies and metropolis in the early 1760s. But one important strand in their attitudes was clearly a product of common sense deductions from commonly held assumptions of the time. Considerations of the balance of power, of changes in economic patterns, of population growth, of legislative autonomy—particularly when viewed in the personal terms of metaphors such as that of the family—made eventual American independence quite conceivable. Certainly a good many colonial "experts" in Britain had the possibility in the back of their minds as new American policy was being formulated. The earl of Shelburne, for example, was greatly influenced by the economic opinions of Josiah Tucker, and Shelburne's personal secretary, Maurice Morgann, advocated strong measures to avoid separation by putting the colonies in their place. Men involved in the construction of the Stamp Act, particularly Henry McCulloh, also had clear notions of potential American independence. McCulloh and Morgann had both proposed general imperial reforms not unlike those actually put into practice immediately after 1763 for the express purpose of preventing American separation. Charles Townshend feared ultimate independence. And even colonials who had denied the possibility had anticipated the later American perception of British policy in suggesting British repression as the principal condition for secession or revolt.

Those who wrote on the American question did not consciously intend to promote independence. But the discussion of the possibility and even the eventuality of independence—a discussion that began in the seventeenth century and culminated in the spate of writings of the 1750s and early 1760s—would provide an important frame of reference for interpreting the events of the crisis toward which the Empire was swiftly moving. American colonials would find it easy to explain British policy, however pragmatically developed, as part of a consistent program, long in the making, for keeping America dependent. And British statesmen—even when they did not envision reform for that purpose—would readily discover in American responses to their actions the very tendencies toward


92 Namier and Brooke, *Charles Townshend*, 147.
separatism that had been fearfully postulated for over a century. Moreover, by accepting the metaphor of the family and taking it seriously, both sides made conflict between the mother country and the colonial children far more likely.\textsuperscript{93}

The difficulty was not that men failed to consider the nature of the imperial relationship, but that their consideration of it had made it a problem for which they could find no solutions and had generated prophecies that could only be fulfilled.

\textsuperscript{93} Burrows and Wallace, "The American Revolution," \textit{Perspectives}, VI (1972), \textit{passim}. 