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AMERICA AS IMPERIUM IN IMPERIO: THE GROWTH OF NASCENT AMERICAN NATIONALISM IN THE LATE COLONIAL PERIOD

By TADASHI ARUGA*

Preface

This article reviews the growth of nascent American nationalism and major factors contributing to its growth in the last decades of the Colonial Period. It is my contention that the American Revolution would not have occurred or succeeded if there had not developed among the Americans a degree of self-awareness as the American people and self-confidence in their united power. Furthermore, I maintain that this nascent nationalism defined to a great extent American attitudes toward foreign affairs in the Revolutionary years. Thus this article is related to my study of the diplomacy of the American Revolution, part of which was published in this journal.

It is obvious enough that the new colonial policies after the peace of Paris and the ensuing British-Colonial conflicts, stimulating both a sense of separateness from Britain and a sense of intercolonial togetherness, brought to the surface latent American nationalism. However, nascent American nationalism existed by the time Britain embarked on the new colonial policies. Economic development and political maturity of the colonies, growth of intercolonial relations, Anglo-American victory over France in Canada, and more fundamentally, common English heritage and common colonial self-identification with the British Empire—all these had been working to nourish nascent American nationalism.

I. The Economic Development of the Colonies

In the 18th Century, population growth in the thirteen colonies was phenomenal. It increased almost tenfold in the seventy-five years before the Revolution. In 1701 it was estimated approximately at 250,000. On the eve of the Revolution it was about 2,500,000. In 1759, the thirteen colonies had a population of some 1,590,000; 1,250,000 whites and 340,000 blacks. That population was roughly one fourth of the population of England and Wales. This ratio certainly changed considerably by the time of the Revolution in favor of the colonies. Benjamin Franklin's remark that the colonial population doubled

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every twenty-five years was no exaggeration. This rapid increase of the colonial population impressed the colonists themselves. They projected this high ratio of population increase into the future and envisaged future America as a populous country. "There are supposed," wrote Franklin, "to be now upwards of one million English souls in North America.... This million doubling, suppose, but once in twenty-five years will in another century be more than the people of England...." In 1755, John Adams made a similar speculation.

This phenomenal increase of the colonial population was accompanied by the rapid expansion of colonial economy. During the 17th Century, British sugar plantations in the West Indies were by far valuable to the mother country than the less developed continental colonies. Sugar was than a highly valuable commodity in international trade. Moreover, British West Indies consumed a greater amount of British goods than the continental colonies.

As the 18th Century progressed, however, the imports of these continental colonies from the other country surpassed that of the West Indies. The imports of the thirteen colonies from England was worth £451,500 (the import of British West Indies was £407,000) in 1715; £2,250,000 (£918,500) in 1764 and £3,013,000 (£1,378,000) in 1772. As Britain became more and more industrialized, the continental colonies grew rapidly as a valuable market for British manufactures.

The exports of these colonies to England also increased. They were worth £1,100,000 (that of the West Indies £2,467,492) in 1764, and £1,358,000 (£3,304,000) in 1772. Thus their exports to England were worth far less than their imports from England. This unbalance was especially great in the case of the Northern colonies, Whose imports from England increased even more rapidly than that of the Southern colonies which produced a larger quantity of products exportable to England. This increasing trade deficit was balanced by favorable balance in their expanding trade with the West Indies, Southern Europe and Africa. Such items as tobacco, rice, indigo, naval stores and pig iron, mostly produces of the Southern colonies, were exported to Britain. But other colonial products, such as wheat, bread, indian corn, beef, pork, fish, run, and lumbers, were exported in increasing quantity to the West Indies, foreign as well as British, and also to Southern Europe and Africa. Much of the colonial trade was carried by colonial merchants and this was a great source of wealth for the Northern colonies, whose merchants were engaged in triangle or multi-angle trade.

British trade regulations, as they were actually practiced, were not so obnoxious to the colonists. The navigation acts protected colonial shipping as well as English shipping

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4 Ibid.
6 *EHD*, IX, 391–393.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid, 394–401.
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as the carrier of trade of the British Empire. Some of the colonial products were encouraged by bounties. Restrictive measures were not effectively enforced. The Molasses Act of 1733, the restrictive measure most harmful to the continental, especially Northern, colonies, remained in the state of salutary neglect. Therefore, the colonists could expand their trade with foreign colonies in America. This trade was an important source of favorable trade balance for the Northern colonies to pay for increasing imports of English manufactures. As the market of British manufactures, the continental, especially Northern, colonies were gaining importance. But the trade of these colonies, especially the Northern colonies, was developing beyond the framework of British mercantilism.

By the middle of the 18th Century, the people of the thirteen colonies were quite conscious of the economic importance of British North America for the mother country. These colonies as a whole were the largest overseas market for English manufactures; they produced such strategic products as naval stores, lumber, pig and bar iron, and ships; also they produced such valuable staples as tobacco, rice and indigo; furthermore, they provided the British West Indies, an important producer of staples, with foods and lumber. Besides, these colonies were expected to continue to grow rapidly, whereas the British West Indies no longer possessed much capacity to grow.

The colonists in North America began to think that the power and prosperity of Great Britain depended largely upon her possessions in North America and would become more so in the future. At the threshold of the French and Indian War, several American publicists contended that these colonies were of such consequence to British trade that, if Britain lost them to France, she would become a second class power and be placed at the mercy of France. British effort to conquer Canada and her decision to retain it for the security of the continental colonies further convinced the Americans of the importance of their colonies for Britain.

When Britain began to pursue new colonial policies, therefore, the colonial spokesmen could emphasize the unwisdom of a policy which would adversely affect the colonial economy and curtail the capacity of the colonies to absorb English products. In opposing such a policy, they claimed, they were defending the best interest of the British Empire. Thus John Dickinson of Pennsylvania remarked: "Her (British) prosperity depends on her commerce, her commerce on her manufactures, her manufactures on the markets for them; and the most constant and advantageous markets are offered by the colonies." Therefore, he observed, "the foundation of the power and glory of Great Britain are laid in America," Thus he tried to remind the Englishmen of the folly of the new colonial policies. This feeling was shared by all the colonial spokesmen. To quote another example, George Mason of Virginia wrote that "Great Britain owes the increase of her wealth, the trade, the ship-

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11 Thomas C. Barrow, "The Old Colonial System from an English Point of View" in Allison Gilbert Olson and Richard Maxwell Brown, eds., Anglo-American Political Relations: 1675-1775 (New Brunswick, Rutgers U.P. 1870) 188. Barrow points out that the British officialdom involved in colonial administration had been increasingly frustrated with the ineffectiveness of the old colonial system before 1763 and had been urging the British government to strengthen the British authority in the colonies.


13 John Dickinson, The late Regulations Respecting the British Colonies ... (1765) in Pamphlets of the American Revolution, I (Cambridge 1965) edited by Barnard Bailyn (hereafter PAR), 669-870 687. The last sentence quoted here was printed in capital letters.
ping and maritime power to her American colonies.\textsuperscript{14} This belief in the economic importance of their colonies was one of the tenets of nascent American nationalism. Because of this belief, the colonists could assume that their boycott of English products would be effective as a weapon in their resistance to the new colonial policies. Because of this belief, they could later seek independence from Great Britain.

II. The Political Maturity of the Colonies

The economic development of the American colonies brought forth a large population of the people rising in status and wealth. Each colony witnessed the rise of a sizable class of the people who might be appropriately called the colonial elites. Well-to-do and well-educated, they began to take into their hands public affairs in each colony.\textsuperscript{15}

Members of this elite class occupied most of the seats in the councils, other important positions in the administrative and judicial structure, and were elected to the assemblies. As the seats of the council were usually occupied by the most aristocratic element of the colonial elites,\textsuperscript{16} the newer, rising elements of the colonial elites used the assembly a popularly elected body, as the main arena for their quest for political power.\textsuperscript{17} They also dominated such apparatus of local government as county courts.\textsuperscript{18}

As Jack P. Greene pointed out, the lower houses's aggressive drive for power reflected the determination of this emerging colonial upper class to gain political power.\textsuperscript{19} In each colony, the assembly acquired a dominant power in public affairs. Following the example of the House of Commons, the assemblies succeeded in getting a number of rights and privileges which included the right not only to decide on the matter of taxation but also to initiate legislation on all matters affecting provincial finances. Because of these rights and privileges on the part of the assembly, it became quite difficult for a governor to control legislation by the middle of the 18th Century.\textsuperscript{20} The rise of the colonial elites was followed

\textsuperscript{14} George Mason, "The Letters of 'Atticus'" No. 2, May 11, 1769, in Robert A. Rutland, ed., The Papers of George Mason, 1725-1792 (3 Vols., Chapel Hill, 1970), I, 106-107. Also the following statement can be found in Daniel Dulany's famous pamphlet, Considerations on the Propriety of Imposing Taxes in the British Colonies (1765), in PAR, I. "An American ...may be induced to think that the measure taken for the protection of the plantations were not only connected with the interests but even necessary to the defense of Great Britain hereself, because he may have reason to imagine that Great Britain could not long subsist as an independent kingdom after the loss of her colonies." (PAR, I, 622)


\textsuperscript{16} Leonard W. Labaree, Conservatism in Early American History, 4-6.

\textsuperscript{17} Jack P. Greene, "The Role of the Lower Houses of Assembly in Eighteenth Century Politics," Journal of Southern History (hereafter JSNH), XXVII (1961), 451-474; and also his The Quest for Power: The Lower Houses of Assembly in the Southern Royal Colonies, 1689-1776 (Chapel Hill, 1963).

\textsuperscript{18} Labaree, Conservatism in Early American History, 4.

\textsuperscript{19} Greene, "The Role of the Lower House," loc. cit., 461.

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 468-470; L.W. Labaree, Royal Government in America (New Haven, 1930; New York, 1958), 172-311.
by the rapid development of higher education in the colonies. In 1745, only three colleges existed; but the number soon increased to ten. Upper class families often sent their sons to Britain to get higher education. But it is remarkable that the colonies developed the educational facilities to reproduce learned gentlemen.

Thus the colonies had a class of intelligent and politically experienced elites by the time of British-Colonial conflicts. The council members were attentive to colonial rights and interests in their own way. Inevitably, however, they tended to be more restrained in expressing their opposition to the new British colonial policies. When the time of a final showdown came, one half to two thirds of them chose to remain loyal to the crown. It was natural that the members of the assembly, traditional defenders of colonial rights, led the movement to oppose the new colonial policies. As they had to go to their electorate regularly, they had to be sensitive to the mood of the people and they acquired considerable skill in mobilizing the support of the people. All the colonies had some sort of property qualifications. As property ownership was diffused widely in most of the colonies, so was the right to vote.

Thus a considerable portion of the common people participated in colonial political process. They also participated in colonial political process in an extra-legal way. When they had grievances to be redressed quickly, they often resorted to rioting. Riots were not unusual in the colonial life. These were often supported and led by responsible gentlemen. The existence of a politically mobilizable population was a very important aspect of colonial politics. It may be said that, without the leadership provided by colonial elites, the colonies would not have been able to resist the British power effectively and succeeded.

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2. Labaree, Conservatism in Early American History, 147. Also Jackson T. Main, The Upper House in Revolutionary America, 1763–1788 (Madison, 1967) for a detailed analysis.
4. Many colonies adopted the forty-shilling freehold, the common standard in England, as the basic qualification. Seven colonies made the possession of land as absolute requirement. The others qualified also an owner of a certain value of other property as a voter. (K.H. Porter, A History of Suffrage in the United States (Chicago, 1918), 121.)

These qualifications did not apparently disqualify most farmers from voting. In New England and Pennsylvania, where small and medium sized farms were common, freeholders of “middle sort” was the largest social stratum. Even in the Southern colonies where planters occupied large tracts of land, yeoman farmers were numerous outside the tidewater region. In New York and Virginia, where large estates were common, lease-holders were treated as free-holders and qualified. (Chilton Williamson, American Suffrage from Property to Democracy, 1760–1860 (Princeton, 1960), 28, 30.) In urban areas, artisans and mechanics with no or little property were disqualified. In Philadelphia in 1775, only 355 of 3,452 taxable males had estate large enough to give them qualification. But many more people actually voted in Philadelphia in the fall election of 1774. (Jensen, The Articles of Confederation, 17; John T. Scarch and Thompson Westcott, History of Philadelphia (3 vols., Philadelphia, 1884), 1, 311.) It is said that, if an individual’s right to vote was challenged, sometimes the only proof of qualification would be his taking an oath that he was a legal voter.—Sydnor, Gentlemen Freeholders, 28–29; Williamson, American Suffrage, 58–59.

5. Jack P. Greene estimates that the elite made up 3 to 5% of the free adult males and that “a broader, politically relevant strata or mobilized population that participated with some regularity in the political process” made up 60 to 90% of the same. 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), 38.


in achieving independence. However, the existence of the common people who could respond to the political message of their leaders and produce some of popular leaders out of their own rank was also indispensable to the success of the colonial resistance and the American Revolution. Although it cannot be said that mass public education was developed in the colonies except for New England, literacy was rather widespread among the colonial population. The growth of newspaper publishing and the popularity of such mass circulating publications as almanacs indicate the degree of literacy of the colonial people. The gap between the colonial elites and the common people was not so great in intellectual and economic resources. Many elites, like Benjamin Franklin, came out of the common people for themselves or one generation ago. The 18th Century America was, as Richard Hofstadter described, after all a middle-class world. A very large portion of the people in the colonies belonged to the so-called "middle sort." They were able to understand the political messages of the colonial leaders. Furthermore, they themselves could manipulate political vocabulary to express their political opinions. The 18th Century America produced a group of highly knowledgeable and politically experienced elites and considerably literate and the politically responsive middle strata which comprised a large portion of the population. Identifying themselves with rising British North America, They developed nascent American nationalism in the late colonial period.

III. The Growth of Intercolonial Relations

Diversity among the colonies in their origin, religious and ethnic composition, topography, climate and social-economic structure is well known. Whatever their diversity, however, all of these colonies inherited the same Anglo-Saxon cultural tradition. Although the colonial population contained non-Anglo-Saxon elements, the dominant cultural group was of Anglo-Saxon origins. This fundamental similarity was basic element which nour-
ished the sense of togetherness among the colonists and made the growth of American nationalism possible.

Another factor which nourished the sense of togetherness among the colonists was the growth of intercolonial economic and cultural relations. Although each colony depended greatly on overseas market for exports and on England for the supply of manufactures, intercolonial market economy also became an important factor to sustain the economic growth of the continental colonies. For example, colonial pig and bar iron, of which the continental colonies produced about one seventh of the world's supply on the eve of the Revolution, was increasingly consumed within the continental colonies for the production of finished products, which were in turn consumed within the colonies. Food and lumber produced in the colonies were also increasingly consumed within the continental colonies. Charleston, South Carolina, shipped large quantities of rice to the Northern ports which sent back flour, sugar and manufactured iron products. Boston imported a large amount of breadstuff from New York and Philadelphia. Merchants in major seaport towns were engaged in various kinds of intercolonial as well as overseas trade. The growth of intercolonial economic ties served later as the economic base to support the political integration of the United States.

Increase in intercolonial trade stimulated and was stimulated by in turn the growth of intercolonial transportation and communication. Although intercolonial trade was carried through coastal seaways, intercolonial traveling was facilitated by the development of high ways. By the time of the American Revolution, a main high way in a fairly good condition ran from Boston to Charlestown through Providence, New York, Philadelphia and Williamsburg. Stage and boat lines were available between such metropolises as Philadelphia, New York, and Boston. A busy traveler could go from New York to Philadelphia and back again in five days, remaining in Philadelphia two nights and one whole day to do his business.

Improved roads and transportation facilities helped the development of a uniform postal service. Intercolonial postal system was considerably improved by Benjamin Franklin who served as deputy post master general for America.

Improved communication and transportation between the colonies facilitated the exchange of ideas in an intercolonial scale. As Max Savelle maintains, the year of 1743, in which the American Philosophical Society was formed, may be used as the marker of the birth of an American cultural self-consciousness. Significantly named the "American" Philosophical Society, this organization was designed as an intercolonial institution to promote useful knowledges. The growth of intercolonial economic and cultural relations resulted in increasingly closer personal contacts among the residents of different provinces.

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13 Kraus, International Aspects, 21-22.
14 Ibid., 24-25.
Intercolonial family ties developed to some extent among the colonial elites.36 Colonial publications such as almanacs were designed for intercolonial audience. Both Benjamin Franklin and Nathaniel Amos, publishers of two famous almanacs, helped to nourish nascent American nationalism by inserting passages that glorified the future of America.37 Newspapers, usually serving for the public wider than a particular colony, spread news of other colonies, Britain and other parts of the world.38 These newspapers, whose number was to increase from twenty-one to thirty-eight between 1764 and 1775, often exchanged important items each other. Thus John Dickinson’s famous “Farmer Letters” appeared in newspapers published in Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, New England and even far off Georgia.39 With this development of international transportation and communication, intercolonial coordination of resistance movement was made possible. Thus, committees of correspondence set up by patriots in various places could correspond each other extensively. Thomas Paine’s Common Sense could reach a hundred thousands of intercolonial readers within a few months.40 Newspapers played an important role in arousing Revolutionary fervor. Most of the colonial newspapers served as media for militant opinions against Great Britain.41 It may be said that the growth of American nationalism and the American Revolution itself were made possible only with the development of intercolonial transportation and communications.

IV. Colonists’ Ways of Self-identification

Inheriting the Anglo-Saxon cultural tradition and living in the rapidly expanding part of the British Empire without any oppressive control from the mother country, the colonists of North America developed their pride in being freeborn Britons. They called themselves Englishmen or Britons and, like James Otis, admired the British Constitution as “the most free one and by far the best now existing on earth.”42 This may be regarded as a reflection of an underdeveloped state of American consciousness. But it was a way for the colonists to reaffirm their rights and liberties which they enjoyed in the colonies. Their loyalty to the British King carried with it the belief that they possessed the same rights and

36 Kraus, Intercolonial Aspects, 42-45.
37 Savelle, Seeds of Liberty, 567-575.
38 Richard L. Merritt, Symbols of American Community, indicates by a quantitative content analysis of the selected newspapers the increase of the ratio of “American items” against the ratio of “ Provincial items” or that of “world items” toward the end of the Colonial Period.
40 Within three months after it first appeared, 120,000 copies were sold. Jensen, The Founding of A Nation, 669.
41 The role of newspapers was studied in detail in Schlesinger, Prelude to Independence. Robert W. Jones classified 23 papers as supporters of Revolutionary propaganda, seven as Tory, and the rest as rather neutral (Jones, Journalism in the U.S., 140).
liberties of the British subjects as the people of the mother country possessed. It may be said, therefore, that, while this concept of the free-born Briton strengthened their sense of attachment to Britain, this concept on the other hand prepared the way for the colonists to resist what they regarded an encroachment on their rights and liberties.

The colonists could identify themselves with the particular colony they lived as well as Great Britain or England. They could also identify themselves with “America,” calling themselves “Americans,” although British North America as a political entry did not exist. As early as 1648, Thomas Gage called himself as “English-American.” In 1691 Cotton Mather referred to himself as a “rude American,” and in 1701 an author of a book about America signed himself as “an American.” But these instances were sporadic in the early years. By the 1750’s the colonists began to speak often of the colonies in North America as a whole. They began to refer to the colonies as “the colonies” or “America,” sometimes with the adjective “British,” sometimes without it.

The reason why they began to develop their American awareness in the middle of the 18th Century may be attributed to several factors. Rapid increase of the colonial population, expansion of colonial economy, colonial maturing in political and cultural affairs, growing intercolonial relations — phenomena mentioned in the previous sections of this chapter — and impending war crisis with French America—all these joined together to stimulate “American” awareness of the colonists.

The colonists could regard Britain or England as their country. The Reverend Aaron Burr, appealing the colonists to prepare for a war with the French, stated: “A free-born Briton ... better ... bravely to sacrifice it (life) to the defense of our religion and country...” Of course they also could regard particular province of their own as their country. Even after American independence, many Americans, even such prominent national leaders as John Adams, Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, continued to refer to their own native state as their country, although they referred to the United States, too, as their country.

By the middle of the 18th Century, however, the colonists began to call America their country. In 1754, young John Dickinson wrote from England to his mother: “But not withstanding all the diversions of England, I shall return to America with rapture, ... no place is comparable to our native country. America is, to be sure, a wilderness, and yet the wilderness to me is more pleasing than the charming garden.”

It is possible to discern Dickinson’s colonial complex in his usage of metaphors wilderness and charming garden. It reminds us of a probable psychological reason why the colon-

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Albert Harkness, Jr., “Americanism and Jenkin’s Ear,” MVHR, XXXVII (1950), 88. This article argues that the first general employment of the word ‘American’ seems to have been in the British-Colonial joint expedition in the War of Jenkin’s Ear where Englishmen and colonials upon forced association found each other peculiar.

Richard Merritt noted as a conclusion of his quantitative content analysis of the selected newspapers the gradual growth of American community awareness in the several decades before the Stamp Act Crisis. He attributed the major cause of this growth to the rapidly growing intercolonial ties of communication and community than to impact of the French and Indian War. Symbols of American Community, 174–175.

Savelle, Seeds of Liberty, 564–582.


nists spoke of the colonies as a whole. The colonists, although they considered themselves Englishmen or Britons endowed with the same rights as their brethren in the mother country, could not be free from a kind of inferiority complex of the provincial toward the metropolis, or from that of offshoots toward the trunk. The colonists themselves often analogized British-Colonial relationship with parent-children relationship. The colonists certainly had a psychological need to compensate for their inferiority complex. Individual colonies were no match for the powerful Britain. If they were considered as a whole, however, they could be regarded as a considerable weight in the British Empire. By the middle 18th Century, the colonists could speak of the importance of North American trade for the power and prosperity of Great Britain because of the rapid development of the colonies, and even hint that in some distant future North America, rather than England, would be the center of the British Empire. It was one of the characteristics of nascent American nationalism to predict America's future greatness.

Coinciding with the growth of American self-consciousness among the colonists, the term British Empire gained popularity in America. This colonial self-identification with the British Empire may again be considered as an evidence of underdeveloped American self-consciousness. Actually, however, as the coincidence mentioned above indicates, the term British Empire was a vehicle for the colonists to satisfy their self-pride. Identifying themselves with the British Empire touched less their colonial inferiority complex than identification with England or Great Britain. The term British Empire could convey for the colonists a sense that the colonies were an important component of the great Empire. When the British people used this term, they used it to glorify Great Britain. The colonies figured merely as her attachments. For the colonists, however, the term had a quite different connotation. When they used this term, they always emphasized the importance of America within the Empire. The following usage of the term by Benjamin Franklin is a typical example: "... in another century ... the greatest number of Englishmen will be on this side of the water. What an accession of power to the British Empire by sea as well as land!" Thus the term British Empire, when used by the colonists, contained a peculiarly American meaning.

Another very "American" aspect of the term was revealed after the beginning of British-Colonial conflicts. The colonists' concept of the structure of the British Empire had not been clear before 1764 because the colonists had not had any necessity of defining it in the age of salutary neglect. When they were challenged by the new British colonial policies, they began to define the structure of the British Empire and developed a concept of the British Empire as a confederation. By 1774, such theorists as Thomas Jefferson and James Wilson defined the British Empire as a confederation in which Britain and the colonies

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49 Koehner, Empire, 84, 986.
50 Franklin, Increase of Mankind, PBF, IV, 233.
were tied together by their common king.\textsuperscript{51} The First Continental Congress denied Parliament any right to impose any tax on the colonies and to interfere with their internal affairs, and granted it only a right to regulate the trade of the whole empire “from the necessity of the case.”\textsuperscript{52} However, it may probably be said that such ideas were not new inventions. Before 1764 the colonies had enjoyed a virtually autonomous status. They took this situation for granted, for they regarded themselves as possessing the equal rights and liberties with the British subjects at home. Discussing the American concept of the British Empire before the Seven Years War, Richard Koebner appropriately observed: “For them the notion of empire did not connote any privileged status belonging to the mother-country in relation to the colonies .... The status of the colonies inside the British Empire was not understood to be in any way analogous to that of the provinces of the Roman Empire.”\textsuperscript{53}

The term British Empire began to be used in the colonies in the middle of the 18th Century, notably by such a publicist as Franklin, when the colonists became conscious of the rapid growth of their population and economic resources and sought for an appropriate identification for themselves. The term became popular when the victory over France in Canada swelled their expectation of the future grandeur of America.\textsuperscript{54} Relationship between the rising popularity of the term and rising American consciousness will be discussed in the next section.

\textbf{V. The French and Indian War and the Rise of British Americanism}

By the end of the 17th Century, Britain and France became two major competitors for colonial and commercial empire. All the wars fought by European states between 1680’s and 1760’s involved colonial and commercial rivalry between Britain and France. In North America, both of them possessed vast colonies. In the Peace of Utrecht, Britain

\textsuperscript{51} In his treatise \textit{A Summary View of the Rights of British America} (1774), Thomas Jefferson argued that Parliament had no authority over the colonies whatsoever, not even the right to regulate imperial trade. For him, the British Empire was, or should have been, a confederation of states tied together by a common king, whose only function was to see to it that no state of the Empire would hurt other members of the Empire. Julian P. Boyd, ed., \textit{Papers of Thomas Jefferson} (multi-volume, in progress, Princeton, 1950– ) (hereafter \textit{PTJ}), II, 121–141.

James Wilson, a transplanted Briton who settled in central Pennsylvania, presented a similar view of the British Empire in his pamphlet published about the same time, \textit{Considerations on the Nature and Extent of the Legislative Authority of the British Parliament} (1774). He regarded all the different members of the British Empire as distinctive states, independent of each other, but connected together under the same sovereign. To the question how the trade of the Empire could be carried on without some power to regulate it, Wilson admitted that the existence of such a regulatory power was desirable and was willing to give it to the king as a royal prerogative. The main part of his treaties is excerpted in Samuel Elliot Morison, ed., \textit{Sources and Documents Illustrating the American Revolution and the Formation of the Federal Constitution} (London, 1923), 104–116.

\textsuperscript{52} \textit{EHD}, IX, 807.

\textsuperscript{53} Koebner, \textit{Empire}, 90.

\textsuperscript{54} \textit{Ibid.}, 86, 105–130. Koebner’s book which presents a history of the term, “Empire,” traces the development of the idea of the British Empire. Richard Van Alstyne’s \textit{The Genesis of American Nationalism} also traces the growth of imperial ideas in both Britain and the colonies. It is my impression that the term British Empire was more often used by the American colonists than by the Britons themselves in the 1760’s.
forced France to recognize the Hudson Bay area and Newfoundland as British possessions and to cede Acadia (Nova Scotia) to Britain. But France still held a vast land mass which spread from the mouth of the St. Lawrence to the mouth of the Mississippi, surrounding the expanding British colonies. The French population in North America was very small. Their population in Canada was about 65,000 at the time of the French and Indian War. With an efficient militia system and with the help of their Indian allies, however, the French could be a match for the more populous, but ill-organized, British colonies.

The boundaries between the British and French possessions were never clear. The Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle settled nothing regarding these boundaries. When the British Americans began to penetrate into the Ohio Valley, which was regarded by the French as their territory, the time for a military showdown approached. The French took a swift military counter-action. In the initial stage of the French and Indian War, they forced Colonel Washington’s small Virginian force to retreat in 1754 and defeated General Braddock’s regular army in the Appalachians in 1755. In the past, Britain had never attempted to conquer Canada. But this time British government was willing to wage decisive battles with the French in North America.

Those colonists and British officials in America who anticipated and desired a war with France in North America found the most serious defect of colonial war preparation in the lack of intercolonial coordination. Thus, when the representatives of seven colonies were invited to a Congress at Albany by the Lieutenant Governor of New York under an instruction from the Board of Trade to negotiate a treaty with the Indians of the Six Nations in the summer of 1754, those representatives also discussed the problem of intercolonial cooperation and produced, under Franklin’s leadership, the famous “Albany Plan” to establish “one general government” in America by an act of Parliament.

This remarkable proposal, however, was rejected by all of the seven colonies which sent delegates to the Congress. Most colonists lacked such an acute sense of crisis to their own security as would force them to accept this kind of plan for union. The conquest of Canada was quite welcome to the colonists. But most of them were not in the mood to wage an all-out offensive war against the French. Reflecting this popular mood, most colonial assemblies were slow to strengthen their defense effort. Only the New England colonies which had had a long tradition of fighting against the French made a full scale military effort. In total, however, more than 20,000 colonists participated in the war.

But it was British regulars that played a major role in subduing the French in Canada. Britain threw in to North America a force of 20,000 regulars. Louisbourg fell in July 1758; Quebec in September 1759; and Montreal, the last French stronghold, in September 1760. By the end of 1760, the victory of Britain became clear. The French had been beaten in all the major theatres in this global war. The Peace of Paris ended the war in February 1763. Britain took Canada, East Louisiana, Florida and several “neutral islands” in the

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57 The text of the plan, together with related documents, is in PBF, V, 357–392.
60 Dorn, *Competition for Empire*, 357–362.
Carribean. As she gave West Louisiana to Spain to induce the latter to accept the peace with loss of Florida to Britain, France lost all the territories in North America except for two tiny islands in the mouth of the St. Lawrence.

Victorious battles in Canada and the Peace of Paris were celebrated by the colonists. They praised the new glory for the British Empire and took pride in their contributions to victory. Within the framework of the Empire, however, the colonists tended to glorify more than ever British America. Enchanted by the vision opened by the annexation of Canada and East Louisiana, they could more than ever envision the great future for America. The term "America" found frequent employment in the public festivities. What these victories stimulated among the colonists was a kind of nationalism which glorified both the British Empire and America. Therefore it may properly be called British Americanism.

It was only one step further from this to think of the future of America as an independent nation. As early as 1755, the young John Adams reached the idea of American independence when he was thinking of the growth of the colonies after the removal of the French power. "It looks likely to me," he wrote to a friend, "if we can remove the turbulent Gallicks, our people, according to the exact computations, will in another century become more numerous than England itself. Should this be the case, since we have, I may say, all the naval stores of the nation in our hands, it will be easy to obtain the mastery of the seas; and then the united force of all Europe will not be able to subdue us. The only way to keep us from setting up for ourselves is to disunite us."62

The possibility of American independence began to be feared by some of British politicians and publicists by the end of the Seven Years War. Among the followers of Dukes of Newcastle and Bedford, there were those who maintained that the removal of the French power from Canada would tend to encourage the continental colonies in their growing mood of independence.63 The American colonists sometimes mentioned independence publicly. But they did so only to deny any desire on their part to be separated from Great Britain. Like John Adams, many colonists might have considered it as a possibility in some distant future.64 But few colonists would have considered it as a practical problem in the near future. Benjamin Franklin was probably right when he recalled of these years before 1764, "I never had heard in any conversation from any person, drunk or sober, the least expression of a wish for a separation, or hint that such a thing would be advantageous to America."65

As the end of the Seven Years War, the colonists proudly identified themselves with the British Empire and did not think of independence as a practical possibility in the near future. Definitely, however, they had by then discovered America as a glorious object with which they could identify themselves within the framework of the British Empire. Thus it may be said that the colonists began to view America as a kind of imperium in imperio, a great sub-empire within the British Empire.

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63 Savelle, The Origins of American Diplomacy, 469; William L. Grant, "Canada versus Guadeloupe, an Episode of the Seven Years' War," AHR, XVII (1911), 735-743.
64 Max Savelle says, "this sort of self-consciousness must also have prepared feelings that, as valuable and useful as the colonies and their resources and men were, they might possibly have been able to exist independently of their European masters." Savelle, The Origins of American Diplomacy, 553.
65 Cited in Clinton Rossiter, The First American Revolution. 4.
VI. The New British Colonial Policy As a Major Stimulus to American Nationalism

Just as the American colonists were becoming exceedingly self-conscious, the British government began its attempt to tighten its control over the American colonies. The loyalty of the colonists to Britain was derived from their British heritage. But their loyalty was sustained by their satisfaction that they could enjoy security, near autonomy, trade opportunity, and westward expansion within the British Empire. The new colonial policies curtailed their near autonomy, trade opportunity and westward expansion, just when the problem of security had become less important as a result of the French and Indian War.

The enumerated list was enlarged to include new items: Attempts were made to strengthen the custom houses in America and the vice-admiralty courts; and naval patrols were strengthened. The British government attempted through such measures to bring the era of salutary neglect to the end.66 The British also discouraged American interests in the western lands by such measures as the Royal Proclamation of 1763 and the Quebec Act of 1774.67 Furthermore Britain maintained an army in America after the end of the Seven Years War, whose function seemed only to protect British imperial officials.68 Most important, the new colonial policies tried to levy taxes from the colonists by acts of Parliament. This attempt to impose taxes on the colonists without their consent, in particular, aroused very strong opposition among the colonists. Colonial resistance developed with this issue as the focal point. These policies and the ensuing British-Colonial conflicts undermined American loyalty to Britain and eventually transformed British Americanism to American nationalism.

The first crisis in British-Colonial relations came with the passage of the Stamp Act in 1765. Colonial legislatures which had been opposed to the passage resolved now one after another their protest to the new tax, using an identical argument based on the principle of “no taxation without representation.” In major port-towns, an organization was set up to force the designated stamp distributors to resign and keep a vigilant eye to prevent the use of stamps. Then the colonists resorted to a tactic of economic pressure. In major towns, merchants organized a non-importation movement to put pressure on British exporting merchants and manufacturers. Finally, they held an intercolonial congress and published a joint declaration.

Confronted with this strong general opposition of the colonists, the British government

66 For the British attempts to strengthen trade regulations and their impacts on the colonists, George Louis Beer, British Colonial Policy, 1754-1765; Bernhard Knollenberg, Origin of the American Revolution; Carl Ubbelohde, The Vice-Admiralty Courts and the American Revolution; Arthur M. Schlesinger, The Colonial Merchants and the American Revolution; Thomas C. Barrow, Trade and Empire, the British Customs Service in Colonial America, 1660-1775 (Cambridge, Mass. 1967).
avoided a showdown and retreated. After a change of ministry, the Stamp Act was repealed and some revision was made in the Sugar Act of 1764 which had been strongly opposed by the Northern colonies. Although Parliament, passing the Declaratory Act, made clear its view that it had the power to legislate for any part of the Empire, the colonists regarded the repeal of the Stamp Act as a substantial victory. This victory strengthened the self-confidence of the colonists. They now felt that, if united, they could successfully force the British government to retreat. They could confirm their view on the importance of the colonial trade for the mother country. And they could regard an intercolonial congress as a precedent for the future.69

In 1767, the British government again attempted to levy tax from the colonists by an act of Parliament. The colonial opposition to the Townshend Act, although milder than that to the Stamp Act, was strong enough nevertheless to induce the British government to retreat again. Again the colonists resorted to a tactics of economic pressure, that is, non-importation. British merchants and manufacturers, who did not like the idea of imposing duties on British commodities imported by the colonists, worked for the repeal of these duties. After a change of ministry, the British government repealed in 1770 all the Townshend duties except duty on tea. Although they continued to oppose tea duty, most of the colonists regarded this a sufficient victory and non-importation was ended.70

The ensuing relatively quiet period was soon interrupted by the Tea Act of 1773. Colonial merchants feared that the act would give virtual monopoly over colonial tea trade to the East India Company, driving independent merchants out of tea business. However, this act was also regarded by the colonists as a scheme to force them to pay tea duty by making it possible for the East India Company to undersell smuggled tea of Dutch origin. Thus again the principle of no taxation without representation became a rallying cry of resistance, although the slogan of antimonopoly was added this time.71

In December 1773, Boston activists staged the Boston Tea Party, thus bringing forth the final and decisive crisis in British-Colonial relations. The Tea Party affair outraged the British government and the British public.72 The British government was now determined to suppress rebellious spirit among the colonists. The government pushed through Parliament what the colonists called the “Intolerable Acts,” aiming to punish the rebellious Massachusetts. The Tea Party was not entirely approved by property conscious colonists. But the coercive measures taken by the British government in retaliation were intolerable to them. They felt that not only the rights of one particular province out also

71 A good monographic study of the Boston Tea Party and the ensuing crisis, is Benjamin Woods Labaree, The Boston Tea Party (New York, 1964). Schlesinger maintains in The Colonial Merchants and the American Revolution (270) that “the fear of monopoly was the mainspring of American opposition” that “protests against taxation without representation” were made chiefly for rhetorical effect. Labaree, taking a different view, stresses the issue of the tea duty as the major issue that caught the attention of the general public. (102–103). The letters and resolves compiled in Peter Force, ed., American Archives, 4th Series (6 vols., Washington, 1837–1846) (hereafter AA–4S), I, seem to support Labaree’s rather than Schlesinger’s view.
those of the whole colonies were now at stake.73 Thus the high-handed British measures provoked strong opposition through the colonies.

Because of their previous experiences of victory, the colonists were in no mood to be awed by the stern attitude of the British government. They were confident that the British government would retreat before united colonial resistance: an intercolonial Congress to demonstrate the unity of the colonies; an intercolonial association for non-importation and possibly for non-exportation; and probably a show of willingness to resort to arms if necessary. Confronted with these counter-measures, the British would dare not risk a civil war. The British public would demand the government to change the colonial policy. Probably after a change of ministry, the British government would yield and repeal the Intolerable Acts and all other obnoxious measures. Such was the thinking of the colonists in 1774.74

The first Continental Congress, convened in Philadelphia in September 1774, proceeded to adopt a declaration of colonial rights and grievances. As for practical measures, the Congress decided to organize an intercolonial association for non-importation to be commenced in December 1774 and for non-exportation to be commenced in September 1775. In order to demonstrate their willingness to fight if necessary, the Congress also adopted a resolution approving the opposition of Massachusetts to the acts of Parliament and stating that if Britain tried to carry those acts into effect by force, all Americans ought to support Massachusetts.75

The official statement of the Continental Congress indicated that the Americans were not ready to part with Britain. But it is certain that they wanted something like a dominion status for the colonies, a status of utmost freedom within the British Empire with the least ties with British Parliament. Thus they were strongly opposed to the Galloway plan. Certainly they were not opposed to forming an intercolonial union. What they did not like was closer relationship with British Parliament envisaged by the Galloway plan.76 All the militants were well aware that an intercolonial unity was essential to any effective resistance. It was those militants who wanted after the beginning of the war to formalize an intercolonial continental confederation at the earliest possible occasion.77

The new British colonial policies, affecting more or less uniformly all the colonies, forced the colonists to think and act continentally. They had to speak for the whole colonies and form a united front in resistance. Defending the rights of the colonies, they used such terms as British North America, British America or the British colonies. But they began...

73 To the leaders of Boston, Franklin from London strongly advised immediate repayment to the Company for the tea destroyed by the Tea Party. (Labaree, The Boston Tea Party, 221). George Washington wrote in June 1774: “The cause of Boston, the despotic measures in respect to it... now is and ever will be considered as the cause of America (not that we approve their conduct in destroying the tea).” cited in Ibid., 234.
74 I summarized the above on the basis on my reading letters and other documents compiled in AA-4S, I.
to employ more frequently such terms as the American colonies, North America or simply America. British statesmen and publicists, too, used the terms Britain and America in speaking of British-Colonial conflicts. This tendency in Britain might have influenced on the colonists in referring the colonies simply as America. The issue was now set as Britain versus America, the power of British Parliament versus the rights of the Americans.

Thus British colonial policy after 1764 was a major stimulus to emerging American nationalism. During those years of British-Colonial conflicts, British Americanism of the colonists was gradually undermined and replaced by more full-fledged American nationalism. By 1775, the colonial leaders had certainly begun to think of American independence as a practical matter. They had warned the British that they would not but be seeking independence if the British repeatedly infringed upon the rights of the Americans. The official spokesmen of the colonists, however, continued to deny their desire or ambition for independence even after the outbreak of the war. Their purpose remained throughout 1775 to be making American colonies virtually autonomous units within the British Empire. But it could not remain that way. In the next year, independence became their war purpose.

**Conclusion**

Nascent American nationalism emerged in the middle of the 18th Century, when the colonies achieved considerable economic expansion and political maturity, and grew more full-fledged toward the eve of the American Revolution. The main features of American nationalism of the Revolutionary Era were shaped during these years, and most of them by the year of 1764 when frictions began to develop in British-Colonial relations.

The American colonists took pride in rights and liberties they enjoyed as the subjects of the British crown, and their loyalty to the king depended on his guarantee of their rights and liberties. They regarded that guarantee as the first principle of government. While

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10 Merritt’s quantitative content analysis of the selected newspapers indicates a considerable rise of Americanism in the ways the colonists referred to the colonies.

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EB Explicit British; the English colonies
EC Explicit Crown His majesty’s Colonies; Royal Provinces
IB Implicit British Colonies; Provinces
IA Implicit American American Colonies
EA Explicit American America; North America

Merritt, *Symbols of American Community*, 129.


12 John Dickinson, a patriot opposed to independence in July 1776, wrote in his pamphlet in 1765, it may be said to be proper as much as possible to depress them... but the attempt in almost every instance... has been unsuccessful. Many states and kingdoms have lost their dominions by severity and an unjust jealousy. "PAR, I, 688. Franklin wrote to his friend Lord Kames in 1767 "every act of oppression would sour their temper,... and hasten their final revolt..." April 11, 1767, *WgBF*, V, 21–22. Articles in newspapers contained this kind of warning. Schlesinger, *Prelude to independence*, 145, 150.
they called Britain the mother country, they were not willing to accept the supreme power of British Parliament in the Empire. Rather they tended to envisage the British Empire as a something like a confederation. This conception of the Empire as a confederation transformed itself later into their conception of the new American nation.

The colonists evaluated highly the value of the trade of the colonies for Great Britain and by implication in world economy. The colonists regarded their prosperity depending on their trade and also looked on the vast continent as a source of their wealth. Enjoying expanding trade, and holding a vast continent for their future expansion, the colonists, especially after the conquest of Canada in the French and Indian War, tended to regard America as kind of sub-empire within the British Empire. When they spoke of the importance of their trade for Britain, or when they spoke of their future grandeur, they always viewed the North American colonies as a whole. The American consciousness of the colonists grew hand in hand with the popularity of the term British Empire among them. Whenever they glorified the British Empire, they glorified British North America. America, in addition to the British Empire, became an object for the colonists proudly to identify themselves with. They could eventually part with the British Empire, because they had in America another glorious object of self-identification. Thus British Americanism was a stepping stone toward American independence.

When the Americans decided to part with Britain, they attempted to secure for the new nation major conditions to be secure and prosperous and to grow into a grand empire. Revolutionary diplomacy aimed at acquiring as free as possible access to the world market and as large as territory in North America. The strategy of Revolutionary diplomacy was built upon one of the basic tenets of nascent American nationalism: the value of American trade for the world. Making use if possible of trade opportunities with America as a bargaining power, the Revolutionary diplomatists attempted to secure help from France and other maritime nations in Europe. With help from France and others, they aimed to achieve not only independence but also an empire, that is, America with a vast territory and extensive trade relations.