

OBLIGATION & TENSION  
CREDIT, WAR, AND IMPERIAL CRISIS IN THE BRITISH-AMERICAN  
NORTHEAST, 1688-1775

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A Dissertation presented to the Graduate Faculty of the University of Virginia in  
Candidacy for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Corcoran Department of History  
University of Virginia

2024

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## **Introduction**

Over the long eighteenth century, northeastern colonial British Americans developed complex relationships with the formal center of British imperial sovereignty in England. Colonists functioned as agents of imperialism, particularly when engaged in colonial wars against imperial adversaries and their Native allies. Colonists experienced imperialism and war as intricately related phenomena. British American territorial sovereignty through the colonial period depended on coercive mechanisms arising from within local government. It also depended, though to a lesser degree, on military force projected from England across the Atlantic.

Between 1688 and 1763 the colonial space encompassing New York, New England, the Ohio River Valley, the Great Lake region, and Atlantic Canada saw violent Anglo-French contestations which cost colonists resources, time, labor, and lost lives. In return, colonists expected returns on their exertions they directed towards imperial territorial acquisition. In their commercial correspondence, account books, military records, contemporary histories, financial and legal treatises, political pamphlets, and government minutes, colonists expressed their independent and autonomous role in financing, organizing, and shouldering substantial costs of these colonial wars. Metropolitan state makers' appointed representatives in the colonies objected to colonists' autonomy even as it allowed for imperial expansion. This tension in imperial visions between periphery and metropole caused the progressive formation of social-structural rifts within the transatlantic British Empire. The American Revolution was the ultimate culmination of these long-standing tensions. British transatlantic imperial expansion contained

the seeds of its own destruction because success required regional delegation, and regional delegation led to decentralization and entropic disintegration of metropolitan authority.

This interpretation conflicts with a general characterization of British imperial state capacity as fundamentally intensifying over the eighteenth century. Historian John Brewer, for example, argues for the development of a military-fiscal bureaucracy which allowed for intensification of coercive power backed by effective taxation. This argument makes partial sense as an explanation of British imperial state development in the eighteenth century. Chains of payments and fiscal obligations supported military activity. British subjects considered credibility of imperial public finance as necessary for their participation in an expanding fiscal-military state. Collection of revenue was necessary to fulfill obligations and maintain this credibility. However, the financial organizations and institutional structures that allowed for this development in England did not necessarily connect to societies as they developed locally in the British American colonies. Brewer's sources focus primarily on the development of revenue-collecting bureaucracies within the British Isles.<sup>1</sup> Brewer's emphasis on the fiscal importance of taxation addresses the emphasis of earlier historians, notably P. G. M. Dickson, on the significance of public debt in the English Financial Revolution around the turn of the eighteenth century. Dickson, in contrast to Brewer, saw the fundamental relationship between the Financial Revolution and British state expansion arising from the emergence of public debt finance. This meant that the British imperial state, as it evolved through the eighteenth century, financed its activities with obligations that it intended to meet only at some future time.<sup>2</sup> The relationship between public debt and taxation was significant in the British Empire because it reflected the

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<sup>1</sup> John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State, 1688-1783* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), xiii, 137–62, 191–218.

<sup>2</sup> P. G. M. Dickson, *The Financial Revolution in England: A Study in the Development of Public Credit, 1688-1756* (London: Routledge, 1967), 1–12, 225–56.

long-term ability of a modernizing state to meet its obligations to its constituents. Expanding the geographic range of analysis to the American colonies raises questions that fall outside of the scope that Dickson and Brewer explore in their studies of the British fiscal-state. Specifically, analysis of wartime delegation to peripheral financiers operating outside of organizations like the Bank of England indicate a colonial origin for war finance in eighteenth-century British America.

British Americans came to believe in the financial capacity of the British state even as they played a disproportionate role in financing colonial war and peacetime economies. Colonists did not see the British Empire as fundamentally weak even as they developed autonomous socio-political institutions disconnected from sovereign authority in England. Colonists, and particularly merchants, proved willing to accept the credibility of the state when it promised them financial backing from metropolitan coffers or a proportionate share of the spoils of colonial war. Prominent colonial merchants and merchant families like the Apthorps, Bayards, Hancocks, and Nathaniel Wheelwright saw opportunity in commercial participation in colonial conflict and territorial acquisition. They accepted contracts and performed the allocative tasks necessary for military success. They adapted their business to the demands of the state and adapted to changing demands to meet their obligations to the British military. However, the Apthorps and Bayards saw themselves embroiled in severe debt litigation as the long-term result of their participation. Such conditions would force the Apthorps, whose interests saw them identified as loyalists by 1775, to temporarily flee the colonies for England. Revolutionaries in Massachusetts confiscated their property there after their removal to the metropole. The Hancocks progressively saw themselves squeezed out of wartime markets because of their lack of connections outside of provincial Massachusetts. Wheelwright would flee colonial creditors in Boston for the West Indies as the result of catastrophic his bankruptcy following his part in the

financing of the Seven Years' War. These merchants participated in imperialism and lost by it. The state did not, they found, have the capacity to fulfill every obligation they once believed it could.

The experiences of these merchants reflected a wider divergence between northeastern colonists' perception and reality of their place within empire. These merchants had direct connections to their economic environments in port towns like Boston and New York along with smaller towns and connected hinterlands within their orbits. Consequently, their experiences reflect a larger structural course of imperial development, that featured the increasing functional autonomy of the colonies. The imperial crises which sporadically emerged in colonial America through the long eighteenth century – disputes that ultimately culminated in the American Revolution and national independence – came not from state overreach but state failure. Colonists did not reject the British Empire because of what it did to them, but what it failed to do for them. A substantial historical literature investigates the negative ramifications of British policy and administrative intervention in the colonies. These works, extending back to the nineteenth century, emphasize the intervention of policymakers into colonial commerce and government in defiance of colonial interests.<sup>3</sup> Other, more recent works reject the negative implications of this intervention but do not reject the transformative effects of British policy on the colonies in general.<sup>4</sup> Similar works that connective institutions bridged colonies and Britain

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<sup>3</sup> Viola F. Barnes, *The Dominion of New England: A Study in British Colonial Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1923), 27-46; Jonathan Barth, "Reconstructing Mercantilism: Consensus and Conflict in British Imperial Economy in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," *William and Mary Quarterly* 73, no. 2 (April 1, 2016): 257-90; Barth, *The Currency of Empire: Money and Power in Seventeenth-Century English America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2021), 12-40, 137-63, 249-89; George Louis Beer, *British Colonial Policy, 1754-1765* (New York: Macmillan, 1907) 1-15; George Louis Beer, *The Commercial Policy of England Toward the American Colonies* (New York: Columbia College, 1893) 45-69; O. M. Dickerson, *The Navigation Acts and the American Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1951), 31-102; Lawrence A. Harper, *The English Navigation Laws: A Seventeenth-Century Experiment in Social Engineering* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939).

<sup>4</sup> John E. Crowley, *The Privileges of Independence: Neomercantilism and the American Revolution* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 1-49; Patrick Griffin, *The Townshend Moment: The Making of Empire and*

with increasing effectiveness, or they argue for the significance of cultural transmissions that tied England and British America into one common entity.<sup>5</sup> In contrast, this study argues for substantial mutually exclusive development creating distance and division between the colonies and England even during periods of war. This interpretation contrasts scholarship that sees war as encouraging early modern centralized state development, as in the work of Bruce Porter, David Kaiser, and Charles Tilly. These interpretations suggest that the demands that war placed on populations form them into cohesive coercive states, that sacrificed individual rights for the purpose of mutual defense.<sup>6</sup> However, defensive coalescence did not imply centralization even when colonists and metropolitan officials acted toward common imperial aims. The case of the northeastern colonies during the European imperial wars between 1688 and 1763 show remarkable local formation of coercive capacity and control independent of England. Colonists emphasized the competence and capacity of provincial society especially after these wars concluded, when the British Empire made claims on them to pay down wartime debts. Colonists did not recognize such postwar austerity as legitimate because they did not see where such obligations to the metropolitan state arose from. Colonists believed they shouldered the costs of

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*Revolution in the Eighteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 114-64; Nuala Zahedieh, *The Capital and the Colonies: London and the Atlantic Economy 1660-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 1-54; Charles M. Andrews, *British Committees, Commissions, and Councils of Trade and Plantations, 1622-1675* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1908), 62-114; Andrews, *The Colonial Background of the American Revolution: Four Essays in American Colonial History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1924); John J. McCusker and Russell R. Menard, *The Economy of British America, 1607-1789: With Supplemental Bibliography* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 331-350.

<sup>5</sup> Jerry Bannister, "Atlantic Canada in an Atlantic World? Northeastern North America in the Long 18th Century," *Acadiensis: Journal of the History of the Atlantic Region* 43, no. 2 (2014): 3-30; Bannister, *The Rule of the Admirals: Law, Custom, and Naval Government in Newfoundland, 1699-1832* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 104-86; Ian K. Steele, *Politics of Colonial Policy: The Board of Trade in Colonial Administration, 1696-1720* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968); Steele, *The English Atlantic 1675-1740: An Exploration of Communication and Community* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 3-20, 213-50; F. B. Wickwire, *British Sub-Ministers and Colonial America, 1763-1783* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966).

<sup>6</sup> Bruce D. Porter, *War and the Rise of the State: The Military Foundations of Modern Politics* (New York: Free Press, 1994), 63-104; David Kaiser, *Politics and War: European Conflict from Philip II to Hitler* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 1-24, 83-140, 203-11; Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990-1992* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1992), 67-95; Tilly, "Reflections on the History of European State-Making," in Tilly ed., *The Formation of National States in Western Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 3-83.

war and should determine the allocation of benefits accordingly. They also believed that the fiscal and commercial structure of the empire should reflect the importance of the colonies as autonomous provincial polities. For the most part, this colonial belief reflected the realities of a polycentric transatlantic fiscal order. Colonists believed that metropolitan fiscal policies did not acknowledge the costs they undertook while conducting wars in North America.

Fiscal capacity determined coercive capacity. Historical sociologists like Max Weber, Charles Tilly, and Immanuel Wallerstein have identified the relationship between the flows of commodities, capital, bureaucratization, economic modernization, and the coercive capacities of states. Weber identified bureaucratic expansion as a key factor in the organization and management of information supporting state structures. Recent work by James C. Scott supports this interpretation posited by Weber in that he emphasizes categorization and uniformity as key elements of the “high modernist ideology” at the basis of the modern state.<sup>7</sup> In partial contrast to this interpretation, bureaucratic linkages did not need to bridge an entire state for members of that state to act on its behalf. Instead, British American colonists served as agents of imperial development while maintaining only limited connection with British metropolitan bureaucracy and holding primary civic obligations to provincial towns and colonial legislatures. Weber identified coercion as the definitive factor of the state. This proved largely true as states asserted their right to act as coercive monopolies over given territories.<sup>8</sup> However, the British imperial state as it existed in colonial North America was multipartite. Different social groups nominally under the British sovereign each asserted overlapping rights to assert coercive power on the part

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<sup>7</sup> James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 10-52; Maria Pia Donato, “Introduction: Archives, Record Keeping and Imperial Governance, 1500-1800,” *Journal of Early Modern History* 22, no. 5 (September 1, 2018): 311–26.

<sup>8</sup> Max Weber, *General Economic History*, trans. Frank H. Knight (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1950); Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, eds. H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 77-128.



of the empire. These social groups, such as colonial regiments, towns, and provincial assemblies, competed for scarce financial resources. Despite this competition, these groups nonetheless intensified imperial power as a whole even as they claimed autonomy within an unwritten constitutional order. Wallerstein, a representative of the world-systems approach to global modern social development, poses a strong core periphery model of empires like Britain's in the eighteenth century. In this model, capital accumulation in the metropolitan core served as the geographic center to which commodities flow from peripheries. In this interpretation, creditor-debtor relationships, the flow of money, the division of labor, capital accumulation, political power, and political ideology map onto these world-systems in which peripheries and semi-peripheries gravitated around the central orbit of European metropolises like London.<sup>9</sup>

In contrast to Wallerstein's centripetal theory of empire, this study reveals that colonial northeastern port towns retained significant economic autonomy and developed their own orbits as centers of trade and finance through the eighteenth century. Despite their smaller populations and later development relative to London, colonies operated as the primary centers of most everyday administrative and commercial activity, and colonists themselves recognized them as such. This characterization supports Mark Peterson's argument for Boston's effective status as a city-state with substantial self-rule through the early American period.<sup>10</sup> This study does not conceptualize Boston as a city-state, however, and instead emphasizes its significance as a

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<sup>9</sup> Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System I: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011) 2-13, 224-345; Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System II: Mercantilism and the Consolidation of the European World-Economy, 1600-1750* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 2-11, 74-289; Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System III: The Second Era of Great Expansion of the Capitalist World-Economy, 1730s-1840s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 55-126; Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System IV: Centrist Liberalism Triumphant, 1789-1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), xi-20.

<sup>10</sup> Mark Peterson, *The City-State of Boston: The Rise and Fall of an Atlantic Power, 1630-1865* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 1-24, 27-65, 85-188, 247-93.

regional center for commerce, finance, and provincial mobilization during periods of war. Sizeable commercial communities contained institutional centers that functioned as loci of metropolitan control even when provincial actors regulated economic activity. These centers included custom houses, admiralty courts, and, after mid-century, regular military regiments. Colonial governors, customs officers, admiralty judges, and British generals like Edward Braddock, Jeffery Amherst, and Thomas Gage, represented imperial interest in the provinces. This patchwork structure of sovereign authority infiltrating an otherwise autonomous colonial sphere of influence reflects the geographic complexity of multiple and partial sovereignties, and global legal pluralism, as examined in the work of global legal historian Lauren Benton. Benton's emphasis on such plural, regionally-variant, structures supporting the emergence of modern empires resemble colonial northeastern America, especially during wartime.<sup>11</sup> The distance separating Whitehall and the colonies, combined with regional variation within colonial America, produced multipartite administrative, legal, constitutional, and commercial imperial orders. The relative autonomous regional development of colonies like those of New England supports Jack P. Greene's argument concerning social development. Greene argues that New England colonies' social and cultural norms were distinct from those of England and other colonies, and only converged to mirror the commercialism and individualism of mainstream British culture as they evolved through the eighteenth century. As a general framework for

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<sup>11</sup> Lauren Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty: Law and Geography in European Empires, 1400-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 1-39; Benton, *Law and Colonial Cultures: Legal Regimes in World History, 1400-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 1-79; Benton and Adam Clulow, "Empires and Protection: Making Interpolity Law in the Early Modern World," *Journal of Global History* 12, no. 1 (March 1, 2017): 74-92; Benton and Benjamin Straumann, "Acquiring Empire by Law: From Roman Doctrine to Early Modern European Practice," *Law and History Review* 28, no. 1 (February 1, 2010): 1-38; Benton and Richard J. Ross, "Empires and Legal Pluralism: Jurisdiction, Sovereignty, and Political Imagination in the Early Modern World," in *Legal Pluralism and Empires, 1500-1850*, eds. Lauren Benton and Richard J. Ross (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 1-18; Vicki Hsueh, *Hybrid Constitutions: Challenging Legacies of Law, Privilege, and Culture in Colonial America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 1-24, 113-134.

regional development, this study supports Greene's methods and argument for a distinct New England course of social development. However, in contrast to Greene's characterization of New England, the case of late-seventeenth-century provincial militarism and commerce indicates that Bay colonists had commercially minded and capitalistic approaches to warfare and expansion.<sup>12</sup> Such patterns of belief and behavior indicate that New Englanders did not exist in any state of uniform communal stability relative to any other region but proved willing to engage in contentious commercial warfare to acquire territory from the French. In the colonial American northeast, commercial acquisitiveness and communal faction were universal characteristics that stimulated British imperialism throughout the eighteenth century.

Colonists utilized local state capacity to further regional financial interests. This put them into competition not only with the French, Spanish, Abenaki, and other imperial rivals, but also with metropolitan officials in England. To understand the fraught ways in which colonists and the imperial center borrowed, spent, and repaid money they appropriated for war, this study crosses the analytical boundaries between Atlantic, continental, hemispheric, and global approaches to the scale of British imperial activity in northeastern British America. It focuses on the place of colonial America within Atlantic trade and fiscal networks connecting Europe and the West Indies to colonists. Furthermore, tracing colonial relationships through financial obligations reduces the analytical importance of political boundaries. Colonists did not confine their financial transactions within provincial jurisdictions, but instead let these connections form wherever it served their individual interests.<sup>13</sup> As Richard Pares and Thomas Truxes have

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<sup>12</sup> Jack P. Greene, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Social Development of Early Modern British Colonies and the Formation of American Culture* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 7-27, 55-80.

<sup>13</sup> Juliana Barr, "Beyond the 'Atlantic World': Early American History as Viewed from the West," *OAH Magazine of History* 25, no. 1 (January 1, 2011): 13-18; Peter H. Wood, "From Atlantic History to a Continental Approach" in *Atlantic History: A Critical Appraisal*, eds. Jack P. Greene and Philip D. Morgan (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 279; Greene, "Hemispheric History and Atlantic History," in Greene and Morgan, eds., *Atlantic*

indicated in their analysis of illicit wartime trade in the Atlantic World, legality did not deter the transregional connective power of financial relationships.<sup>14</sup> State coercion and commercial integration applied to societies across transatlantic and intercontinental networks.<sup>15</sup> The most intensive of such relationships between commercial and coercive capacity, this study finds, emerged primarily at the local level in the colonial American northeast. Much of the development of global coercive capacity underlying early modern military development, at least within the British Empire, emerged from dispersed regional loci rather than single imperial centers.<sup>16</sup> This characterization is in accordance with the emphasis that historians like Douglas Edward Leach, Robert A. Gross, James Kirby Martin, and Mark Edward Lender place on the importance of provincial military development in the eighteenth century including the significance of town militias and regiments accountable to provincial assemblies. Often, as Leach and Fred Anderson have argued, social rifts emerged through the interaction of provincial

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*History*, 299-316; Nicholas Canny, "Atlantic History and Global History," in Greene and Morgan, eds., *Atlantic History*, 317-36.

<sup>14</sup> Richard Pares, *War and Trade in the West Indies, 1739-1763* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936), 395-470; Pares, *Yankees and Creoles: The Trade Between North America and the West Indies Before the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956); Thomas M. Truxes, *Defying Empire: Trading with the Enemy in Colonial New York* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 1-9, 37-104, 123-38; Truxes, "Transnational Trade in the Wartime North Atlantic: The Voyage of the Snow 'Recovery'," *The Business History Review* 79, no. 4 (December 2005): 751-80.

<sup>15</sup> Charles Tilly identifies the relationship between capital and coercive capacity as determining the imperial power of commercial empires like the Dutch and British in the early modern period. Tilly, *Capital Coercion, and European States*, 38-61.

<sup>16</sup> In contrast, see the more Eurocentric perspectives on imperial militarization, particularly military provisioning and finance, Jeremy Black, *A Military Revolution? Military Change in European Society 1550-1800* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press International, 1991); Black, *European Warfare: 1660-1815* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 1-37, 80-147; Black, *European Warfare in a Global Context, 1660-1815* (New York: Routledge, 2007) 93-104; Brian Downing, *The Military Revolution and Political Change: Origins of Democracy and Autocracy in Early Modern Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); Philip T. Hoffman, "Prices, the Military Revolution, and Western Europe's Comparative Advantage in Violence," *Economic History Review* 64, no. 1 (February 2011): 39-59; Geoffrey Parker, *The Military Revolution: Military Innovation and the Rise of the West, 1500-1800*, 2nd edn. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 6-81.

soldiers with the regulars who represented different worldviews and sought to use coercive force to enforce conformity with metropolitan demands.<sup>17</sup>

The colonial American northeast saw the emergence of territorial competition between imperial subjects that had little to do with treaties and court life in Europe. The colonial theaters of the Nine Years' War, War of the Spanish Succession, War of the Austrian Succession, and, critically, the Seven Years' War created tensions and conflict of interests between the goals of colonists and empire. These critical conflicts spurred the articulation of divergent conceptions of empire which influenced periods of peace that followed the formal, diplomatic resolutions of these wars. This supports historical arguments like those of Fred Anderson, Francis Jennings, and William R. Nester, which emphasize the critical importance of these colonial wars, and particularly the Seven Years' War, as initiating the social fissures in empire that would eventually lead to the American Revolution.<sup>18</sup> In contrast to these works, this study emphasizes the specific importance of provincial state capacity in the colonial theater, an internal, North American dynamic that was disconnected from the wider global conflict and arose from local fiscal autonomy. In one sense, the Seven Years' War was a global war because conflicts between the imperial parties spanned the world. However, in another sense it was not global because the dispersed sites of conflict and mobilization did not necessarily bear much structural relation to

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<sup>17</sup> Fred Anderson, *A People's Army: Massachusetts Soldiers and Society in the Seven Years' War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 111-141; Robert A. Gross, *The Minutemen and Their World* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976); Douglas Edward Leach, *Arms for Empire: A Military History of the British Colonies in North America, 1607-1763* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1973); Leach, *Roots of Conflict: British Armed Forces and Colonial Americans, 1677-1763* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 8-41, 64-133; James Kirby Martin and Mark Edward Lender, *"A Respectable Army": The Military Origins of the Republic, 1763-1789*, 3rd edn. (New York: Blackwell, 2015), 1-28.

<sup>18</sup> Fred Anderson, *A People's Army* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 167-224; Anderson, *Crucible of War: The Seven Years' War and the Fate of Empire in British North America, 1754-1766* (New York: Vintage, 2000), 453-734; Francis Jennings, *Empire of Fortune: Crowns, Colonies, and Tribes in the Seven Years War in America* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1988), 455-479; William R. Nester, *The French and Indian War and the Conquest of New France* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2014), 237-260.

each other. The concerns that animated colonists to participate were distinctly provincial. They did not need metropolitan prodding to engage in the conflict, nor did events in Europe have any strong determinative effect on how colonists chose to participate in the fight against New France. It was these local concerns that would eventually spur colonial Americans to reconceptualize their relationship with Great Britain after the peace of 1763.

Historian Justin Du Rivage has emphasized the importance of colonial conceptions of British taxation over the significance of the actual burdens those taxes placed on individuals after 1763. This interpretation emphasizes conceptions of imperial right of taxation over true economic interests in ways that conflict with the conclusions of historians who emphasize the immediate economic problems created by the administrative reforms under George Grenville and Lord Frederick North during the American imperial crisis.<sup>19</sup> Du Rivage's interpretation leaves several key questions unaddressed by focusing on the origins of the American Revolution as arising from popular opposition to taxation without representation. Why did British Americans break from an empire for which they had long expressed intense reverence? Why did Parliament insist on contested colonial taxes if it was clear that such policy would lead to war? Why did colonists feel so strongly about paying taxes that they would risk open violent conflict against Britain?<sup>20</sup> On the first of these points, Brendan McConville also provides an example of colonists' conflicting images of the British political system evolving through the revolutionary period. Through the long eighteenth century, colonists expressed a common British cultural heritage and reverence for the authority of the British monarch. However, such allegiances did

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<sup>19</sup> Beard and Beard, *The Rise of American Civilization*, 189-227; Becker, *The History of Political Parties in the Province of New York*, 53-111; Merrill Jensen, *The Founding of a Nation: A History of the American Revolution 1763-1776* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2004), 70-97, 265-313.

<sup>20</sup> Justin Du Rivage, *Revolution Against Empire: Taxes, Politics, and the Origins of American Independence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 4-5.

not secure connections between the state apparatus and colonists.<sup>21</sup> In this way, American revolutionary mobilization should be thought of not as a political separation between colony and metropole, but as a mass recognition of an already existent separation between states that functioned, in practical terms, independently from each other.

Mobilization and commitment at the popular level required sustained social resistance.<sup>22</sup> Consequently, examination of competing social units, and the environments in which they formed, helps explain the paradoxes that Du Rivage and other historians identify but have not resolved. Historians of popular mobilization during the American Revolution often express reluctance to draw causal relations between socio-economic changes and rebellion. These apprehensions arise from a belief that colonists, motivated by ideological commitments, would have united against fundamental assaults on their autonomy, in any circumstance, regardless of economic conditions.<sup>23</sup> In such interpretations, financial explanations served either as one secondary contributing factor or played little role at all. In contrast, this dissertation examines the origins of the American Revolution from the perspective of socially emergent fiscal units in the colonies. It identifies significant connections between economic coalitions that formed in the northeast in the 1760s around the system for financing the Seven Years' War and the emergence of formal ideologies that led to the American Revolution. Before colonists expressed their motivations in political language, they expressed grievances about their place within this fiscal system. New political and constitutional arguments did not arise from ideas alone; nor did they represent a rupture with the course of colonial development through the Revolutionary period.

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<sup>21</sup> Brendan McConville, *The King's Three Faces: The Rise & Fall of Royal America, 1688-1776* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 2-4, 7-11.

<sup>22</sup> T.H. Breen, *American Insurgents, American Patriots: The Revolution of the People* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2011), 12.

<sup>23</sup> Gross, *Minutemen and Their World*, 107.

Instead, they emerged as an expression of accumulated experiences and emergent intracolonyal loyalties which later found their symbolic expression in political discourse.

A definitive contrasting interpretation is that of Gordon S. Wood who rejects economic conditions as a factor in the origins of the American Revolution, citing the benefits colonists received from England because of their participation in the Seven Years' War in addition to other financial benefits. Additionally, Wood represents ideological expressions during the Revolution as radical insofar as they initiated a fundamental break with the social structures of the colonial past and introduced new patterns of American life. Wood's interpretation of the American Revolution, drawing on the comparative theories of Hannah Arendt, contrasts the American Revolution with the fundamentally "social" French Revolution in which economic conflict played a significant role. Wood's interpretation downplays the significance of fiscal marginalization in the colonies because it gauges ideological commitments based on published writings in the pamphlet debates, and other popular literature, of the 1760s and 1770s. In contrast, I argue, the position of individual colonists within the imperial fiscal system had shaped these colonial alignments before these debates.<sup>24</sup>

Du Rivage argues that revolutionary mobilization depended on whose terms Americans would pay taxes.<sup>25</sup> An interpretation emphasizing the fiscal origins of conflict between actors at different levels of government enables a deeper analysis of the social phenomena of colonial opposition to taxes. What types of daily experiences would motivate colonists to generate

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<sup>24</sup> On social rupture and ideology interpretations set in contrast to social conditions, see Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1991), 3-8. On Arendt's interpretation, see Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Viking Press, 1965), 49; For use of pamphlets as source in discrediting the socio-economic origins of revolutionary ideological discourse, see the text and notes in Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, 1-54.

<sup>25</sup> Du Rivage, *Revolution Against Empire*, 4-5.



opinions on the legitimacy of a tax? Why did most colonists coalesce around common interests at the local level rather than forming coalitions with metropolitan interests across the Atlantic? The American Revolution occurred in the context of Parliament's attempts to finance the deployment of 10,000 royal soldiers earmarked for service after the Treaty of Paris in 1763 in North America and the consequent introduction of metropolitan bureaucracies for this purpose.<sup>26</sup> Why did colonists reject the expenses of this military presence and view it as a tyrannical encroachment outside the proper bounds of constitutional sovereignty? Why did colonists with their own internal rifts and regional tensions unite against this militarization? Additionally, New England towns had strong hierarchical cultural norms and fiscal structures with power concentrated in the hands of selectmen, militia officers, and merchant elites. Why did colonists consider this type of hierarchical society as more representative than one instituted through a metropolitan bureaucracy or the imperial military? Democratic impulses do not fully explain colonists' acceptance of local regimes over transatlantic ones. Many colonists, like Thomas Hutchinson in Boston asserted the primacy of metropolitan authority. Those who agreed with him became loyalists by the end of 1774 even though they had been fully integrated members of their colonial communities just a decade prior. The mobilization of colonists to challenge metropolitan authority, instead, emerged from the fallout from the fracturing of the fiscal practices that financed the Seven Years' War. This fallout included waves of bankruptcies in the colonial northeast. The empire asserted the validity of obligations which the colonists had never come to recognize. By 1763, the British drove France out of North America and ended a period of sustained economic development built on territorial acquisition and commercial expansion

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<sup>26</sup> Eliga H. Gould, "Liberty and Modernity: The American Revolution and the Making of Parliament's Imperial History," in Jack P. Greene, ed., *Exclusionary Empire: English Liberty Overseas, 1600-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 114.

throughout the Atlantic northeast. This British triumph proved short-lived in the colonies as postwar economic distress laid bare the fault lines between people whose interests aligned with the metropole and those and those who remained rooted to local networks of borrowing and exchange.

The British Empire consisted of overlapping fiscal states with distinct prerogatives. They had cultural similarities and strong common commercial relationships with dominant entrepôts, like London, with large financial orbits. However, though most of the early modern British Atlantic felt London's commercial pull, most colonial subjects' primary social and commercial relationships revolved around regional entrepôts like Boston and among neighbors within their own towns. Different loci of commercial and fiscal capacity accumulated capital and administrative knowledge. This diffusion of exchange among many organizing nodes gave the many different authorities within colonies control of economic activity, though all were nominally under control of the British sovereign. This political structure produced a pluralistic legal society in which dispersed British subjects contested legal outcomes and strategically selected venues to resolve disputes. Metropolitan authorities often found their greatest capacity to exert control over distant colonies at specific locations like custom houses where fiscal linkages, patronage, and salaries created loyalty to Whitehall.<sup>27</sup> Colonists often successfully contested this authority through negotiation or deception.

This plurality of authorities and venues did not aggregate into a single unitary British system of law. Subjects forming social units in the peripheries of empire contested the intrusion of metropolitan legal authority. After more than a century of successful contention, they came to

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<sup>27</sup> Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty*, 2-3; Jack P. Greene, *Negotiated Authorities: Essays in Colonial Political and Constitutional History* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994), 319-327; Gautham Rao, *National Duties: Custom Houses and the Making of the American State* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 1-48.

recognize the de facto reality of separate spheres of authority as a constitutional relationship sanctioned by long practice.<sup>28</sup> This decentralized political system emerged through the actions and obligations of individual colonists who established and sustained provincial governments. Neither colonists nor imperial state makers needed to see this reality in its whole for it to function. Overlap of legal authority occurred, but different, geographically dispersed, social units ultimately exercised dominance over local concerns. Particularly in New England, colonists understood that their towns would have priority over governance, particularly in times of peace.<sup>29</sup> When united against an imposing French threat, or when receiving consumer goods from the metropole, colonists had little reason to confront overarching British governance as an alien or malevolent presence.<sup>30</sup> However, after the Seven Years' War, Grenville's ministry sought to consolidate authority by cutting metropolitan credit and imbursements to provincials.<sup>31</sup>

Many early modern discussions of sovereignty revolved around the particular powers exercised by the province, the empire, the king, and Parliament. Because British subjects did not fully appreciate the novel political systems that developed on the colonial periphery, their silence regarding the importance of town government is understandable. The social structure of the town was total and all-consuming yet simultaneously mundane. Townspeople contested the authority of other towns and provincial legislatures like the Massachusetts General Court. Political elites also formed contentious coalitions which drew support from regional and economic interest

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<sup>28</sup> Mary Sarah Bilder, *The Transatlantic Constitution: Colonial Legal Culture and the Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 1-14, 73-90; Jack P. Greene, *Peripheries and Center: Constitutional Development in the Extended Politics of the British Empire and the United States, 1607-1788* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986).

<sup>29</sup> On colonists' political organization at the level of the town in the eighteenth century, see Michael Zuckerman, *Peaceable Kingdoms: New England Towns in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1970), 3-45, 220-260.

<sup>30</sup> Breen, *American Insurgents, American Patriots*, 41-2.

<sup>31</sup> Andrew David Edwards, "Grenville's Silver Hammer: The Problem of Money in the Stamp Act Crisis," *Journal of American History* 104, no. 2 (September 2017): 337-362.

groups.<sup>32</sup> However, this type of contestation proved so ubiquitous and continuous that it did not disrupt any fundamental social relationships between individuals at the local, municipal, level.

Towns dominated social and political life for colonial New Englanders. Most Americans never experienced England, and many never traveled far outside of their towns until later adulthood, if at all.<sup>33</sup> Colonists transmitted most information concerning daily life through homes, taverns, meetinghouses, and markets within the borders of one's immediate community.<sup>34</sup> Until the town order came under threat, the ordinariness of its existence made it less visible than the trappings of royalty, generals, and legislatures. Yet once the costs of imperial militarization and austerity forced the town into competition for resources in the 1760s and 1770s, New England towns became focal points for organizing resistance to Parliament and Crown. Imperial crisis interrupted the schedule and patterns of interaction within and between communities, forcing towns to turn from municipal concerns toward forming provincial coalitions.<sup>35</sup> Corporate units united in federated unions as committees of safety and observation,<sup>36</sup> committees of correspondence, and the Sons of Liberty emerged from the social infrastructure of town governments.

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<sup>32</sup> Roy Hidemichi Akagi, *The Town Proprietors of the New England Colonies: A Study of Their Development, Organization, Activities and Controversies, 1620-1770* (Philadelphia: Press of the University of Pennsylvania, 1924), 1-14; Thomas Bender, *Community and Social Change in America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1978), 3-14, 45-85; T. H. Breen, "Narrative of Commercial Life: Consumption, Ideology, and Community on the Eve of the American Revolution," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 50, no. 3 (July 1993): 471-501; Richard L. Bushman, *King and People in Provincial Massachusetts* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 3-25, 55-90; Edward M. Cook, *The Fathers of the Towns: Leadership and Community Structure in Eighteenth-century New England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976); Bruce C. Daniels, *The Connecticut Town: Growth and Development, 1635-1790* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1979) 3-7, 64-139; Daniels, *The Fragmentation of New England: Comparative Perspectives on Economic, Political, and Social Divisions in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Greenwood Publishing, 1988).

<sup>33</sup> Anderson, *People's Army*, 37; Breen, *American Insurgents, American Patriots*, 39.

<sup>34</sup> Gross, *The Minutemen and Their World*, 6-7.

<sup>35</sup> Gross, *The Minutemen and Their World*, 9, 17.

<sup>36</sup> Breen, *American Insurgents, American Patriots*, 18.

Historical theorists of revolution have posed several models for how populations decide to, and mobilize towards, political revolt. One type of explanation examines revolutions as extreme forms of political protest. As Theda Skocpol writes, these theories tend to “envisage revolutions as particularly radical and ideological variants of the typical social reform movement.”<sup>37</sup> In contrast, Marxist social theories identified structural conflicts between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. Skocpol, Charles Tilly, Ted Gurr, and Chalmers Johnson have proposed alternative models applicable outside of this industrial class conflict explanation and applicable to largely agrarian populations in early modern monarchical states. Skocpol writes that these revolutions “transformed state organizations, class structures, and dominant ideologies,” and therefore it is necessary to distinguish them from riots and coups.<sup>38</sup> Skocpol’s definition of revolution poses a problem for an interpretation of the American Revolution. While true that many structural changes occurred through the American Revolutionary period, the impetus came first from local attempts to maintain political continuity. Small forms of protest like riots blended into larger upheaval through the 1760s and 1770s. At the same time, many similar protests occurred in colonial America without producing an event of such magnitude as the revolutionary conflict escalating in 1775.

An explanation for the scale and extremity of the American Revolution benefits from what Ted Gurr calls “relative deprivation,” a dynamic that occurs when people become dissatisfied at existing conditions and revolt against established authority as the result of a gap between what a group feels entitled to and what they experience.<sup>39</sup> This dissertation focuses on changes in credit conditions in the aftermath of the Seven Years’ War which illustrate Gurr’s

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<sup>37</sup> Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), xiii-xiv.

<sup>38</sup> Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions*, xiii-xiv, 3-8.

<sup>39</sup> Ted Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), xx-21; Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions*, 9.

concept of the difference between reality and expectation that drive revolutionary movements. In this case, credit refers not only to financial credit narrowly conceived, but also the faltering credibility of imperial institutions after 1763. Shifts from imperial infusions of money and resources to imperial austerity initiated an intense reconsideration by the colonists of the legitimacy of the imperial state when it failed to meet its promises and New Englanders suffered catastrophic losses as a result. Little evidence indicates that either Parliament or their appointed contractors felt they had provoked economic crisis in the colonies, nor did they feel they had failed to meet any obligations. The failure to recognize the ramifications of a contraction of wartime infusions of money and credit emerged from limitations of state perception. Much of the debt undertaken for colonial war fell outside the formal mechanisms, namely the creation and transmission of full financial accounts, that the metropolitan state could use to assess colonial public and private finances. The British imperial state had not developed the capacity to bring all loci of wartime decision-making and resource allocation under the eye of Whitehall. This failure to see the consequences of centralized fiscal policy helps explain why colonists grew dissatisfied with membership in the British imperial system, but it does not fully explain why coalitions formed in revolutionary America to dispute British authority nor how they sustained themselves.

Tilly's concept of "multiple sovereignty" identifies a deeper and continuous fissure between colonial and metropolitan societies.<sup>40</sup> Tilly explains the political violence of revolutions as emerging from the formation and recognition of distinct coalitions. Revolutionaries, in this understanding, cannot act meaningfully unless they form an organized group with access to the same resources. This organization is necessary but not sufficient, as competing groups and governments can repress this group formation through threats and violence. This repression

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<sup>40</sup> Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (Reading: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co, 1978), 3-12.

makes the costs of organizing prohibitive. The cause of revolution in this case is contending collective organizations aligning against each other to maximize sovereign authority over some region. From this tension then arises medium-term consequences such as the formation of revolutionary ideologies and growing popular discontent. This theory of revolutionary mobilization applies to colonial New England. The collective deprivation caused by postwar imperial credit failure motivated the concerted rebellion of American colonists.

This dissertation addresses credit, war, and imperialism in the colonial American northeast in five parts. Chapter One addresses the segmented social and administrative structures of colonial New England during the Nine Years' War and its aftermath. It investigates how imperial conceptions of unity and deference within the transatlantic empire conflicted with the autonomy of provincial military leadership, particularly that of William Phips. Chapter Two moves to a macro-level structural perspective of British fiscal development in the Atlantic world. It describes the relationship between public revenue and public expenditure during periods of imperial war. Growing British imperial dominance featured new ideas about money, debt, and trade that encouraged metropolitan commercial and fiscal policies to use private debt for public ends. This chapter also explains how the relationship between debt and imperial expansion promoted the long-term disintegration of the British imperial state in North America. Chapter Three explains the emergence of commercial and political factions in the context of the War of the Austrian Succession and the first half of the Seven Years' War. This chapter explains how colonists operated in largely autonomous mercantile and military units that challenged metropolitan policymakers and generals. This chapter identifies how the empire began to cut out the need to delegate authority to provincial middlemen through reliance on the private credit accessed through a relatively small number of merchant firms. Chapter Four explains the effects

of the consolidation of financial power in the merchant firms introduced in Chapter Three. This chapter explains how the wartime financial transition, and specifically changes in the methods of contracting for provisions and war finance, incentivized an overextension of merchant debt. This overextension provoked port town financial crises which damaged social stability in northeastern colonial commerce. This economic crisis coincided with the austerity policies of the post-1763 administrative reforms. The effects of British policy during this period initiated colonists' reconceptualization of the benefits of membership within the British Empire. Chapter Five explains how the political and social development of town life, and particularly locally emergent methods of public finance, came into conflict with the British state after 1763. This conflict between local and metropolitan interests and political loyalty explains the process of town-centric mobilization in the early stages of the American Revolution.



## Chapter One

### A Segmented State: The Inadequacies of Fiscal Centralization in North American Colonial Conflicts, 1688-1700

“For the Sovereign is absolute over both alike; or else there is no Sovereignty at all; and so every man may Lawfully protect himselfe, if he can, with his own sword, which is the condition of war.” -Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*<sup>1</sup>

English imperial administrators sought to unify metropolitan and colonial political authority in the seventeenth century. The segmented social structures of the English Atlantic limited this effort at consolidation. Distance and geographic differentiation created conditions for provincial autonomy. In the American colonies, social factions emerged with significant powers of political self-determination. Authorities in London successfully managed to utilize merchants' knowledge and wealth to create common interests and obligations among dispersed English subjects. This served metropolitan economic interests by expanding access to revenue. However, this did not result in a state unified by hierarchical institutions.

Limited coercive capacities constrained any attempt by the English state to create universal compliance with any predominant imperial goal. Political and economic thinkers in England sought unsuccessfully to remedy such multicentric proliferation of authority. Imposing uniformity on transatlantic institutions depended on England's sovereign control of the fiscal system. In periods of colonial war, distant provincial government could successfully challenge many of the tenuous holds that metropolitan authorities exercised over them from London. The exigencies of war necessitated delegation to local leaders with access to regional commercial

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. C.B. MacPherson (London: Penguin, 1985), 257.

networks, political support, and geographic knowledge. For example, the governor and military leader of Massachusetts, William Phips, along with his allies in the colonial militia and ministry, accumulated significant power because of such delegation during King William's War. Phips utilized local resources and military intelligence in the limited successes enjoyed by colonial forces against the French in Atlantic Canada. Within four years of his rise to political and military command in Massachusetts, Phips's provincial authority challenged the fiscal relationship between Massachusetts and England, provoking his removal by authorities in London. Massachusetts's participation in the colonial theater of the Nine Years' War revealed the weak relationship between English subjects enmeshed within different sites of transatlantic governance. Resolution of such tensions depended on a social equilibrium reached not by amicable diplomacy, nor binding financial obligations, but mutual confrontation and acceptance of a tacit stalemate between town, province, and metropole.

In 1690, the English merchant and politician Josiah Child published the final edition of his tract *A New Discourse of Trade*. Originally published in 1668, thirteen years before Child rose to prominence as governor of the English East India Company, the book described changing relationships between imperial states, warfare, and finance. Child wrote: "all war is become much rather an expence [sic] of money than men, and success attends those that can most and longest spend money, rather than men; and consequently Princes [sic] armies in Europe are become more proportionable to their purses, than to the numbers of their people." Furthermore, because of introductions in the use of "powder, shot and fire-arms," Child wrote, the coercive

capacity of late seventeenth-century states depended increasingly on manufacturing capacity and commercial transportation.<sup>2</sup>

At the time Child wrote, the construction of large forts, especially in colonial outposts, prolonged periods of warfare due to extended sieges. The extension of the time during which English forces engaged in the siege of forts required significant expenditures of public revenues over unpredictable periods.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, prolonged conflict also put significant costs on societies who diverted resources and people towards the conflict and away from domestic economies.<sup>4</sup> In 1690, the English political economist Nicholas Barbon wrote that “Men fight more upon equal Terms than formerly; and like two Skilful [sic] Fencers, fight a long Time, before either gets Advantage... But now both Parties are Equally Disciplin’d and Arm’d; and the Successes of War are not so great; Victory is seldom gained without some Considerable Loss to the Conquerer.”<sup>5</sup> The social cost of lost lives, and increased demand on scarce resources, put severe strain on colonial communities.

As English merchant-writers like Josiah Child and Charles Davenant noted, military officers and government officials could not consistently predict the duration of conflict, and so they had difficulties effectively forecasting the revenue that they would need to cover the

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<sup>2</sup> J.P. Carswell, *The South Sea Bubble* (London: Cresset Press, 1960), 11; Josiah Child, *A New Discourse of Trade* (London: J. Hodges, 1690), 209.

<sup>3</sup> In the eighteenth century, British military spending ranged from 75-80% of annual public expenditure. During major wars during this period, public military expenditures subsumed between 10 and 15% of all British income. John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, Money, and the English State, 1688-1783* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 40, 137.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Mun, *England's Treasure by Foreign Trade* (London, 1718); Geoffrey Parker, *The Military Revolution: Military Innovation and the Rise of the West, 1500-1800* 2nd edn. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 45-81; Peter Wilson, “European Warfare 1450-1815,” in Jeremy Black ed., *War in the Early Modern World* (London: Routledge, 1999), 177-205.

<sup>5</sup> Nicholas Barbon, “A Discourse of Trade (1690),” in Gavin John Adams, ed., *Nicholas Barbon: The Complete Works: Economics, Trade, Building and Insurance* (New York: Newton Page, 2019), 122-123.

necessary expenditures.<sup>6</sup> The cumbersome methods of revenue collection in both England and the North American colonies relied on coopting local assemblies, proprietors, or tax farmers to extract revenue from local populations and then direct it toward some governing body like the Exchequer in England. Revenue collection through tiered networks of government put two substantial constraints on spending for warfare.<sup>7</sup> First, local governing bodies and tax farmers took a portion of revenues for their own maintenance and welfare that otherwise might have found its way into that part of the public purse directed toward war. Second, interaction between local revenue collectors and the higher-ups of the imperial state produced friction between the colonial and metropolitan interests over the allocation of funds.<sup>8</sup> Determining a concerted policy between collectors and spenders, along with the transference of revenue from subjects through a network of local institutions, delayed the efficient functioning of English military forces.

Quick and powerful supply lines and financial liquidity increasingly determined the outcomes of wars. In the North American colonies, this concern for speed developed into a largely autonomous system for wartime allocation by the eighteenth century because of three factors: (1) the reliance on provincial populations to provide personnel and provisions to the sites of conflict closest to where they lived, (2) the costs of shipping and financing the allocation of resources across the Atlantic from England, and (3) the reliance on colonial wartime intelligence given the relationship between speed of communication and physical proximity to enemy territory like French Canada.

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<sup>6</sup> Charles Davenant, *An Essay upon Ways and Means of Supplying War* (London: Jacob Tomson, 1695), 40-43.

<sup>7</sup> Massachusetts. Treasury Office. Province of the Massachusetts-Bay. Massachusetts Historical Society. Microform. Boston, MA.

<sup>8</sup> John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State, 1688-1783* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 92-93; Julian Hoppit, *The Dreadful Monster and its Poor Relations: Taxing, Spending and the United Kingdom, 1707-2021* (New York: Penguin, 2021), 1-34; *Britain's Political Economies: Parliament and Economic Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), xiv, 5, 10, 14-15, 22-25.

Reliance on autonomy of colonial populations and provincial government to fund England's military during the Nine Years' War faced strong opposition from both merchants as well as policymakers in England. These merchants and policymakers directed this concern particularly at New England, where powerful local assemblies, ministers, and some governors interpreted imperial mandates loosely. Colonial leaders could defy policy from Whitehall when they felt it did not adhere to the customary rights they had exercised.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps most problematic from the perspective of England's increasingly commercially minded elite, New England did not conform to a colonial model whereby planters and merchants extracted local commodities for export to the imperial metropole. Contemporaries noted that fisheries proved an exception to this rule, but the monetary value of fish exports did not compete with the value of staple crops from the Southern colonies and West Indies. The commodity trade between New and Old England created only weak direct economic linkages. Instead, New England primarily competed with England as an importer, especially from the West Indies, and derived most of its net regional income from providing shipping and commercial services to other colonies.<sup>10</sup> Josiah Child called New England "the most prejudicial Plantation to the Kingdom of England," for this reason. He called particular attention New England's lack of conformity to imperial economic controls of trade as outlined under the Navigation Acts.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Bernard Bailyn, *The New England Merchants in the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Harper, 1955), 143-198; J. H. Baker, *An Introduction to English Legal History*, 4th edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 15, 23-26, 31-32, 223-226; Carl Bridenbaugh, *Cities in the Wilderness: The First Century of Urban Life in America 1625-1742* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1964), 52-53; Patrick Crowhurst, *The Defence of British Trade 1689-1815* (Folkestone: Dawson, 1977), 104-137; Nuala Zahedieh, *The Capital and the Colonies: London and the Atlantic Economy 1660-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 27-54, 80-85, 137-143.

<sup>10</sup> John J. McCusker and Russell R. Menard, *The Economy of British America, 1607-1789* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 92-111.

<sup>11</sup> Child, *A New Discourse of Trade*, 193.

From the perspective of the early modern English state, lack of colonial conformity hindered metropolitan statecraft. Institutional incoherence limited the ability for imperial policymakers to manipulate colonial action according to a unified vision. James C. Scott writes that states aim to simplify and regiment components of society to make them “legible.” The legible state, in Scott’s formulation, abstracted social information, which then allowed a modernized, increasingly scientific, state to reform societies to match that abstract vision. He writes that the “social simplifications thus introduced not only permitted a more finely tuned system of taxation and conscription but also greatly enhanced state capacity.”<sup>12</sup>

Scott specifically writes that capitalism was a component of this modernist tendency toward homogenization because it abstracted material into abstract commodities with market value. His interpretation explains modern states’ conquest of the organic diversity of a premodern or “nonstate” society. In this social model, utilitarian abstraction for the purpose of state management tends toward radical simplification that uproots symbiotic relationships. State authorities have limited understanding of the complexities of such relationships and, consequently, negative ramifications can be severe. Scott provides examples of complications that arise during the state’s efforts to enforce uniformity on human populations across large distances, including the specific problems of fiscal conformity under state taxation. He argues that state management necessitates consideration of resistance and revolt. Taxation requires both knowledge of economic conditions along with the perception of subjects’ willingness to accept tax policies. The state, consequently, draws on coercive tools in addition to information collection to transform society according to a unified plan. Crisis occurs when crude state

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<sup>12</sup> James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 2-4, 15.

intelligence jeopardizes state security when misidentifying the demands it can place on its constituents such as if it were to coerce excessive contributions to state revenue.<sup>13</sup>

Scott's concept of the modernizing state correctly identifies the information gathering activities of the early modern British state. However, this conception misses the extent to which coercive authority lagged state intentions in the process of modernization in the case of late-seventeenth century New England. In the Massachusetts Bay Colony, state function relied considerably on strategic application of both incentives and coercive punishments to meet, as near as possible, the vision of a metropolitan rule. Such activity relied extensively on coopting individuals with conflicting goals, competing strategies, and regionally specific knowledge. Strong core-periphery models of early modern state creation fail to account for the regional authority allowed under regimes reliant on aggregated, incomplete, perspectives of dispersed individuals.<sup>14</sup> Scott's model, therefore, presumes that centers of state power imposed their influence onto populations lacking the institutional organization to take on state roles themselves. Colonial British America, with its well-developed provincial governments, in contrast, requires adapting Scott's theories of the modern information state to account for such polycentric development.

Integration of commercial actors into the imperial state strengthened the influence of metropolitan administrators. However, this combination of interests forced the state to compromise its centralized visions to gain their engagement and support. Merchants expected *quid pro quo* relationships with the state. This included both state sponsorship of their firms'

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<sup>13</sup> Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, 8, 13-4, 20-1, 24-5, 29-30.

<sup>14</sup> Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System I: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 224-99; Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System II: Mercantilism and the Consolidation of the European World-Economy, 1600-1750*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 244-89.

activities along with active promotion of prominent merchants into political positions under the crown and Parliament. Commercial policies enacted under Charles II arose largely from merchant agitation for commercial expansion into the Atlantic. During the Interregnum, merchants supporting West Indian expeditions under the Cromwell administration, like Martin Noell and Thomas Povey, held roles like Farm of the General Customs as well as farm for excise of multiple specific trades. These farm positions allowed merchant-statesmen to accumulate commission payments from public revenue, effectively inserting themselves into the structure of the state fiscal system. Noell, a member of the East India Company, served as a de facto banker to the government through the Restoration. He paid the salaries and public expenses of state appointees often through personal loans and letters of credit. His vessels carried letters of marque allowing privateering of enemy vessels, making his ships a part of England's military force. Such activity allowed Noell to accumulate great wealth, particularly in the colonies. After the English capture of Jamaica in 1655, he obtained a grant of 20,000 acres on the island.<sup>15</sup> Access to private capital and knowledge augmented state capacity but reduced centralized state autonomy by outsourcing metropolitan command to individuals, firms, and corporate bodies.

In 1690, the New England colonies had a population of around 87,000 people. Many of these colonists lived in large coastal towns like Boston and Salem, but with a 6.2% population increase over the following decade, colonists put increasing pressure on outlying territory.<sup>16</sup> Settlers moved into Maine and sought outposts with access to fisheries along the northeastern seaboard. This territorial expansion yielded disputes over resources with the French and Abenaki, which Bay Colonists interpreted as a threat to the security of their colony. A colonist and ship

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<sup>15</sup> Charles M. Andrews, *British Committees, Commissions, and Councils of Trade and Plantations*, 21-58; Michael J. Braddick, "The Rise of the Fiscal State" in *A Companion to Stuart Britain*, ed. Barry Coward (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 69-87.

<sup>16</sup> McCusker and Menard, *The Economy of British America*, 102-4.



captain from near the Kennebec River, William Phips, positioned himself as a leader of an endeavor to supplant the French in Canada by capturing the prominent towns and military outposts of Port Royal and then Quebec. This plan received popular support from colonists and political backing from the local ministerial elite.<sup>17</sup> Fortifying frontier towns against French predation from the sea entailed significant costs which fell largely on local populations. Requisitions on towns placed substantial strain between provincial and municipal levels of government. This strain produced conflict during war. For example, in 1690 Marblehead residents formed a mob to prevent Captain John Alden from completing orders from the colonial government of Massachusetts to impress two large guns from a ship in the Marblehead harbor.<sup>18</sup>

Representatives in town assemblies and the General Court agreed that an offensive to wrest control over French territory in Canada was essential for Massachusetts Bay's security. Many colonists noted specifically the burden of taxation they experienced under this state of prolonged threat, which administrators and military officers recognized even outside of Massachusetts.<sup>19</sup> On the fiscal burden that Massachusetts faced in 1690, Captain Francis Nicholson wrote from Virginia to the Earl of Nottingham in England that "there hath been great Taxes and likely to be greater, the Countrey [sic] very much impoverished, which makes the people very uneasy, and there are great Divisions amongst them." He continued on this theme of this burden on trade in Massachusetts, stating: "All their honest men have little or no trade but the others...manage now as formerly an Unlawfull [sic] Trade, for I am inform'd by severall

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<sup>17</sup> Howard H. Peckham, *The Colonial Wars, 1689-1762* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 36-38.

<sup>18</sup> Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Commerce and Culture: The Maritime Communities of Colonial Massachusetts, 1690-1750* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1984), 226.

<sup>19</sup> The Massachusetts Treasury office organized taxation of local sterling money for payments made during the 1690-1700 period. Local tax collectors collected money on their own accounts and then were reimbursed provincial legislators and town selectmen. For example, see Massachusetts. Treasury Office. Province of the Massachusetts-Bay, ss. James Taylor, gent. Treasurer and receiver general for His Majesty's said province. 1701. Massachusetts Historical Society. Microform. Boston, MA.

[sic] that they have vessels come directly from the Canaries and Cadiz, whither they carry Tabaccos. They have also a Trade with Newfoundland, (where suppose they get French Goods).”<sup>20</sup> Colonial leaders saw that the financial costs of colonial warfare fell substantially on the local population. Nicholson recognized that high fiscal burdens turned compliant subjects into evaders of the trade restrictions mandated under the Navigation Acts. New England traders’ purchase of Spanish tobacco threatened tobacco-producing colonies like Virginia. Critically, this illicit trade decreased public revenue accrued through duties on trade at a time of increased public spending.

In late-seventeenth-century England, merchants and administrators raised the rates of duties to the point that it incentivized both illicit commerce as well as disincentivizing legal trade on which administrators placed the duty. Writing on the topic of funding conflict during prolonged engagements of warfare, Charles Davenant observed, that “in Taxing the People, we should have regard not to create Disaffection to the Government... We should likewise see that our present Gifts should not, in their Consequences, bring Damage to the ordinary Revenue of the Crown; for, in such cases, we give of one hand, and take away of the other.”<sup>21</sup> Davenant expressed a core problem that administrators faced in maintaining a coherent fiscal state during periods of high wartime expenditure. If they set taxes too high, colonial traders would resort to illicit trade or leave the market thus reducing revenue to the crown. Writing on such effects from beer and ale duties in England, Davenant wrote: “This great Decrease is, by the Commissioners of the Revenue, chiefly attributed to the new Additional Duties, which in the Country have made numbers of Victuallers, in every County, leave of their Trade.”<sup>22</sup> Because policing compliance

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<sup>20</sup> Francis Nicholson, “Letter to the Earl of Nottingham,” November 4, 1690, Correspondence, CO 5/1305, The National Archives, Kew, London, UK.

<sup>21</sup> Davenant, *An Essay upon Ways and Means of Supplying War*, 30.

<sup>22</sup> Davenant, *An Essay upon Ways and Means of Supplying War*, 46-7.

itself required revenue, the seventeenth-century English imperial fiscal state faced a significant practical limit to its authority. This cost of enforcement was particularly high colonial regions most distant from the seats of central government and capital accumulation in Whitehall.

Historical sociologist Charles Tilly defines states as “coercion-wielding organizations that are distinct from households and kinship groups and exercise clear priority in some respects over all other organizations within substantial territories.”<sup>23</sup> This definition coheres with the coercive emphasis in the definition of the state proposed by Max Weber as a community that “successfully claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory.”<sup>24</sup> Given the emphasis on the successful projection of force in these definitions, the late seventeenth-century English empire did not fall clearly within these conceptualizations of a unified state. This limited capacity of the early modern British imperial state created a space a space for local administration, and delegation of public financial services, in colonies like Massachusetts, allowing for autonomous provincial zones.

In cases where Davenant’s upper limit to taxation – the threshold beyond which traders would exit the legal market – colonial leaders sought a popular mandate within their provinces to impose taxes to meet local as well as imperial military ends. Such local funding of defense in the colonies allowed provincial leaders to direct the coercive capacity of their states, demands that sometimes put them in competition with the imperial metropole’s claims to local revenue. Such a conflict occurred between 1690 and 1694 in Massachusetts under the military and civil authority of William Phips, and his supporters, who mobilized predominantly domestic colonial resources

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<sup>23</sup> Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990-1992* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1990), 1.

<sup>24</sup> Max Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. eds. H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946), 78.

against the French and their Native allies in Canada. They then took on autonomous executive authority over military and fiscal administration.

In the summer of 1690, a force composed of some 2,500 New England colonists under William Phips and John Wally left Massachusetts with the intention of taking control of French-Canadian territory, including the city of Quebec. The failed expedition suffered from inadequate supplies, the inability to transport supplies efficiently from place to place, and a problem of maintaining a concerted force of militia forces in prolonged siege warfare. These challenges affirm Child's characterization of seventeenth-century war as fundamentally about the mobilization of resources through financial channels. Most of the resources Phips and Wally struggled to obtain and move, including personnel and provisions, came directly from the domestic colonial economy. Given the state of colonial development and capacity at that time, such demands took a substantial toll, and precluded indefinite engagement in the conflict. The Massachusetts minister John Wise, who witnessed the expedition under Phips wrote that the "Want or Scarseness [sic] of Provision might be a great Disadvantage and Discouradgm [sic] under some of our last Thoughts, our Stoares [sic] being so far Spent and the Countrey [sic] not capable of Recruiting us now upon easy termes [sic] might much disadvantage us from taking such Measures as we might have thought of when we were put by our first Attempts..."<sup>25</sup> Projecting power with enlisted colonists and resources long enough to enact an effective siege proved prohibitive even over the limited distance between Massachusetts and Quebec, let alone across the Atlantic from England.

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<sup>25</sup> John Wise, *Two Narratives of the Expedition Against Quebec, A.D. 1690, under Sir William Phips* (Cambridge: John Wilson and Son, 1902), 6.

Moving supplies, especially fieldpieces, proved a key factor in the failure of the siege. The key failure arose from an overextension of supply lines whereby the Lieutenant-General John Wally landed the force's field pieces at a location where the soldiers could not easily defend them after the force made a partial retreat. While this placement of guns was a strategic blunder that Wise attributed in part to Wally's cowardice, this failure also indicates that whole campaign the attempt depended on a single successful offensive against Quebec City. This single offensive depleted the expedition's limited stock of manufactures and other supplies, and Phips did not have access to additional resources to sustain it. In the years following this military failure, Phips made arguments to this effect in his requests to the Lords of Trade to obtain a larger quantity of weapons, ammunition, and large ships in addition to the funds necessary to construct a fort 1.5 leagues from Quebec. From such a fort, they could pursue a more sustained offensive given the reduced costs of attacking over a shorter distance. Phips additionally requested greater colonial autonomy for engaging in a subsequent attack, specifically on the issue of raising money locally, asking that the "People of New England [be] restored to their former Rights and privileges, so as to enable them to raise men and money as before they have done."<sup>26</sup> The Lords of Trade did not meet these requests and Phips made no subsequent attack according to his modified plans after the failure of 1690.<sup>27</sup> Wise reiterated Phips's concerns after the event, especially concerning the shortage of ammunition, stating "in all probability our Ammunition was not at first [proportionable] to our Undertaking."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> William Phips, "Proposal for the Liberty of Coyne in New England," November 9, 1691, Petition, CO 5/856, The National Archives, Kew, London, UK.

<sup>27</sup> Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Commerce and Culture*, 54-55; C. P. Stacey, "Phips, Sir William," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 1 (University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003).

<sup>28</sup> Wise, *Two Narratives of the Expedition Against Quebec*, 6.

In line with Phips's request for greater fiscal and monetary autonomy in a future attack on the French in Canada, the initial failure of the summer of 1690 arose largely from the insufficiency of financial means to pay troops and spend on supplies. Phips and the Massachusetts government funded the siege using ad hoc methods that relied on a short-term emission of colonial paper currency with no long-term plan to back the notes with anything other than public credit. Eventually colonists that had received these notes, including soldiers that had received them for pay, demanded that they receive silver for the notes. The Bay Colony government had no public bullion reserves to meet these outstanding demands, and so wealthy colonial elites, particularly William Phips, paid off these notes in silver from their own private accounts.<sup>29</sup> The colonial leaders lacked the permission and means to pursue this method of public finance again. To regain it, Massachusetts formally requested the restoration of their right to mint coin within the colony in November 1691, a freedom it lacked since the crown closed the Massachusetts mint in 1682.

In a petition to England in November of 1691, Phips and Increase Mather offered several reasons why "New England's liberty to coin its own money" would benefit the colonists, particularly in their military operations against the French and their Native allies. First, Phips argued that the colonies struggled under conditions of monetary scarcity, whereby they had inadequate bullion-based money beyond a small supply of Spanish coins.<sup>30</sup> Some historians have rejected the claims regularly put forward by North American colonists of a persistent shortage of money. Advocates for this position argue that trade imbalances causing the money supply to leave the colonies is either statistically overstated or that the colonists would have made up this

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<sup>29</sup> Peckham, *The Colonial Wars*, 38.

<sup>30</sup> Phips, "Proposal for the Liberty of Coyne."

shortage in their trade with bullion imports from the West Indies they imported Spanish and Portuguese gold coins.<sup>31</sup> While such Iberian coinage does appear regularly in accounts through the colonial period, the limited supply of these coins did not prove sufficient to provide liquidity for the public expenditures necessary to fund war. The insufficiency specifically of public reserves is evident in the out-of-pocket burden on private subjects to remit on the public debt underpinning the short-term paper emissions of 1690. Available sterling could not cover the costs of Massachusetts's operations, and so Phips's and Mather's petition called attention to the deficit and its impairment of the province's ability to take offensive action during the Nine Years' War.

Sovereignty depended on universal recognition of state-sponsored money. The right of Bay Colonists to coin money during conflicts had emerged as a significant source of conflict between colonial leaders and crown representatives since the early years of the Glorious Revolution, especially under the authority of Dominion of New England governor Edmund Andros. John Wise, for example, provoked a public debate after his proposal to establish a private land bank to insure an adequate colonial money supply. Wise also protested the Andros government, which led the Dominion of New England government to imprison Wise in 1689.<sup>32</sup> The English state removed Andros in April 1689, which allowed colonists greater effective autonomy. However, the formal prohibition against colonial monetary autonomy remained.

Phips and Mather's second argument for the benefit of the colonial right to mint its own coins mirrored that of Nicholson and Davenant on the unintended negative effects of commercial

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<sup>31</sup> Richard P. Crowhurst, *The Defence of British Trade* (Folkestone: Dawson, 1977), 120; John J. McCusker and Russell R. Menard, *The Economy of British America, 1607-1789: With Supplemental Bibliography* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 338-339; Farley Grubb, "The Circulating Medium of Exchange in Colonial Pennsylvania, 1729-1775: New Estimates of Monetary Composition, Performance, and Economic Growth," *Explorations in Economic History* 41 (Oct. 2004).

<sup>32</sup> Jonathan Edward Barth, "'A Peculiar Stampe of Our Owne': The Massachusetts Mint and the Battle over Sovereignty, 1652-1691," *The New England Quarterly* 87, no. 3 (September 2014): 490-525; Heyrman, *Commerce and Culture*, 13-14.

regulation. Namely, excessive pressures from England to conform with centralized economic plans incentivized colonists to skirt the law. Just as high duties in turbulent war conditions encouraged smuggling, Phips and Mather argued that dependence on Spanish money led to fraud and counterfeit. In a period where people often clipped the bullion content off the edge of coins for sale while retaining the legal rate of the stamped coin itself, illegal debasement of coins could eventually make them unacceptable for payment at face value.<sup>33</sup> Consequently, Phips and Mather, in their second argument for the provincial right to coin, requested the delegation of fiscal autonomy from metropolitan England to the colony. Even under the provincial autonomy granted to Massachusetts in its 1691 charter, severing London's fiscal regime by granting monetary independence to a colony proved antithetical to the interests of the crown, Parliament, and the Lords of Trade regardless of the potential costs of fraud in North America.<sup>34</sup>

Phips and Mather made a third argument that colonial New England's lack of money limited the extent of colonial trade. Insufficient liquidity hindered colonial exchange by necessitating additional steps and transaction costs to parties making commercial transactions.<sup>35</sup> Exchange without what contemporaries referred to as "ready money," or physical units of specie, meant that parties had to negotiate on credit. This demanded careful bookkeeping, determination of interest rates and the assessment of a borrower's creditworthiness.<sup>36</sup> Phips and Mather pointed

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<sup>33</sup> Jonathan Barth, *The Currency of Empire: Money and Power in Seventeenth-Century English America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2021), 96-7, 125, 139, 200-8, 241, 258, 264, 274; Christine Desan, *Making Money: Coin, Currency, and the Coming of Capitalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 237, 257-8, 263, 314, 321, 341, 355-7, 365, 372; John J. McCusker, *Money & Exchange in Europe & America, 1600-1775: A Handbook* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978), 4, 8.

<sup>34</sup> Bernard Bailyn, *The New England Merchants in the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Harper, 1955), 170-6; Richard L. Bushman, *King and People in Provincial Massachusetts* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 11, 26, 33, 86, 90-2, 102-6, 111-4, 190; Mark Peterson, *The City-State of Boston: The Rise and Fall of an Atlantic Power, 1630-1865* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 172-3, 188-93, 201, 209, 347, 358; "The Charter of Massachusetts Bay – 1691," The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History, and Diplomacy, Lillian Goldman Law Library, Yale Law School, New Haven, CT.

<sup>35</sup> Phips, "Proposal for the Liberty of Coyne."

<sup>36</sup> Davenant, *An Essay upon Ways and Means of Supplying War*, 40-3.



to the specific barrier to trade that lack of a strong medium of exchange imposed on those who hired labor with wages, like shopkeepers and artisans who could not easily hire on credit.<sup>37</sup> In the context of funding war, and the time-sensitive need for immediate allocation of large amounts of resources, military outcomes depended on the speed and extent of trade directed toward the war effort determined military outcomes, much as Child and Davenant argued. Both authors proposed similar solutions to what they saw as the same fundamental hindrance to a nation's inability to fund war.

Both Child and Davenant saw limitations in using the circulation of money the means of organizing military resources for the nation. In England, however, where the state practiced full legal monetary autonomy, Child and Davenant urged legislators to use their statutory powers to influence the legal price of money, or the rate at which its holders lent it for use at interest. Davenant specifically recommended Parliament set the maximum legal rates of interest on money lent at six percent whereas he observed the price of "Interest-money" moving in the range of eight to ten percent such that those who benefited were the "Usurers, who are the Drones of a Common-wealth, living upon the Honey without any Labour" and should "be brought in to bear their proportion of the Common Burthen."<sup>38</sup> High interest incentivized those with money to hold it as a valuable asset unless paid to part with it at high prices. This limited the extent to which the money circulated to provide liquidity amongst merchants and other traders. Requests for legislative intervention like Davenant's illustrate a stark dichotomy between England and the colonies. Whereas Davenant, an English merchant, could indicate a means by which a governing body could intervene to promote the capacity for his society to support the costs of war, Phips

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<sup>37</sup> Phips, "Proposal for the Liberty of Coyne."

<sup>38</sup> Davenant, *An Essay upon Ways and Means of Supplying War*, 111.

and Mather had no coherent monetary system in which to intervene. The monetary systems of England and New England already existed as two separate spheres in 1690 with divergent capacities to exercise monetary control.

In addition to the divergent monetary norms between Old and New England, divergent administrative systems developed between the two regions as well. According to the definitions of state proposed by Weber and Tilly, and the Hobbesian hierarchical state model proposed during the English Civil War, polities depend on ultimate deference to some sovereign power with capacity to determine the rightful projection of coercive force. Some merchant-writers like Josiah Child supported such sentiments with statements likening punctual payments of public debt to the health of the allegorical body of the state: “such fatal stops being to the body politick like great obstructions of the liver and spleen to the body natural, which not only procure ill habits, but sometimes desperate and acute diseases, as well as chronic.”<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, Child decried division within the state, which he believed kept people continually in fear and “consequently apt to Sedition and Rebellion.”<sup>40</sup> His perspective commended fiscal coherence as stable, peaceful, and conducive to the health of society. However, while such ideals could perhaps be applied to the state within England, transatlantic distance necessitated the use of colonial state capacity. Inability to project influence from the metropole made a uniform system, under a single fiscal regime, prohibitive.

Child’s conception of the state and its finances reflected imperial norms and the centralizing impulses of state actors. While forced to accept a degree of colonial autonomy in fiscal and military matters, London maintained a threshold past which it could not tolerate

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<sup>39</sup> Child, *A New Discourse of Trade*, 184.

<sup>40</sup> Child, *A New Discourse of Trade*, 153-54.

deviation. English officials did not tolerate deviation on the questions of currency and revenue which linked the Atlantic economy back to a central node at London. Consequently, colonists' attempts at fiscal autonomy provoked strong reactions from the Lords of Trade and other institutions of English government. Although delegation to colonial military authorities, like Phips, maximized military efficiency, England's imperial state drew the line at permitting provincial fiscal independence because such autonomy challenged metropolitan fiscal sovereignty.

Despite the failed attempt on Quebec in 1690, New England exhibited a number of strengths in its ability to pursue conflict against hostile forces in Canada. These capacities drew resources from domestic economic development and local networks operating autonomously from metropolitan oversight. First, the central loci of decision making for colonial warfare tended to be proximate to sites of conflict. This gave colonial commanders like those of the 1690 expedition significantly more flexibility to make decisions with respect to the movement of people and resources. It also gave them the ability to effectively delegate authority. This capacity to delegate was strengthened by the participation of preeminent executive authorities as military commanders present at sites of conflict, as was the case with William Phips's various military and government roles between 1690 and 1694. Examples of this are evident in the military success preceding the failed Quebec expedition. Speed of acquisition and deployment of local resources from Boston allowed for the capture of Port Royal from the French earlier in the summer of 1690. The resources included two large ships with sixty-two guns, 417 men, along with an additional three smaller ketches and a bark under the command of William Phips and

Cyprian Southack. The rapidity of the event left the French unprepared, and the force captured the fort at Port Royal with no effective opposition.<sup>41</sup>

The role of Boston and colonial port towns in such conflicts indicates how colonial government and capital allowed local authorities to act as a de facto state. On the relationship between urban centers and state capacity, historian Charles Tilly writes that “cities are loci of capital accumulation, furthermore, gives their political authorities access to capital, credit, and control over hinterlands.”<sup>42</sup> Boston performed such a role in the campaign against Port Royal. Phips launched these vessels from Boston with resources derived from its hinterland, including residents to serve as soldiers and sailors who manned the expedition. By orchestrating campaigns from Boston, Phips and other commanders could delegate, divide, and repurpose its forces without appeal up a long chain of command. For example, following the successful capture of Port Royal, and the transportation of captured ammunition and other stores back to Boston, Phips redirected forces under Cyprian Southack’s command towards Cape Sable, a strategic site along Acadia’s Atlantic coast, and Newfoundland, where the French and English contested access to the region’s valuable fishery. There, the deputy force engaged in small conflicts along the coast, allowing Southack to capture several small French outposts. Southack reported that he had “cleard [sic] some parts of Newfoundland from the French.”<sup>43</sup> News of this event only reached England via transmission from Southack when he presented it in a petition requesting a formal advancement of position within the “Royal Services.” Southack’s successes did not arise from a central directive from Boston or Whitehall. Information concerning these conflicts traveled from the colony to the metropole, not vice versa. Local commanders made critical strategic decisions

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<sup>41</sup> “Petition from New England and Newfoundland,” Petition, June 28, 1690, Correspondence, CO 5/1081, The National Archives, Kew.

<sup>42</sup> Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States*, 51.

<sup>43</sup> “Petition from New England,” 1690.

in Massachusetts and executed these strategies at sites of conflict, with little input or support from central authority.<sup>44</sup>

The successes of Phips and Southack, operating with significant autonomy in the late spring and early summer of 1690, indicate that colonial military endeavors to fight for territory during King William's War achieved success when the colonists pursued more limited aims. Unlike the failed 1690 expedition, these successful attacks took the form of quick assaults with fixed costs rather than prolonged engagements that required consistent supplies and spending. The failure of the siege of Quebec arose from a shortage of manufactures and, most specifically, field pieces. The New England economy centered on agrarian production, shipping, shipbuilding, and fishing. Firearms were a primary component of a successful expedition and required importation from England. Seventeenth-century New England had limited capacity to produce manufactures, and the primary attempt to establish a proto-industrial base there had failed with the ironworks on the Saugus River in the 1650s.<sup>45</sup> Thereafter, New England could not manufacture its own iron products, including weapons. England had this capacity but lacked the ability to supply implements of war in sufficient quantities to New England forces.

As Phips and Southack's military successes in Acadia and Newfoundland prior to the failed expedition against Quebec attest, colonial forces proved capable of executing small attacks with limited financial requirements. Colonial leaders operated autonomously as a de facto norm, with little capacity for the English imperial state to give directives. Importantly, these same

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<sup>44</sup> Cyprian Southack generated significant geographic notes for military raids around Nova Scotia and Newfoundland. Much of the local military intelligence was gathered and communicated between officers during these expeditions. See Cyprian Southack, Cyprian Southack letters, 1697-1705, microfilm, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA.

<sup>45</sup> E.N. Hartley, *Ironworks on the Saugus: The Lynn and Braintree Ventures of the Company of Undertakers of the Ironworkers in New England* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1957), 215-71.

colonial leaders directed the finances allowing for local conflict, although this meant working within the fiscal constraints of the colonial economy. In the two years following the Quebec expedition, the Lords of Trade recognized the need to grant additional powers to local leaders to enable them to conduct wars from the colony. At the time, the Lords of Trade saw no threat to state autonomy in allowing substantial decision-making power among colonists given that wartime expediency made it necessary. However, within three years, the ramifications of this provincial authority produced reconsiderations in the metropole when provincial government exercised increasing authority on fiscal and judicial matters. The quick rise and removal of William Phips as governor and preeminent military leader took place during a period of provincial self-determination. In this short period, Bay colonists internalized authority and resources in response to the military threat of the French and Native forces from the north. This included exercising authority in courts outside imperial oversight and challenging crown representatives tasked with maintaining fiscal linkages between the colony and London through customs duties. It also included provincialization on matters of defense and allocation of public resources as a response to the enforced political union with other colonies.

On November 25, 1691, the English Attorney General, Sir George Treby, approved William Phips's commission as Captain General and Governor-in-Chief over the jurisdiction of the "colony of Massachusetts Bay, the Colony of New Plymouth, the Province of Main in New England, the territory of Acadie or Nova Scotia, and the Lands lying between the Territory of Nova Scotia and the province of Main aforesaid into One Real Province, by the name of the Province of the Massachusetts Bay in New England."<sup>46</sup> The commission granted Phips full

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<sup>46</sup> "Draught of Mr. William Phips Commission Approved by the Attorney General," Commission, November 25, 1691, CO 5/856, The National Archives, Kew, London, UK.

power to judge all offenders in capital and criminal matters, to grant pardons, and, critically, to remit all fines and forfeitures including captured vessels under maritime law. Phips had “full Power and authority to erect one or more court or courts administered within our said Province and Territory for the hearing and determining of all marine and other causes and matters proper.”<sup>47</sup> The sole stated exception to this grant of authority mandated that Phips had to refer all cases of treason to London.

Phips’s commission also granted him full power to levy and command military forces to any location within the stated territory and to construct fortifications and supply them with ammunition and ordnance. The approved commission granted Phips the formal military position of Vice-Admiral for the “seas and Castles about your Government according to such Commissions Authorities and Instructions as you shall receive from Ourselves or from our High Admirall [sic]...”<sup>48</sup> While the commission established a chain of deference to these authorities in London, Phips retained most practical powers that he had practiced prior to the commission including appointing and directing the activities of ship captains. The position also allowed Phips to punish “any offender or offenders which shall be mutinous, seditious, disorderly or any way unruly, either at sea or during the time of their abode or residence in any of the Ports, Harbours, or Bays of our said Province and Territory,” the exception being that Phips could not prosecute officers acting under direct authority of the High Admiralty.<sup>49</sup> The commission granted Phips significant power, although as the events prior to the commission indicate, Phips had exercised significant power over military matters before this formal recognition.

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<sup>47</sup> “Draught of Mr. William Phips Commission,” 1691.

<sup>48</sup> “Draught of Mr. William Phips Commission,” 1691.

<sup>49</sup> “Draught of Mr. William Phips Commission,” 1691.

In the year following the approval of Phips's commission, he made full utilization of his authority to procure wartime necessities. On July 2, 1692, Phips released an order to secure colonists who failed to appear at a militia muster to the officers of the Regiment of Boston. Phips combined civil and military authority to make demands of the local population. In addition to his initial order, Phips added that "all Constables of Boston and Charlestown are to be aiding & Assisting in the Execution of this warrant."<sup>50</sup> He further instructed constables to aid in the collection of duties that merchants had avoided paying to that time, thus addressing at a provincial level those deviations from mercantile law that Nicholson had warned of two years prior. In emphasizing the role of local constables in enforcing military participation and commercial compliance, Phips assumed the coercive capacity of a state consolidated within the province.

Phips used his executive authority to allocate resources in support of the provincial population rather than participating more broadly in the Atlantic anglosphere. For example, in September 1693, Phips responded to a proposal for the meeting of the colonial governments of New England, Virginia, Maryland, and Pennsylvania to "correct and agree upon a certain quota of men and money for the defense of the frontiers"<sup>51</sup> of New York. Phips rejected this proposal of a defensive union protecting an endangered region of the colonies. He cited the pressing need to retain resources within Massachusetts. Phips presented two reasons for his refusal to respond to the request. First, he noted "the Epidemical and mortal sicknesses and other calamitous occurents [sic] within this Province."<sup>52</sup> Outbreaks of epidemic diseases like smallpox and typhus often

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<sup>50</sup> "Copy of Sir William Phips's Order for Securing Such as Failed to Appear at the Militia Muster, and a Letter to Phips About Military Matters," Order and Correspondence, July 26, 1692, CO 5/857, The National Archives, Kew, London, UK.

<sup>51</sup> William Phips, "Letters from Sir William Phips on Sir Francis Wheler's Defeat by the French," Correspondence, September 18-25, 1693, CO 5/857, The National Archives, Kew, London, UK.

<sup>52</sup> Phips, "Phips on Wheler's Defeat," 1693.



correlated with military engagements in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This correlation was due to large displacements of otherwise isolated populations coming into close and sudden contact. Outbreaks put significant costs on populations and resources.<sup>53</sup>

In his decision not to participate in the inter-colonial defensive union, Phips also argued that Massachusetts's participation had become unnecessary since Connecticut had already made an "alteration" to their colonial militia to transfer command to New York for the defense of Albany. Phips previously had command of these Connecticut forces and argued that he would have directed them to aid New York had he retained command. Given the costs the colony had then recently assumed in terms of both lives and resources, Phips decided that it would not be in the best interest of Massachusetts to participate in any union of defensive forces for the protection of the whole of the American colonies. Instead, he argued that Massachusetts had already taken on too significant a burden in combating French and Indian forces and, furthermore, had done so with little help from the other colonies. He noted specifically the public financial burden that conflict had placed on the colonial government, writing:

besides the many other adversities and losses which have [befallen] this People, the burden of a long and chargeable war has been borne by themselves with very little assistance from their Neighbours; whereby they are so exhausted, and such a vast Debt contracted as is almost insupportable, and still continue to be at a very considerable growing Charge for the necessary guarding of the Frontiers of this Province.<sup>54</sup>

The methods for short term colonial war finance, by Phips's account, fell on the colonial population in the form of a nearly unserviceable public debt. In the money-scarce colonial credit

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<sup>53</sup> Elizabeth A. Fenn, *Pox Americana: The Great Smallpox Epidemic of 1775-82* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001), 44-134; William H. McNeil, *Plagues and Peoples* (New York: Anchor Books, 1998), 48, 51, 58, 273-4; Selectmen of the City of Boston, "Minutes of April 28, 1756," in *Report of the Record Commissioners of the City of Boston Containing the Selectmen's Minutes from 1754 through 1763* (Boston: Rockwell and Churchill, 1887), 38.

<sup>54</sup> Phips, "Phips on Wheler's Defeat," 1693.

economy, expenses entailed credit obligations. Payments on credit necessitated finding some form of revenue to repay debtors. Finding such revenue proved difficult and slow when a significant number of colonists had limited access to liquid funds with which to pay taxes.

The Bay Colony government relied on the more manageable short-term option of paper currency backed by public credit in the case of the Quebec expedition. This method afforded the colonial government greater time between expenditure and remittance so long as the recipient of the public note recognized its validity. However, as the scramble to make payments in silver following the expedition illustrates, recipients did not recognize this colonial paper as valid currency without redeemability in bullion. Consequently, Phips's government faced political pressure for repayment every time it borrowed money to finance a military operation. This pressure placed the difficulties of overcoming monetary scarcity on the local government. Colonial leaders needed to accumulate a reserve to back its currency or borrowing would risk the province's public credibility.

The inadequacies of the colonial fiscal state when the central government in London failed to provide funds to support colonial military initiatives meant that the province had to limit its role in the war. Financial barriers imposed by the limitations of revenue collection urged Phips to limit the colony's military efforts. This was a matter of ability more so than intention. Local priorities prevented participation in a wider inter-colonial defensive coalition even if Phips and the Massachusetts colonial legislature wished to contribute to the defense of other colonies. For example, Massachusetts provided some military aid upon request of Governor John Usher and the Council in New Hampshire in the summer of 1692 for defense "from the Invasion of the

French & Indian Enemy.”<sup>55</sup> This aid, however, did not entail large-scale diversion of resources from Massachusetts, but only seven barrels of powder lent on the short term public credit of New Hampshire and backed by a future promise of mutual assistance with Usher stating that he “shall be ready to assist you as occasion shall offer.”<sup>56</sup> This quid pro quo relationship between Massachusetts and New Hampshire indicates that rather than one sovereign unit consolidated in defense against a common enemy, the colonies practiced a form of weak intercolonial political allegiance based on a calculated exchange of resources. Subsequent territorial conflicts, and rights over military matters, disputed between Phips and Usher illustrate this provincialized relationship between the colonial governments.

On May 26, 1693, Phips wrote to Usher concerning a complaint he had received from the merchant William Pepperell. Pepperell had complained to Phips that New Hampshire colonists had fired on his ship from the fort on Great Island as he transported a cargo to his home port of Kittery in Maine. The New Hampshire forces in the fort then commanded Pepperell, by his own account to “anchor under the Fort and the Master required to enter and unlade his Vessel at said Island, and the Vessel seized, the hatches sealed up, and...armed men put aboard her.”<sup>57</sup> Pepperell stated that the party that confiscated his vessel did so under the authority of a warrant from Usher, though they refused to produce a copy to Phips. Advocating for Pepperell against what he saw as an unjust seizure, Phips wrote that the “Vessell lies there to the great loss and damage of the owner, being ignorant of any Transgression committed.”<sup>58</sup> Phips’s argued that he

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<sup>55</sup> William Phips, “Copy of Sir William Phips's Order for Securing Such as Failed to Appear at the Militia Muster, and a Letter to Phips About Military Matters,” Order and Correspondence, July 26, 1692, CO 5/857, The National Archives, Kew, London, UK.

<sup>56</sup> Phips, “Phips's Order and Letter,” 1692.

<sup>57</sup> William Phips, “Copy of Sir William Phips's Letter to Mr Usher and Mr Addington About the Complaint of William Peprell,” Correspondence, May 26, 1693, CO 5/857, The National Archives, Kew, London, UK.

<sup>58</sup> Phips, “Phips's Letter to Usher and Addington,” 1693.

had received similar prior complaints from other merchants and demanded Usher to inform him the reason why this confiscation occurred. Phips's challenge to Usher arose from his concerns about the geographic extent of his authority and ability to enforce laws in accordance with his commission. On the confiscation of Pepperell's ship, he wrote to Usher:

If it arise from any pretence [sic] or claime [sic] of Jurisdiction over the River on both sides, it's necessary I be made acquainted therewith, and the grounds of such challenge...be accordingly taken for concerting that matter betwixt the Governments here, or that it receive a determination by their Majesties. It being inconsistent with their Majesties' Service and Interest that any misunderstandings happen betwixt their respective Governments.<sup>59</sup>

The dispute reflected a degree of atomization among the colonial governments whereby the needs of particular regions took priority over any consolidated union. Usher and Phips operated colonial governments that conflicted with one another on matters of enforcing rules within territories. Provincial governors like Phips only turned to England in cases when they wished to appeal to external authority to resolve disputes they could not otherwise resolve themselves.

Phips disputed the right for New Hampshire to confiscate Pepperell's cargo, because he argued that doing so was contrary to the intentions of the Crown. However, his attempt at resolving the issue, despite nominal appeal to crown authority, remained an inter-colonial issue resolved between the correspondence of the governors rather than external appeals to England. This event also hinged on the issue of the right to confiscate property, a type of resource collection and military power that Phips's commission had granted him. He disputed a similar right under Usher, however, in Pepperell's case, specifically preempting the argument for right under jurisdiction.<sup>60</sup> Phips took a definitive position as the crown's appointed executive in charge

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<sup>59</sup> Phips, "Phips's Letter to Usher and Addington," 1693.

<sup>60</sup> Phips, "Phips's Letter to Usher and Addington," 1693.

of Massachusetts as well as Pepperell, a colonist within that territory. Phips prioritized Massachusetts's interests in opposition to those of other colonial government, the empire as a whole, and, at times, metropolitan authority in London.

Phips's autonomy as a governor, and his regional support, separated him from, and placed him in conflict with, not only other colonial governments but with the Lords of Trade and Plantations. Beginning in July 1692, the Board of Trade initiated legal proceedings against Phips in response to complaints made against him. Between the summer of 1692 and January 1694, two controversies arose concerning Phips's authority over military and commercial matters in New England. The first of these controversies concerned a naval captain named Richard Short who commanded the military ship *Nonsuch*. Short had an altercation with Phips in 1692 following Phips's accusation that Short had permitted his men to illegally board private merchant vessels where they would work in exchange for wages. According to Phips, Short would take a cut of these wages himself, thus depleting military ships of necessary labor for his own personal gain. Phips also accused Short of misusing funds stored on the ship. Upon docking in Boston, Phips confronted Short about these charges. The confrontation escalated into a physical fight during which, according to the official report of the Lords of Trade, Phips "gave [Short] divers blows with his Cane."<sup>61</sup> Though Phips did not deny this, several witnesses would attest that Short initiated the violent conflict. Phips then had Short imprisoned in the "Common Gaol" where Short argued "he was kept in illegal Imprisonment without Bail or mainprize" for nine months.

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<sup>61</sup> "Material Relating to Legal Proceedings Against Sir William Phips, Governor of Massachusetts Bay, by the Board of Trade, Relating Largely to Several Ships," Petition; Correspondence; Report; Minutes; Legal Document, July 1, 1692-January 19, 1694, CO 5/858, The National Archives, Kew, London, UK.

During this time, Phips did not permit anyone contact with Short unless he first granted permission.<sup>62</sup>

Short remained in prison until freed by a writ of habeas corpus. He then returned to London and made his complaint against Phips. The Lords of Trade began compiling affidavits on the event, including from members of the crew of the *Nonsuch*, who made a characterization of Short as an ill-tempered captain whose incompetence and drunkenness had pushed the crew to the verge of mutiny. They further requested his replacement with a different, more respected, member of the crew named Thomas Dobbins. This characterization of Short concurred with Phips's initial written response to the accusation in which he noted that the crew had led an attempt to replace Short with the ship's gunner while still in New England. Testimony from witnesses to the fight between Phips and Short proved slightly more ambiguous as to fault, but those who made definitive statements on the event concurred to varying degrees that Short, either through physical attack or insult, bore responsibility for first escalating the interaction.<sup>63</sup>

Two considerations in Phips's interaction with Captain Richard Short concerning the *Nonsuch* drew specific scrutiny from the Lords of Trade. First, Phips made the decision to confiscate the money chests onboard the *Nonsuch*. Phips justified this decision because of Short's extravagant spending of public funds allocated to the ship, an accusation which the testimony of the crew supported. However, dispute as to Phips's subsequent transference of these funds appears to have concerned the Lords of Trade. Phips would later respond to this accusation, arguing that he had directed all confiscated funds toward the public service, rather than self-enrichment. Second, the Lords of Trade's report indicated apprehension as to Phips's

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<sup>62</sup> "Legal Proceedings Against Phips," 1692-1694.

<sup>63</sup> "Legal Proceedings Against Phips," 1692-1694.

approach to dealing with the problem. By imprisoning a naval officer, Phips's indicated a lack of deference to established legal procedures. Short accused Phips of using his authority as Vice-Admiral to bring a captured French prize ship to trial in Massachusetts. Much like the confiscated chest from the *Nonsuch*, this accusation also concerned Phips's control over public wealth and resources arising from local authority in cases of military.<sup>64</sup>

The suit against Phips concerning the French prize centered, in part, on the customary share owed to the crew that captured the vessel, which Phips acquired when his court condemned the ship. In New England, where no established legal profession had emerged, adjudication of commercial and military matters depended on local town and colonial authorities. Often these authorities drew what they could from English legal texts, but otherwise operated as independent institutions with rules and customs fundamentally distinct from the more coherent, connected, common law institutions of England or the emerging law practices in official Vice Admiralty courts.<sup>65</sup> English merchants expressed their dismay about this irregular legal system. For example, Josiah Child decried the difficulty of adjudicating commercial disputes in the colonies, and outside of England generally. He noted that an English merchant had to bring writs of prohibition to the Court of the King's Bench, a process that put significant costs on the merchant in terms of lost time and fees. Merchants had trouble getting the English courts to understand the complexities of the disputes because lawyers lacked knowledge of transatlantic commerce. Significantly, these courts did not accept paper financial and commercial instruments originating "from beyond Sea" as admissible evidence in the latter half of the seventeenth century.<sup>66</sup> The administration of transatlantic commercial dispute resolution was done piecemeal, in localized

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<sup>64</sup> "Legal Proceedings Against Phips," 1692-1694.

<sup>65</sup> Lawrence M. Friedman, *A History of American Law*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 10.

<sup>66</sup> Child, *A New Discourse of Trade*, 142-43.

venues overseen by overlapping of government bodies and appointed merchants. This lack of official uniformity gave colonial authorities, like Phips, substantial practical authority over commerce and finance.

In the localized colonial legal system, provincial authorities often organized courts for specific disputes, appointing local judges to decide given cases. Phips, using his appointed authority as Vice-Admiral, created a court wherein he appointed himself judge. Phips alleged that “by his Commission he [was] authorized to hear and determine all Matters relating to the Admiralty in that Province, and for the purpose to Erect Courts.”<sup>67</sup> The black letter terms of his commission approved by the attorney general just one year earlier appear to support Phips’s interpretation of his right to this authority.<sup>68</sup> Practically, however, subsequent accusations brought suspicion on Phips from the Lords of Trade. They noted that “it does not appear that any Account has been made for any part of the said Prize to his Majesty, or for the share belonging to the Ships Company.”<sup>69</sup> This accusation of failure to transfer funds due to the ship’s crew as well as the crown followed a period of concern about the extent and lawfulness of Phips’s appropriations from private subjects for military purposes in New England. The Lords of Trade further accused Phips of appropriating guns from private ships to fit a “Ship and Brigantine, under pretense of their being employ’d for their Majesties’ Service” and “without taking care any satisfaction should be given to the said Owners.”<sup>70</sup> England had granted Phips military authority in accordance with the need to manage colonial participation in the ongoing war. However, they soon concluded that Phips intended to utilize this executive capacity in defiance of customary

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<sup>67</sup> “Legal Proceedings Against Phips,” 1692-1694; Friedman, *A History of American Law*, 10.

<sup>68</sup> “Phips Commission,” 1691.

<sup>69</sup> “Material Relating to Legal Proceedings Against Sir William Phips, Governor of Massachusetts Bay, by the Board of Trade, Relating Largely to Several Ships,” Petition; Correspondence; Report; Minutes; Legal Document, July 1, 1692-January 19, 1694, CO 5/858, The National Archives, Kew, London, UK.

<sup>70</sup> “Legal Proceedings Against Phips,” 1692-1694.



procedure when he felt it was an issue of necessary military expediency. Granting authority to provincial government disrupted a balance of power that had maintained checks against decisions like Phips's.

The lawsuit against Phips argued that the correct procedure for all confiscation and condemnations of prizes required him to grant a portion of what was on the ship to the English crew who had captured the prize, to secure the remaining cargo by nailing down the ship's hatches, and then to send the secured vessel to royal representatives via the Lords of Trade. Phips rejected Short's claim that he had embezzled the French prize. He argued that he had put together accounts for all prizes and then reported them to the Lords of Admiralty, proof in his view that he had not defrauded the state.<sup>71</sup> Phips believed his choices were justified. He denied few of the specifics of his alteration of the standard procedure as described in the Lords of Trade's report. Rather, he noted his inclusion of the Admiralty in his decisions to appropriate resources for the necessity of local conflict.

Despite Phips's conflicts with imperial and colonial governments, he retained his authority to the degree, and duration, he did because of his value in organizing the exchange of resources and information between the colonies and England. For example, operating from Boston, Phips coordinated the transfer of military intelligence between other sites in the Atlantic. In July 1693, Phips communicated information he had received from Colonel James Kendall, the Governor of Barbados, to the Admiral Sir Francis Wheler of the HMS *Sussex* who was then considering staging an attack against the French in both Quebec and Newfoundland. Phips wrote that Kendall had "read an accompt from the Governour of the French settlement thereof the

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<sup>71</sup> "Legal Proceedings Against Phips," 1692-1694.

Strength of that place the last year [sic] in number of men.”<sup>72</sup> Based on the information received from Kendall, Phips recommended that Wheler needed an additional 400 men for an expedition against the French. Philip’s knowledge and connections proved invaluable as dispersed English forces planned military campaigns in northeastern American territories.

Phips also informed Wheler of a concurrent expedition planned out of Massachusetts that Phips conveyed “will require a considerable number of men.” Additionally, Phips added that “the awful Consideration of the contagious sickness brought in the Fleet is very much affrightening [sic] and discouraging to men to adventure themselves on board the Fleet.”<sup>73</sup> Ultimately, Wheler chose not to engage the French in either Quebec or Newfoundland on the justification of having insufficient personnel for the purpose. Presumably, his calculation arose in part on the information conveyed from Barbados through Phips. Phips’s role as conveyor of such information also proved critical in communication within New England. For example, he related his learning, via a ship from Cadiz on September 15, 1693, that the French had captured a fleet of English and Dutch freight ships from New York of which the Massachusetts justice and government functionary, Isaac Addington, had invested. Phips conveyed this information to Addington.<sup>74</sup> Such information flowed into Massachusetts through Phips, making him a critical node in the interconnected commercial and military network that allowed an English fiscal-military state to function. His ability to collect and disburse unique knowledge gave him significant influence.

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<sup>72</sup> William Phips, “Letter from Sir William Phips to Sir Francis Wheler About the Military Situation in Canada,” Correspondence, July 27, 1693, CO 5/857, The National Archives, Kew, London, UK.

<sup>73</sup> Phips, “Phips to Wheler,” 1693.

<sup>74</sup> Phips, “Phips to Wheler,” 1693.

In addition to serving as a critical node of information, Phips's placement in Boston further served the purpose of providing resources to expeditions passing through the port. In this way, Boston's proximity to sites of North American conflict during King William's War made it critical for the success of military expeditions against French Canada. Projecting power directly across the Atlantic proved prohibitive due to limitations of manpower and provisions. Consequently, successful ventures had to organize their plans through Boston, which served as a staging area to equip and man the military expeditions envisioned in London. The required timing for such plans depended on the season and available resources within Boston at given times of the year. This use of American ports as places of military preparation for the American campaigns made corresponding through provincial government necessary. Officers like Francis Wheler often needed to exercise substantial foresight to arrange resources through intermediaries like Phips well in advance of arriving in North America. In June 1693, for example, Phips wrote to Wheler that he had awaited directions concerning plans from England concerning Wheler's squadron, but advanced notice did not arrive and so Phips claimed that the "yeare [sic] being now too far advanced" to meet the full demands necessary for Wheler's expedition.<sup>75</sup>

Wheler ultimately could not pursue expeditions in Quebec or Newfoundland, due in part to inadequate resources and manpower available in New England. However, Wheler and Phips both believed that any potential for military success would depend on effectively tapping colonial resources and knowledge. Much like in the case of the failed Quebec expedition of 1690, the determining variable for military success was the ability to muster, allocate, and deploy resources and personnel from within New England. Wheler did not consider the direct employment of metropolitan financial resources to colonial conflicts as an option. Consequently,

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<sup>75</sup> Phips, "Phips to Wheler," 1693.

the de facto reality of colonial warfare was metropolitan reliance on provincial executive autonomy and, specifically, William Phips's administration. England proved willing to cede some powers to Phips for the purpose of delegating decisions to local military experts, as evident in the initial terms of Phips's commission. However, as in the case of the Lords of Trade's concern over Phips's response to Captain Richard Short and the *Nonsuch*, metropolitan English government did have clear limits to the extent of colonial control of resources and public finance. Metropolitan government saw sovereignty and deference on matters of commercial control as interconnected. Subsequent charges levied against Phips in 1693 and 1694 further illustrate this interconnection.

In November 1693, the Commissioners of the Customs in London made a formal complaint against William Phips based on a report of Jahleel Brenton. The Commissioners wrote: "Upon reading a Presentment from the Commissioners of the Customs dated the twenty second Instant concerning Mr. Jahleel Brenton Collector & Surveyor in New England, who complains of being Molested by Sir William Phips Capt. Generall [sic] and Governour [sic] in Chief of the Province of the Massachusetts Bay in New England, in the execution of his duty."<sup>76</sup> Much like the recent complaint that Richard Short levied against Phips a year earlier, Brenton accused Phips of publicly confronting and assaulting him while in performance of his public duty. In this case, the confrontation arose from Brenton's attempt to confiscate enumerated goods from a merchant vessel arriving in the port of Boston.

Phips had already expressed a general hostility to the local custom office as conflicting in its purpose and jurisdiction with the Admiralty over which he exercised control. Much as in the

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<sup>76</sup> "Reference of the Presentment of the Commissioners of the Customs Upon the Comp'th of the Collect'ed Against Sir William Phips," Minutes, November 30, 1693, CO 5/906, The National Archives, Kew, London, UK.

earlier case of jurisdictional dispute with the confiscation of William Pepperell's goods by New Hampshire officials, Phips again found himself as a voice for a specific mercantile interest against commercial controls and confiscations of officials other than himself. Notably, Richard Short's testimony indicated that Phips appropriated resources from private vessels, which Phips did not explicitly deny. He did not see authority over private trade as outside the purview of government. However, in the last two decades of the seventeenth century, and specifically given the economic requirements of King William's War, Phips recognized that the viability of the colonial state he oversaw depended on private commercial participation. Where taxation capacity proved limited by monetary scarcity and a small population, any functional state apparatus required the voluntary contribution of capital, resources, and public financial work by well-networked local merchants. In exchange, these merchants sought protection against foreign predation, competition, and forms of governance less friendly to their trade. Phips's conflict with Brenton and the Commissioners of Customs was more than ideological preference, but a step necessary to maintain the political autonomy of a provincial government that had evolved to assume broad powers over money, goods, vessels, and men.

The Commissioners of the Customs presented Brenton's complaint against Phips to the Lords of Trade, where they compiled it together with the former, strikingly similar, complaint by Richard Short. This second accusation, according to the board's perspective, represented a clear violation of centralized imperial policy under the terms of the Navigation Acts. Phips, no stranger to metropolitan scrutiny, saw no immediate threat to his position even after the Lords of Trade summoned him to answer the charges in London in person. Phips expressed confidence in the legality of his interactions with Short and Brenton. Then amid war with the French and their Native allies, the logistics of Phips's extraction from New England to attend the Board of Trade

in London to answer these charges proved difficult. Engaged with concerns of local diplomacy, Phips had disconnected himself from political sentiment in England as well as Massachusetts.

At the beginning of 1694, Phips was negotiating a peace with Abenaki forces at Fort William Henry in Maine when he was presented with the formal complaint against him. The security of Phips's authority had weakened over the previous year due to a weakening of support among the Bay Colonies' ministerial elite. Though long considered a favorite of the Puritan old guard since the dissolution of the Dominion of New England, some powerful colonists, most notably magistrate William Stoughton, had changed their opinion of Phips. His open criticism of their specially appointed Court of Oyer and Terminer in the Salem Witch Crisis strained the relationships between the governor and leading ministers. In January 1694, the Lords of Trade finalized their report containing the accusations against Phips and soon after recalled him to London. He arrived in London in January 1695 at which time he was arrested on the charge of conspiring to withhold money from customs. He died a month later, before his trial, from illness.<sup>77</sup>

In 1651, Thomas Hobbes wrote that the "*Value, or Worth of a man, is as of all other things, his Price; that is to say, so much as would be given for the use of his Power: and therefore is not absolute; but a thing dependent on the need and judgement of another.*"<sup>78</sup> Writing towards the end of the English Civil War, Hobbes proposed a theory of socially determined value that found expression in price. This price required mutual judgements of others. Over the following half century, the closest analog to this relativistic social judgment was the overlapping obligations and valuations of the English credit economy. Many prominent merchants,

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<sup>77</sup> Stacey, "Phips, Sir William."

<sup>78</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 151-52.

economists, and public financiers of the late-seventeenth century sought, much like Hobbes, to bring England's credit economy within the unified control of a singular sovereign body. Mercantile elites like Josiah Child, Charles Davenant, and Nicholas Barbon lamented the limitations that financial nonuniformity placed on the expansion of metropolitan commerce. Imperial planners in London ran into the problem of regional traditions, local authority, and insulated monetary systems as they attempted to impose a single commercial system. Advocates of universal fiscal norms that would bring peripheral space firmly into the fold of the imperial state sought to accomplish their goal by increasing colonial oversight and by offering low legal interest rates to incentivize the creation of credit obligations extending from London. Such efforts failed when confronting strong colonial states, like the Phips government. This proved most true when, as in the case of the sterling-scarce colonial New England, colonial subjects were beyond the influence of metropolitan price and interest controls. Because colonial military control rested in the hands of provincial governments, and because of the institutional separation of colonial courts, even the most devoted fiscal centralizers found few means to enforce compliance with such directives abroad.

Hobbes foresaw that opponents of his political doctrine would criticize it because of its alleged impracticality and absence of precedent. He wrote: "The greatest objection is, that of the Practise [sic], when men ask, where, and when, such Power has by Subjects been acknowledged."<sup>79</sup> Hobbes realized that his political model would illicit repugnance based on norms of Western political doctrine and practice as it had evolved up to the mid-seventeenth century. As his opponents noted, even if governments might be persuaded in theory of the benefits of universal state sovereignty, entrenched habits and local allegiances could prove an

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<sup>79</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 260-61.

insurmountable barrier to implementation. Hobbes made a counterargument that mirrored the modernizing impulses of would-be state makers over the following century. He wrote that the past could not necessarily be held as a model for the subsequent evolution of government and cited the civil turmoil of the 1640s and 1650s in England as proof of this point. The Hobbesian vision of the subject in society rejected the idea of a decentralized order emerging from natural laws. Instead, from his new perspective, the social world consisted of external, manipulable, objects external to the human subject. This was not a world where humans acted as subordinate parts of a cosmic order beyond secular mandates. The centralizing effort of the Navigation Acts and expanding territorial imperial expansion reflected this ideology of control and constructed order based on metropolitan knowledge and expertise on matters of statecraft. Under such a conception, the modern imperial state, especially on colonial matters, should prize dominance over accord.<sup>80</sup> In this new Hobbesian politics, multi-centered nodes of competing decisions, even if an evolved norm to that time, would by necessity conflict with the proper role of the state by the eighteenth century.

In England, the coevolution of the imperial state and debt litigation evolved substantially through the second half of the seventeenth century, as courts increasingly inserted themselves into private credit relations. In 1678, the King's Bench upheld the legality of third-party damages from failure to meet debt obligations in the case of *Dutton v. Poole*, and the Exchequer Chamber upheld the decision two years later.<sup>81</sup> The seventeenth century saw the emergence of such institutional controls over credit relationships and the state's increased capacity to enforce obligations through litigation. This coevolution, and indeed codependence, of debt and legal

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<sup>80</sup> David Johnston, *The Rhetoric of Leviathan: Thomas Hobbes and the Politics of Cultural Transformation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 214-15.

<sup>81</sup> Baker, *An Introduction to English Legal History*, 354.



institutions allowed for a projection of political power from the metropole. The role of the courts strengthened the economic influence of the state, but it remained contingent on the use of the courts to resolve disputes. Local deviation of colonial courts outside of metropolitan control allowed for individual agency that could stymie the imperial state's ability to enforce credit relationships according to a unified plan.

Hobbesian thought continued in the concept of "civil society" and in the social valuation of money and credit, expressed in the arguments of late-seventeenth- and eighteenth-century political and economic discourse. Child, Davenant, and Nicholas Barbon mirrored this same principle in their advocacy for commercial uniformity and state autonomy over credit and interest rates. In 1690, Barbon wrote: "The Two Chief Causes of the Decay of Trade, are the many Prohibitions and high Interest."<sup>82</sup> He envisioned a future where the role of the state would not include intervention to limit trade by creating barriers to entry into global markets or placing prohibitive costs on, or banning, forms of commerce.<sup>83</sup>

To Barbon, the state should promote trade through active intervention by expanding the geographic scale of the English commercial sphere. Promoting the ease of firms' expansion and the liquidity and speed of their exchanges, in Barbon's view, was the proper role of the state. As Barbon and other political economists argued, reducing market interest rates by law, or reducing the legal price of money to service existing debts, would spur English commerce by bringing money and other assets into circulation.<sup>84</sup> Barbon wrote that "by not consuming the Goods that are provided for Man's Use, there ariseth a dead stock, called Plenty and the Value of those Goods fall, and the Covetous Man's Estates, whether in Land, or Mony [sic], becomes less

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<sup>82</sup> Barbon, *A Discourse of Trade*, 133.

<sup>83</sup> Barbon, *A Discourse of Trade*, 136.

<sup>84</sup> Barbon, *A Discourse of Trade*, 110.

worth...”<sup>85</sup> Barbon emphasized the movement of assets as the source of wealth, and the covetous as those who refuse to participate in the invigorated central commercial system. To Barbon, holding rather than exchanging assets endangered the welfare of the fiscal state and, consequently, English society. Those who held assets were, he believed, “dangerous to a Trading State, as a Forreign [sic] War; for though they themselves get nothing by their Covetousness, nor grow the Richer, yet they would make the Nation poor, and the Government great Losers in the Customs and Excises that ariseth from Expence.”<sup>86</sup> Barbon’s proposal sought to use the state as a tool of universalized commerce and finance, but this required maximizing participation. Those who fell outside the financial and commercial control of the state, like autonomous North American colonists, seemed from this perspective antithetical to England’s common good. Barbon advocated for a security of ownership and flourishing of English commerce in an environment whereby public authority assured the security of private finance and commercial institutions. Barbon’s vision centered on an expansionary, unified, and secure partnership between the imperial state and the economy “where the Customs makes great Figures, in the Kings Exchequer; where Ships are the Bullworks of the Kingdom; and where the Flourish of Trade is as much the Interest of the King as of the People.”<sup>87</sup>

Barbon hoped that a symbiotic relationship between the people and the imperial government would invigorate English society through mutual obligation. Barbon noted that trade increased government revenue and provided employment for the people by promoting consumption. He argued that by stimulating a consumer culture, that everyone would “pay by those things which he Eats and Wears, something to the Government.”<sup>88</sup> This would raise the

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<sup>85</sup> Barbon, *A Discourse of Trade*, 129-30.

<sup>86</sup> Barbon, *A Discourse of Trade*, 129-30.

<sup>87</sup> Barbon, *A Discourse of Trade*, 115.

<sup>88</sup> Barbon, *A Discourse of Trade*, 119-20.

flow of duties to public coffers through the Excise and Customs. Furthermore, Barbon conceptualized such trade and consumption as augmenting the coercive capacity of the state to make war. This would grant power in global and domestic affairs to the English government, while both protecting and providing business opportunities to merchants and other subjects.

Barbon wrote:

Another Benefit of Trade is, It is Useful for the Defence [sic] of the Government; It Provides the Magazines of Warr. The Guns, Powder, and Bullets, are all made of Minerals, and are wrought by Traders; Besides, those Minerals are not to be had in all Countries; The great Stock of Saltpeter is brought from the East Indies, and therefore must be Imported by the Merchant.<sup>89</sup>

In Barbon's political economy, commerce benefited the state by contributing to its coercive capacity. The state's capacity to successfully wage war, much as Child and Davenant argued, depended on its ability to coopt private commerce for resources and manufacturers. Likewise, as John Wise's account of the 1690 Quebec expedition indicates, American colonists recognized this capacity to allocate weapons and provisions as necessary for their military successes against French colonists. However, as the Quebec expedition also illustrates, both metropolitan and colonial authorities faced a conundrum. Colonists wanted the maximum quantity of military imports from England while retaining local autonomy when it came to using them. The metropole, in contrast, wanted to use commerce as a tool to consolidate state autonomy in London, but needed to refer to de facto provincial power and knowledge to mobilize colonial populations and resources.

In the mercantile credit framework of late-seventeenth-century English economic thought, the state was to play an active role in commerce, and commerce, in return, to service the

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<sup>89</sup> Barbon, *A Discourse of Trade*, 119-20.

interests of the state. These thinkers considered their expert knowledge and empirical experience as necessary to promote this public-private relationship beyond the boundaries which social development had yet granted to their trades. Likewise, to Hobbes, a superior alternative to reliance on evolved traditions already existed in the form of “Principles of Reason.” These principles he compared to skills of “making, and maintaining Common-wealths” and which “consisteth in certain Rules, as doth Arithmetique [sic] and Geometry; not...on Practise onely [sic].”<sup>90</sup> This sentiment, contemporaneous with the first Navigation Acts (1651) endorses hierarchical planning, with control cascading downward from the imperial sovereign. As the conflict between William Phips and the English fiscal system illustrates, this state building impulse of the early modern English empire faced immediate limitations when confronted with the necessity of peripheral delegation. Hobbes’s vision for supreme state control was impossible in a multicentric English Atlantic world.

Expediency in times of colonial war only magnified the risk of decentralization from the perspective of English authorities. If someone like Phips could retain local support, they could leverage wartime expediency to consolidate power outside the oversight of the English state. Any effective attempt to consolidate English power demanded that such provincial authority be curtailed. King and Parliament increasingly came to see transatlantic merchants as critical toward this end. By bringing these merchants into the fold of metropolitan politics, the empire intended to unify networks of financial obligations around one master node in London, completing their intended project of full fiscal hegemony. London could recall Phips for threatening its sovereign

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<sup>90</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 262; Johnston, *The Rhetoric of Leviathan*, 185-87, 215.

control of the imperial fiscal system. However, the provincial conditions that created Phips remained.

## Chapter Two

### A Debtor Empire: Imperial Integration and Public Finance in Eighteenth-Century

#### Transatlantic British Society

“For I ask, What would a Man value Ten Thousand, or an Hundred Thousand Acres of Excellent *Land*, ready cultivated, and well stocked too with Cattle, in the middle of the in-land Parts of *America*, where he had no hopes of Commerce with other Parts of the World, to draw *Money* to him by the Sale of the Product?” – John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government* (1689)<sup>1</sup>

Colonial relations with England during periods of war emerged from institutional developments and demographic changes progressing through the entire early modern era. The activities and political opinions of local merchants, statesmen, and military officers like William Phips emerged in the context of macro-level fiscal transitions. By widening the temporal and geographic scale of an explanation of American colonies’ place within British imperial financial structures, we can see how long-term fiscal change determined the thought and action of individuals in both England and the colonies. British officials and American colonists each had a vision for a general, imperial political economy. These visions came into conflict as Britain mobilized armed forces for war and developed systems for borrowing, spending, and repaying money.

This chapter argues that fiscal institutions within the British Atlantic had a multicentric structure which prevented consolidation of metropolitan control. Furthermore, rather than a force for state consolidation, war was a centrifugal force that shifted fiscal power outward toward the

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<sup>1</sup> John Locke, “Second Treatise of Government,” in Peter Laslett, ed., *Locke: Two Treatises of Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 301.

colonial periphery.<sup>2</sup> Over the eighteenth century, war and delegation eroded the unity of the empire even as it simultaneously expanded territory and enriched many of its members. This model of imperial development provides a long-term structural explanation for the eventual separation of the colonial American periphery from Britain's sovereign control in the last quarter of the century.

Conceptions of obligation and value informed England's imperial expansion in North America. Obligations and value found their expression in the circulation of money and measurement of credit and debt.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, the primary historiographical intervention of this chapter is a challenge to an interpretation of the eighteenth-century British state as fundamentally strengthening its hold over its constituents through the expansion of an apparatus for collecting revenue. Such interpretations underplay the larger significance of public debt and the destabilizing obligations it represented from the perspective of the British sovereign.<sup>4</sup> This chapter uses quantitative data to describe the relationship between public debt and revenue collection over the eighteenth century. Fiscal change supported the autonomy of provincial populations, even as imperial authorities attempted to use fiscal policies to encourage colonial subordination. Political economists and policymakers asserted the benefits of state control over currency. British overseas imperial expansion accompanied the emergence of liberal support for

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<sup>2</sup> Robert Higgs, *Crisis and Leviathan: Critical Episodes in the Growth of American Government* (Oakland: Independent Institute, 2012), 30-33, 57-74, 261; Bruce D. Porter, *War and the Rise of the State: The Military Foundations of Modern Politics* (New York: Free Press, 1994), 63-104.

<sup>3</sup> Craig Muldrew, *The Economy of Obligation: The Culture of Credit and Social Relations in Early Modern England* (London: Macmillan Press, 1998); Claire Priest, *Credit Nation: Property Laws and Institutions in Early America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021), 38-73.

<sup>4</sup> John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State, 1688-1783* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 88-134; P. G. M. Dickson, *The Financial Revolution in England: A Study in the Development of Public Credit, 1688-1756* (London, 1967); Niall Ferguson, *The Cash Nexus: Money and Power in the Modern World, 1700-2000* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 23-136; Julian Hoppit, *Britain's Political Economies: Parliament and Economic Life, 1660-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 66-99; Julian Hoppit, *The Dreadful Monster and its Poor Relations: Taxing, Spending and the United Kingdom, 1707-2021* (London: Penguin, 2021), 1-34.

international free trade. Anti-bullionist perspectives on money sought to remove traditional barriers to individuals accruing debt on the empire's behalf.<sup>5</sup> However, remittances in bullion or other commodities remained necessary despite the policies arising under this new economic ideology. Acquisition of territory and resources promoted colonial war accelerated a process of political fragmentation by 1775.

American colonists in the eighteenth century understood the importance of the relationship between currency and debt for public expenditure.<sup>6</sup> The method of funding public projects whereby colonial government creditors issued legal tender notes in anticipation of taxation, or "currency finance." Under this financial system, a series of debtor-creditor relationships coupled with taxation, created a circulation of private bills that functioned as the dominant form of currency for interregional commerce and public finance. In the eighteenth-century currency finance system, a government credited merchant-financiers or land banks who backed notes with their private wealth. These notes would theoretically circulate within the general population until the government taxed them out of circulation. This taxation reduced the money supply, which had a deflationary effect on prices and kept exchange rates down (because reducing the number of circulating bills made those in circulation scarcer and, consequently, more valuable to those that held the remaining bills).<sup>7</sup> Taxation allowed for the repayment of public debts, which perpetuated the cycle between government, financiers, and those who paid

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<sup>5</sup> Christine Desan, *Making Money: Coin, Currency, and the Coming of Capitalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

<sup>6</sup> Joseph A. Ernst, *Money and Politics in America, 1755-1775: A Study in the Currency Act of 1764 and the Political Economy of Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1973), xvi.

<sup>7</sup> Practically, the deflationary tendencies of imperial cycles to occur in long cycles followed by stable equilibria and then large upswings in prices and decline of real wages. These upswings tend historically to coincide with political transitions and conflict as occurred during the last forty years of the eighteenth century and through the era of the "Age of Revolutions," see David Hackett Fischer, *The Great Wave: Price Revolutions and the Rhythm of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 102-155.



with and were paid by these notes. This kept a medium of exchange in circulation, thus facilitating trade.<sup>8</sup> The terms “mediums of exchange” included all money circulated for use as a means of local payment. One can contrast this with money stored solely as a store of value when withdrawn from circulation and hoarded. Many seventeenth- and eighteenth-century political economists argued that maximizing this circulation would be beneficial to commerce because of the liquidity it provided for exchange. Policymakers sought to manipulate the emission of currency and issued public securities to induce private expenditures and to fund government spending. These early modern Britons saw public finance, private commerce, and the health of the state as fundamentally interconnected.<sup>9</sup>

Effective debt financing, under the control of public officials and contracted financiers, took more than a century to develop. Neither colonial governments nor imperial officials exercised centralized control over monetary policy as England established its first American economies. English monetary laws and customs did not survive the Atlantic passage because of the relative underdevelopment, and differences of scope, of a new colonial economy. Distance from the metropole additionally prevented market integration, especially in financial markets.<sup>10</sup> This meant that colonies developed their own forms of money. This localization of colonial finance survived the seventeenth century, despite imperial economic reforms. Furthermore,

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<sup>8</sup> E. James Ferguson, “Currency Finance: An Interpretation of Colonial Monetary Practices,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3, no. 10 (1953), 153-180; Joseph Ernst, *Money and Politics in America, 1755-1775: A Study in the Currency Act of 1764 and the Political Economy of Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1973), 4.

<sup>9</sup> John Asgill, Nicholas Barbon, and John Briscoe, *Proposals Made to the Honorable House of Commons, by the Land Bank United, for Raising Two Million, or More* (London, 1696); Daniel Defoe, *An Essay Upon the Public Credit* (London, 1710); John Law, *Money and Trade Considered: With a Proposal for Supplying the Nation with Money*, Gavin John Adams, ed. (1705; U.S. Newton Page Press, 2013).

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Josiah Child’s complaints about the lack of uniformity in transatlantic adjudication of disputes over financial instruments. Josiah Child, *A New Discourse of Trade*, 4th ed. (London: J. Hodges, 1669).

financial localization continued in most colonial regions into the eighteenth century despite increased financial sophistication of Atlantic merchants and imperial policymakers.

Effective currency financing faced limitations in the colonies because mediums of exchange varied.<sup>11</sup> This lack of a common colonial currency limited the metropole's ability to draw on colonial productivity for imperial projects like war. Transatlantic financiers struggled to reconcile drastic differences in exchange rates between local provincial currencies and pounds sterling.<sup>12</sup> By the middle of the eighteenth century, currency finance became the dominant method of public finance because of the ability it gave governments, in the colonies as well as in Britain, to assure large amounts of currency remained in circulation. Circulating currency facilitated trade and, therefore, made it possible to generate revenue through customs taxes.<sup>13</sup> Customs revenue funded military excursions and paid salaries.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, both colonies and London sought to determine their sovereign right to coin money and issue paper bills. This created tensions between debtors and creditors as well as between colonial and metropolitan governments. The circulation of money between the colonies and metropole correlated with and, to an extent caused, their place within the power structure of imperial government in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The value of money within a nation, the geographical

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<sup>11</sup> Jonathan Edward Barth, "'A Peculiar Stamp of Our Owne': The Massachusetts Mint and the Battle Over Sovereignty, 1652-1691," *The New England Quarterly* 87, no. 3 (September 1, 2014); Jonathan Barth, *The Currency of Empire: Money and Power in Seventeenth-Century English America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2021); Robert E. Wright, *Origins of Commercial Banking in America, 1750-1800* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001); John J. McCusker, *Money and Exchange in Europe and America, 1600-1775* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978).

<sup>12</sup> See for example the fluctuation of rates during the land bank era in colonial Massachusetts, particularly during the War of Austrian Succession. George Athan Billias, *The Massachusetts Land Bankers of 1740* (Orono: University of Maine, 1959); John J. McCusker, *Money and Exchange in Europe and America, 1600-1775* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978), 131-55.

<sup>13</sup> Wallerstein, *Modern World-System II*, 16-7, 25-30, 49, 57-63, 81, 88, 92, 106-9, 111-2, 116-7, 132.

<sup>14</sup> Niall Ferguson, *The Cash Nexus: Money and Power in the Modern World* (New York: Basic, 2001), 23-76; Henry Roseveare, *The Treasury 1660-1870* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1973), 22-36, 40, 111, 120-30, 154; Carolyn Weber and Aaron Wildavsky, *A History of Taxation and Expenditure in the Western World* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986), 259-70.

extent of legal currencies, and the national balance of trade proved a dominant concern of English policymakers and their metropolitan merchant allies like Thomas Hutchinson.<sup>15</sup> Public and private credit occupied a central role in these policy concerns as all credit relationships implied the need for remittances to clear outstanding debts.<sup>16</sup>

Issuing currency provided a mechanism to fund state expansion. Consequently, early modern states sought to maximize the extent to which global populations utilized their currencies and public credit. The question of how best to accomplish this commercial power, and what types of economic change would count as progress, proved a matter of intense debate in the seventeenth century. At this time, despite the opposing philosophies on the valuation and flow of money, all interlocutors considered remittances in specie as key to the English imperial economy in one form or another. Once paper notes were issued, hard specie payments were required to retire this public debt, and all agreed that failure to retire currency emissions posed a danger to the national economy.<sup>17</sup>

Specie, especially sterling silver, proved critical to this role in the expanding early modern English empire as the pound sterling functioned as the benchmark unit of exchange even where English-minted silver did not widely circulate. This was the case in the American colonies, where Parliament and crown officials banned its circulation.<sup>18</sup> The imperial emphasis

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<sup>15</sup> Thomas Hutchinson, "To Israel Williams, 1 February 1749," in *The Correspondence of Thomas Hutchinson: Volume I: 1740-1766*, ed. John W. Tyler and Elizabeth Dubrulle (Boston: Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 2014), 103-4.

<sup>16</sup> Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System II*, 91-94, 100, 109, 153-54.

<sup>17</sup> Henry Roseveare, *The Treasury*, 66; Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System II*, 76, 105, 276; Carolyn Weber and Aaron Wildavsky, *A History of Taxation and Expenditure in the Western World*, 228-35, 250-2.

<sup>18</sup> Jonathan Barth, *The Currency of Empire: Money and Power in Seventeenth-Century English America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2021), 27, 33, 38, 49, 57; Joseph Ernst, *Money and Politics in America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1973), 6, 23, 96; John J. McCusker and Russell R. Menard, *The Economy of British America, 1607-1789* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 81, 83; C.V. Sutherland, *English Coinage, 600-1900* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1973), 157-80; Nuala Zahedieh, *The Capital and the Colonies: London and the Atlantic Economy, 1660-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 230-33, 283-84.

on silver unified core and periphery around the British specie standard, as common reference to the sterling exchange rate in the colonies illustrates.<sup>19</sup> This specie standard, or a monetary system where all money consists of gold, silver, or notes immediately redeemable in these metals, pervaded the English Atlantic world in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>20</sup> This also meant that regions without reference to sterling fell outside the commercial purview of the metropole even when people within such regions claimed English subjecthood or even actively promoted the geographical expansion of English claims to sovereignty.

British commercial competition with the Spanish and French in the eighteenth century had local origins. Political and economic thought reflected these concerns. Because of their proximity to contested borderlands, British-American provincials saw the threat of competing empires as a direct threat to their property and persons rather than an abstract economic or political concerns. Proximity to aggressive subjects of continental empires gave colonial war a critical immediacy which colonists did not necessarily find reflected in metropolitan thought and policy. Nor did colonists find that the empire shouldered the financial costs of war which provincial forces undertook.

The turn of the eighteenth century saw escalation of inter-imperial conflict in colonial North America. War induced mobilization of local military forces from across the British colonies in response to imminent threats. Information concerning Spanish and French threats spread between port towns. In 1702, Thomas Prince of Boston wrote to Thomas Hinckley in Barnstable, Massachusetts concerning news from St. Augustine. Prince wrote that the “State of the Country at this time is not very good.” He attributed the state of colonial affairs to a long

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<sup>19</sup> See example of price currents for how colonists valued their local currencies against British silver sterling. McCusker, “Demise of Distance,” 295-321.

<sup>20</sup> Ernst, *Money and Politics in America*, xvii.

siege by the English against a Spanish fort in St. Augustine. He wrote that Spanish ships arrived and blocked the harbor trapping the escape route of the English forces. Fearing an approaching army, Prince continued, the English troops burned St. Augustine, most of their own ships, and then left by land. As a result of these events, Prince wrote that “there is great charge to the Countrey [sic], which made it necessary for a tax to be raised...”<sup>21</sup>

During Queen Anne’s War, Prince also observed that Massachusetts colonists had heard little news from England save that the French navy had captured two English Men of War and that the English forces in turn did “considerable damage” to the French. He recorded that an English ship attacked a Spanish “plate fleet,” but failed to capture any bullion. Prince’s writing indicates that colonists had distinct monetary concerns arising from within the provinces. Colonists scrambled to obtain bullion they required not simply to enrich themselves at the Spanish expense, but also to finance regional state functions. Notably, this happened simultaneously to the financial revolution in England where the proliferation of public securities saw an increased capacity to finance war with public debt. Tallies, an early form of government bond, served this purpose within England in the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries as did continuations of Stuart-era methods like annuities paid to wealthy elites in exchange for one-time payments to the state. It was not coincidental that the development of such methods emerged during two imperial wars between 1688 and 1697 and then again between 1701 and 1714. This period saw the proliferation of writing on methods intended to finance the growing needs of the British imperial state. Merchants and other wealthy elites developed methods of pooling wealth and created financial organizations like the Bank of England in 1694.<sup>22</sup> The

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<sup>21</sup> Thomas Prince, “Letter to Thomas Hinckley Esq At Barnstable in New England (1702),” Thomas Prince Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA.

<sup>22</sup> Christine Desan, *Making Money: Coin, Currency, and the Coming of Capitalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 10, 153, 171-9, 190, 231, 239-40; Roseveare, *The Treasury*, 23, 31-2, 40, 49-50, 62.

financial demands of this period also saw the development of sizeable fiscal bureaucracies for the purpose of revenue collection. However, these institutional developments did not emerge from within colonial societies as they did in mainland England. The accounts of colonial merchants, military officers, and politicians rarely if ever alluded to functions performed by the Bank of England or public securities issued from the metropole.<sup>23</sup> Instead, colonists' primary concern was with bullion imbursements from the royal treasury and maintaining adequate Iberian and French money necessary to provide liquidity for intra-colonial exchange. These colonial financial concerns had precedents extending to the beginning of the early modern period and did not depend on a financial revolution emerging from London. Financial state capacity in the colonies, in consequence, depended primarily on the economic support of local, provincial, populations.

With no professional police force, towns relied on local men appointed as constables and guards who surveilled the activities of people within the town and enlisted the aid of locals in suppressing disorder, warning out migrants, and apprehending felons. This reality of limited state support for policing caused magistrates to turn to the idea of *posse commitatus*, or power of the country, formalizing the practice of town appointees calling on all local men to assist in the

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<sup>23</sup> It is impossible to completely prove the negative, but several accounts of notable colonial merchants do not discuss the activity of the Bank of England, though the royal treasury and bullion shipments do appear, particularly during colonial wars. Charles Ward Apthorp, *Accounts (1755-1768)*. Charles Ward Apthorp papers, 1727-1858, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA; Charles Ward Apthorp collection, 1756-1908, New York Historical Society, New York, NY; William Bayard (1729-1804) collection, 1754-1790, New York Historical Society, New York, NY; Stephen DeLancey papers, 1712-1775, New York Historical Society, New York, NY; Hancock family accounts and receipts, 1728-1829, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA; Richard Clarke ledger, 1760-1879, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA; Watts papers, 1689-1870 (bulk 1740-1840), New York Historical Society, New York, NY; Wendell family Letterbooks and Account Books, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA.

enforcement of laws. In some cases, magistrates could also call upon town and provincial militias to enforce order when the ordinary civilian population proved insufficient.<sup>24</sup>

Agents of British imperial expansion, including both state administrators and merchants, faced the problem of communicating and exercising controls between provinces and across the Atlantic. Metropolitan administrators came to understand the difficulties of imposing a centralized model of imperial integration. They depended on the voluntary participation of geographically dispersed private individualized and corporate bodies with independent, and often conflicting, motives. Institutions like the Board of Trade, for example, concluded by the beginning of the eighteenth century that they needed to reign in private colonies and put them under the direct supervision of crown officials. The method, albeit a contentious one, by which they could accomplish this, the Board of Trade agreed, would be recalling charters by Parliamentary statute.<sup>25</sup>

Despite the ability to make formal decrees from Whitehall, metropolitan administrators faced several weaknesses of the imperial state that prevented them from curbing autonomous action in the colonial periphery. The first shortcoming of the imperial state at the beginning of the eighteenth century was that of non-uniform legal institutions with limited ability to appeal to higher courts and sporadic production of reviewable records. In 1700, courts in England had only recently started to allow litigants to obtain new trials in such cases where one could successfully argue that a trial judge had erred in their directions to a jury or their ruling on the admissibility of evidence. This practice motivated early eighteenth-century judges to begin taking systematic notes

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<sup>24</sup> Pauline Maier, *From Resistance to Revolution: Colonial Radicals and the Development of American Opposition to Britain, 1765-1776* (1972; New York: W.W. Norton, 1979), 17.

<sup>25</sup> Jack P. Greene, *Peripheries and Center: Constitutional Development in the Extended Politics of the British Empire and the United States, 1607-1788* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1986), 59.

of evidence. Such systematization would progress through the eighteenth century.<sup>26</sup> This allowed for a centralized vision of some peripheral space through categorization and communication of legal information. However, North American colonies remained largely insulated from institutional legal consolidation in England.

New England colonists continued to resolve their civil conflicts interpersonally within the town, and much of these resolutions required no recourse to official courts. Even commercially active towns with relatively high populations, like Gloucester, Massachusetts, had little litigation within the town population. Over the first half of the eighteenth century, much of the civil litigation that would occur in such towns emerged from credit relations. This did not imply that the colonial methods of resolving financial disputes co-evolved with, or connected to, the civil legal institutions developing in mainland England. Many merchants with experience across the Atlantic noted the incomprehensible and non-uniform nature of transatlantic courts on commercial issues. Merchants came to rely instead on custom and credit for enforcing and resolving disputes across large distances.

At the provincial level, colonies developed regional institutions in response to common commercial pathways that emerged between towns. Fishing towns in coastal Massachusetts, for example, saw an increase in intertown debt litigation through the first half of the eighteenth century because of demands for capital and financial services from growing regional entrepôts like Boston and Salem. Increased demand for currencies to facilitate regional trade also led to the practice of mortgaging real property in exchange for public bills of credit. After 1700, evolving regional colonial economies, like that of coastal New England, experienced financial interconnection in advance of political or social centralization. Through the mid-eighteenth

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<sup>26</sup> Baker, *Introduction to English Legal History*, 85.



century, New England townspeople continued to recognize all those outside town boundaries, even those with whom they did business, as “strangers.”<sup>27</sup> Colonial exchange remained largely community-centric with less intensive reach outside of interpersonal credit networks.

In eighteenth-century England, the resolution of credit conflict had evolved into more formal systems than in the American colonies. Subjects in England experienced increased rates of imprisonment for debt. Nine eighteenth-century London prisons housed debtors. The evolution of this practice saw substantial popular opposition on the grounds of violation of the Magna Carta and the unwritten constitution. However, eighteenth-century judges, like Lord Mansfield, saw little credibility in such traditionalist arguments and continued to utilize imprisonment as a state-sponsored coercive mechanism to punish and disincentivize default.<sup>28</sup> Such enforcement mechanisms did not bridge the Atlantic, where few formal financial disputes occurred, and intertown disputes had limited recourse to institutional imprisonment. Imprisonment for debt would emerge in the latter part of the eighteenth century, particularly in the early national period, once American communities had established their own enforcement apparatus and bankruptcy laws. In the first half of the eighteenth century, towns like Boston had only the limited carceral capacity of the town gaol. Differences in state capacity, consequently, allowed for divergent evolution of credit practices across the British Atlantic.

From the perspective of imperial administrators and theorists in London, the evolution of regional colonial credit economies and capital markets augmented the resources that British subjects could mobilize towards colonial wars and imperial expansion. Self-sufficient regional commercial systems fell outside the financial orbit of London. Overreliance on peripheral

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<sup>27</sup> Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Commerce and Culture: The Maritime Culture of Colonial Massachusetts, 1690-1750* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1984), 69-71; Mann, *Neighbors and Strangers*, 11-46.

<sup>28</sup> Norman S. Poser, *Lord Mansfield: Justice in the Age of Reason* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013), 269.

finance and capital jeopardized the centralized vision of empire which had been the project of policymakers in London over the previous century. Metropolitan authority continued to face the conflicting aims of expansion and creating a unified, hierarchical, political control system. The capacity of state institutions like the Board of Trade, Treasury Board, and civil courts, grew in absolute terms, but not necessarily in pace with the expansion of semi-autonomous colonial societies.

Two metrics which indicate the colonies' outpacing of metropolitan economic and social controls were population and consumer demand. In New England and the Middle Colonies, the average percent increase in population per decade between 1700 and 1750 was 36.3%. Between 1700 and 1750, the populations of these two colonial regions increased by a total of around 510,600 individuals. The total population increased by a factor of almost 3.5. This rapid rate of population growth proved particularly extreme in the Middle Colonies, where commercial growth had allowed for the development of Philadelphia and New York as prominent entrepôts with intensive connections with agricultural hinterlands. In these colonies, the average percent increase in population per decade between 1700 and 1750 was 41.1% compared with 31.6% in New England. Population expansion allowed for larger domestic markets and consequently, specialization. In port towns, provincial merchants developed relationships with wholesalers and craft artisans. By 1730, many young import merchants like Thomas Hancock and the elder Charles Apthorp found opportunities to enter the rapidly expanding markets centered in Boston. They purchased the right to operate warehouses near Boston's Long Wharf and sold textiles and manufactures from London along with financing the transportation of sugar, rum, fish, and enslaved people from the West Indies along the eastern seaboard and into Atlantic Canada and

Newfoundland. Population growth allowed for the expansion of colonial commerce and the rise of entrepôts and influential provincial merchants.

**Table 2.1. Population Growth (New England) 1700-1750**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Total Population</b>	<b>% Increase</b>
1700	92400	—
1710	115100	24.5
1720	170900	48.4
1730	217300	27.1
1740	289700	33.3
1750	360000	24.3

Source: Adapted From John J. McCusker and Russell R. Menard, *The Economy of British America, 1607-1789* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 103.

**Table 2.2. Population Growth (Middle Colonies) 1700-1750**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Total Population</b>	<b>% Increase</b>
1700	53500	—
1710	69600	30.1
1720	103100	48.1
1730	147000	42.6
1740	220500	50
1750	296500	34.5

Source: Adapted From John J. McCusker and Russell R. Menard, *The Economy of British America, 1607-1789* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 203.

These merchants were representative, but not unique, in terms of their specialization and expansion in eighteenth-century North America. In northeastern towns, professional occupations increased in number including ministers, doctors, lawyers. Lawyers particularly increased rapidly in response to commercial demands. Seventeenth-century colonial America had almost no professional legal class, but by the mid-eighteenth century, colonists recognized lawyers as integral parts of colonial life. Lawyers accumulated wealth and influence, and figures like James Otis came to play significant civic roles in port town communities like Boston. The growth of a wealthy professional class allowed for investable income which often entailed backing shipbuilding, distilling, land speculation ventures, and limited industrial production for iron goods.<sup>29</sup> This allowed for the geographic expansion of colonial territory west under the impetus of colonial entrepreneurs. It also allowed for increased capital self-sufficiency as colonists produced and exchanged goods without reliance on English suppliers.

From the perspective of the English metropole, the rapid pace of colonial economic development and population growth meant that British Americans experienced less dependency on metropolitan commerce for some goods and services which local firms could instead provide. Consumer demand outpaced colonial imports from Great Britain through the eighteenth century on a per capita basis. This did not imply that colonial commerce separated from that of England, but instead colonial demand for English products came to include manufacturers and luxury goods.<sup>30</sup> Merchants, imperial administrators, and mariners integrated British Atlantic society through communication and shipping. However, provincial development meant that significant

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<sup>29</sup> Greene, *Pursuits of Happiness*, 69.

<sup>30</sup> McCusker and Menard, *The Economy of British America*, 281.

circuits of trade and finance occurred within the Western Hemisphere and orbited principally around northeastern colonial port towns rather than England. By the 1730s, fishermen trying to outfit vessels, like Gloucester's Nathaniel Parsons, could turn to Boston merchants for capital and credit. These fishermen could also utilize the services of Boston merchants as middlemen to facilitate the shipment and sale of their catches to the West Indies and Southern Europe.<sup>31</sup>

Advocates of state consolidation in England, along with their administrative representatives in the colonies, faced a significant challenge given the rate of colonial expansion. They needed to enforce the collection of taxes in a way that maximized the collection of public revenues without either granting too much authority to regional tax collectors or placing so high of a burden on particular industries so as to disincentivize participation in the taxed trade and losing public revenues as a result.<sup>32</sup> Throughout the eighteenth century, metropolitan policymakers and administrators oversaw the expansion of a fiscal bureaucracy which could record and transmit information regarding revenues and expenses as well as organize the collection of revenue, particularly at custom houses. Within England, these bureaucracies saw the multiplication of transcribers, copyists, and record keepers who held responsibilities for communicating data to administrators in the Exchequer and Treasury Board.<sup>33</sup>

The expansion of a British fiscal bureaucracy did secure a progressive increase in revenue through the long eighteenth century. Between the Glorious Revolution and the American Revolution, revenue accrued in metropolitan coffers nearly tripled as measured per annum. The largest increases occurred during periods of war when the need for revenues was strongest to

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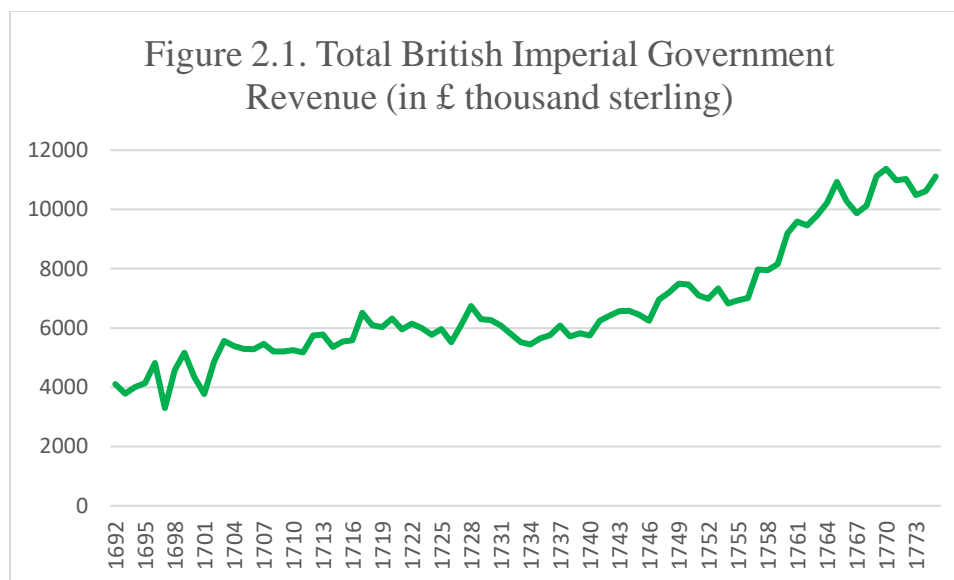
<sup>31</sup> Heyrman, *Commerce and Community*, 76.

<sup>32</sup> On independent tax collectors and tax farmers, see Roseveare, *The Treasury*, 36-7, 40, 127; Webber and Wildavsky, *A History of Taxation and Expenditure in the Western World*, 39, 75, 133, 230, 255, 271, 278, 294; On losing revenue through disincentivizing particular trades, see Davenant, *An Essay upon Ways and Means of Supplying War* (1695).

<sup>33</sup> Brewer, *The Sinews of Power*, xvi.

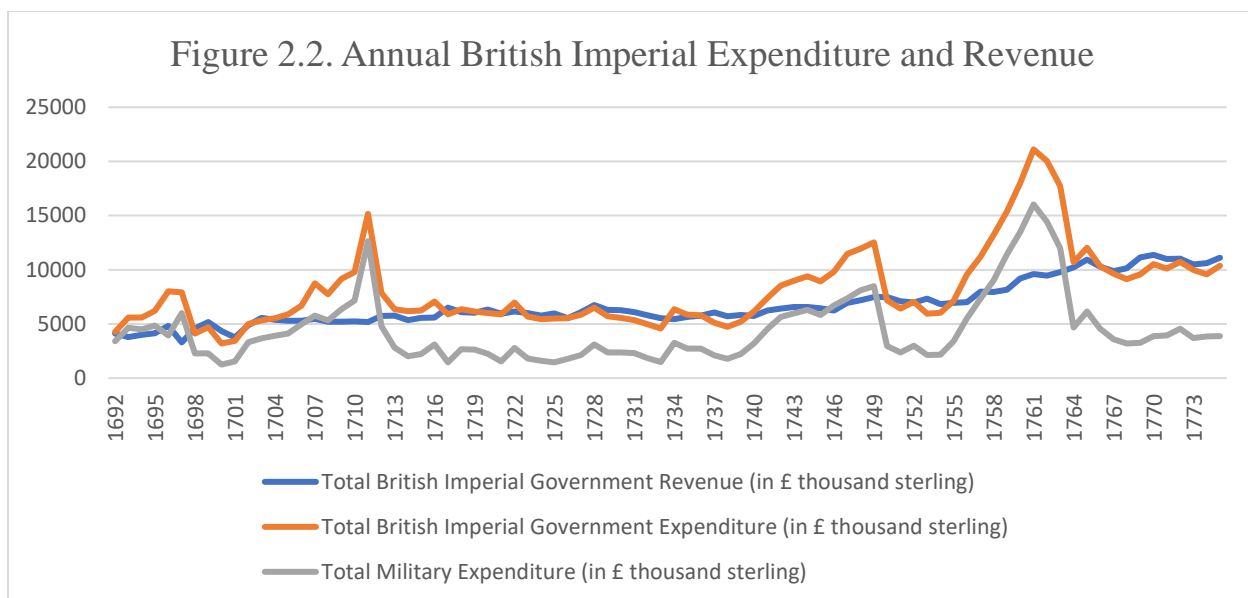
cover increased costs. War served as a means of expanding state power by augmenting the coercive and bureaucratic apparatuses supporting taxation. The wartime augmentation of state power garnered support rather than resistance, generally, from among the empire's subjects of the threat France and Spain posed to colonial interests in the Ohio Valley, the Great Lakes region, and Atlantic Canada. Increased revenue collection partially supports an interpretation emphasizing a fundamental aggrandizement of British state power through the eighteenth century. However, just as important as the ability to accrue revenue was the ability to cover the costs of new obligations.

Total annual revenue which the British metropolitan government accrued through the eighteenth century increased from around £4,000,000 in 1692 to over 11 million at multiple points between 1760 and 1775. The first decade following what historians refer to as England's Financial Revolution saw strong swings between years before steady upward growth beginning around 1704. Periods of warfare saw increases in aggregate revenue collection (1701-1714, 1739-1748, and especially 1754 to 1763). After the wars, the amount of revenue the empire collected did not generally return to prewar levels but continued into peacetime interims because the empire continued to pay the costs of the wars after peace. Wars also created military and bureaucratic expansion which created new persisting revenue demands. Taken solely by itself, the net increase in revenue collected over the eighteenth century would indicate an increased centralized fiscal capacity in line with a strong fiscal-military state interpretation of British imperialism. However, this does not account for the obligations which the state held against commercial agents particularly in the colonies.



Source: B.R. Mitchell, *British Historical Statistics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 575-94. These figures do not reflect costs undertaken through credit networks exclusive to the colonies but instead expenditures as reflected in Treasury receipts in London.

The difference between metropolitan revenue and expenditure determined much of the extent and nature of imperial state capacity in British America. Imperial states drew resources from their subjects but also had obligations to those same people. These obligations increased drastically in times of war. Centralization was strongest when the metropolitan state could cover the full extent of its obligations with revenue. However, this never occurred. Additionally, the gaps between what the state owed to its subjects and what it collected did not shrink in times of war despite the best efforts of policymakers and administrators to expand the fiscal bureaucracy to meet these needs. The gap between revenue and expenditure widened significantly during wartime. This indicates that the British imperial state relied more on the activity of firms and other constituents across its territory to mobilize money, men, and resources for war.

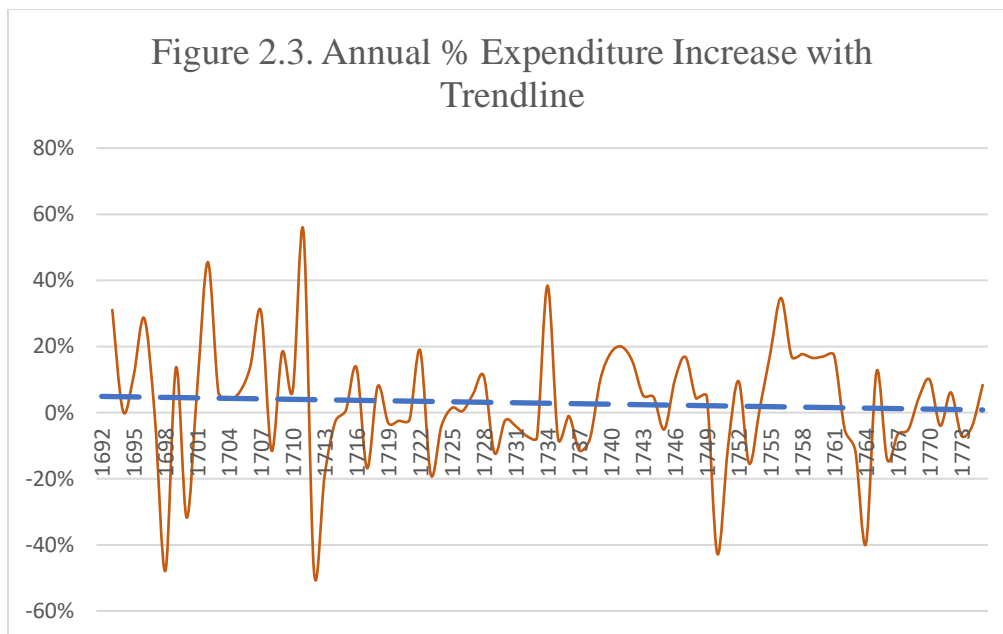


Source: B.R. Mitchell, *British Historical Statistics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 575-94. Annual expenditure slightly outpaced revenue under the British state from 1692 through 1775. This was due particularly to drastic upswings in expenditure during periods of war. For example, see the periods between 1688 and 1697 (Nine Years' War), 1701-1714 (War of the Spanish Succession), 1739-1748 (War of the Austrian Succession), and 1754-1763 (Seven Years' War).

Analyzing British imperial state capacity in terms of its fiscal development requires weighing the rate of increase of its taxation capacity with the simultaneous rate of increase of its financial obligations. Imperial public debt meant metropolitan dependence on dispersed creditors with their own interests and allegiances. Austerity could therefore cause conflict when the imperial core tried to reign in the autonomous units by mandating monetary conformity, reducing expenditures, enforcing trade restrictions, or implementing new taxes. Attempts at austerity and oversight in colonial America under the Dominion of New England, Currency Acts of 1751 and 1764, and Grenville's administrative reforms, proved unpopular because they restrained obligations that peripheral subjects felt the empire owed them. The generous grants and commercial liberalism of the Pitt administration from 1758 through 1762, however, found significant popular support in the colonies. From the metropolitan perspective, public debt and



commercial laxity meant that imperial delegation to peripheral agents caused a form of imperial entropy. Imperial officials did not express this concern in these terms but manifested it in their actions and policies like the hard money policies and rigorous enforcement of commercial laws under Newcastle, Grenville, and colonial officials like Thomas Hutchinson, Andrew Oliver, and Francis Bernard.



Source: B.R. Mitchell, *British Historical Statistics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 575-94.

The percentage change in annual expenditure fluctuated significantly from year to year as British politicians and administrators adjusted the annual budget to meet immediate demands. Some years rate of increase shot upward drastically, followed by reactionary belt-tightening readjustments. The four largest spikes, save one, came during periods of warfare (1701, 1710, 1755 were during wars) (Figure 2.3). Each of the four largest negative rates of increase occurred in the immediate aftermath of major wars. These periods of postwar austerity generally corresponded to episodes of imperial crisis, particularly in the case of the post-1763 Grenville administration

reforms. Importantly the average percent expenditure was positive through the period, though the rate of increase trended downward through the eighteenth century.

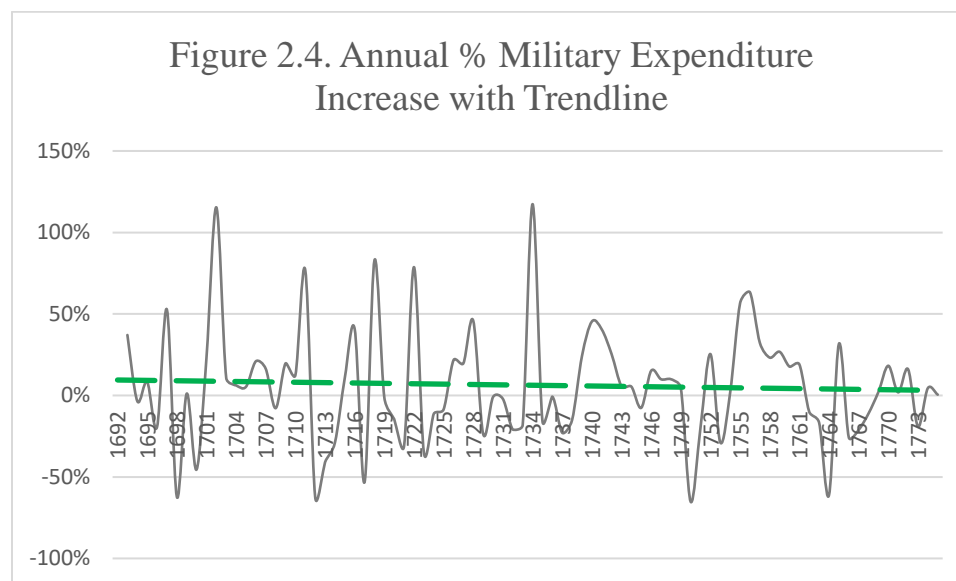
Obligations of the British state increased dramatically in periods of war. The social structures which emerged during inter-imperial conflicts required expansion into contested borderlands. Debtors in these peripheral spaces expanded the range of their influence and brought in new territory from which they could produce commodities which they could then remit through creditors in port towns and England.<sup>34</sup> These creditors accrued wealth through these means. The state could then tax this wealth to fulfill its own obligations. So long as these chains remained intact, the empire could remain in equilibrium. Importantly, this equilibrium required colonists to successfully expand, or in short, to succeed in colonial wars. Failure jeopardized the chain of remittance that maintained the legitimacy of the state to its creditors. Consequently, the empire proved willing whenever possible to assert the maximum influence over colonial wars using regular officers answerable to Whitehall such as Generals Jeffery Amherst and Thomas Gage. However, this direct intervention proved limited by expense and the importance of colonial knowledge and economic participation for wartime successes.

Military expenditure increased on average over the whole of the eighteenth century although the rate of increase progressively decreased over the same period. The rate of increase of military expenditure over the eighteenth century slightly outpaced the rate of public expenditure as a whole. This indicates the disproportionate importance of war in British imperial public finance over this period. In contrast to the percent increase in the rate of expenditure, and military expenditure in particular, the average annual percent increase of British imperial revenues was slightly lower. This indicates a core tension of eighteenth-century imperialism

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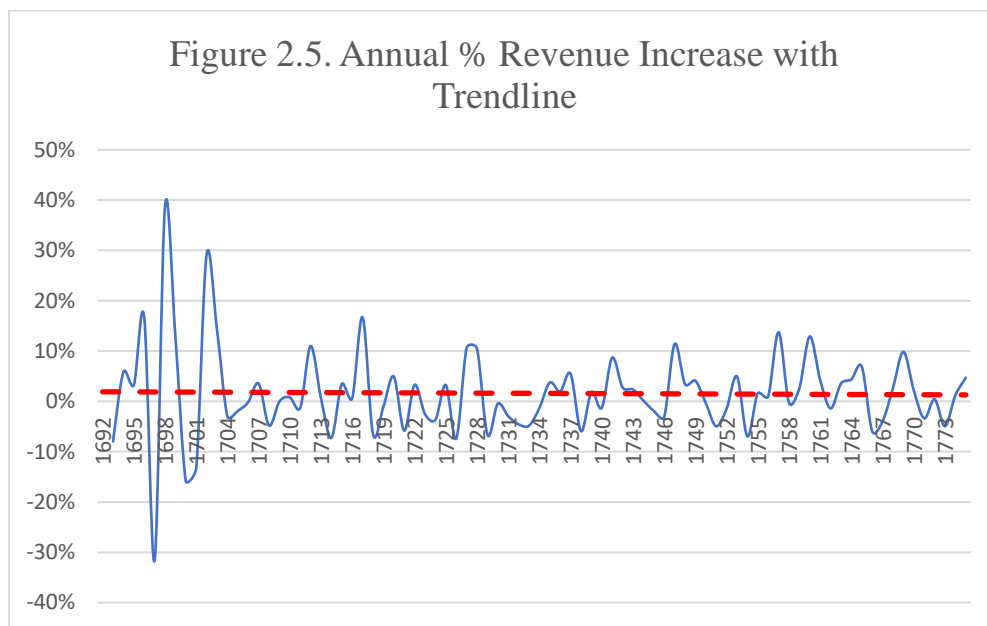
<sup>34</sup> For the integration and importance of colonial America into the mid-eighteenth-century world-economy, see Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System III*, 208-51.

which was that what the state could collect in taxes often fell below what needed to operate. This made it partially dependent on creditors and agents of imperial expansion in the colonies. Too much of this dependence weakened centralization.



Source: B.R. Mitchell, *British Historical Statistics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 575-94.

The percentage change in annual military expenditure supports the significance of military spending, and lack thereof, as key determinants in large swings between positive and negative percent changes in total public expenditure. Militarization and imperialism produced sporadic and cyclical rhythms in public finance which aggravated tensions between the metropole and society within the empire. Peaks in military spending in Figure 2.4 match those in Figure 2.3 showing percent change in total British expenditure, indicating that militarization correlated with aggravated cyclical spending patterns. The annual percent revenue increase went through a period of drastic increases and swings during the Financial Revolution in England before stabilizing substantially over the remainder of the century. Annual percent revenue increase lagged annual percent expenditure increase on average through the century. Revenue fluctuated significantly less than expenditure, particularly during major wars (Figure 2.5).



Source: B.R. Mitchell, *British Historical Statistics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 575-94.

Quantitative evidence supports the conclusion that the eighteenth-century British Empire expanded in terms of its capacity to tax its subjects. This capacity for revenue collection gave the empire the ability to grow and intensify its coercive hold over some subjects. However, debt was a countervailing force to this coercive hold which made the centralized state dependent and weak when it came to its capacity to control those peripheral monetary regimes which fell outside of the consolidated fiscal-military state. Annual percent changes in revenue and public debt fluctuated drastically. However, the long-term trend was a small but steady increase in the rate of revenue offset by a slightly larger and equally persistent increase in expenditures.

Metropolitan policymakers developed methods of funding this debt through financial instruments that guaranteed public creditors income that the state bureaucracy was sure to collect

over the following years.<sup>35</sup> However, this did not alter the fundamental reliance of empire on the ability to finance its activity ahead of its ability to acquire the necessary resources and money for remittances. The necessity of this acquisition fueled the empire's expansionist tendencies as in the case of North American colonial wars. In these wars, colonists served as economic shock-troops of imperial acquisition because they operated as the most proximate agents of resource procurement. These resources covered the imbalance between what the empire had and what it owed to its subjects. Reliance on colonists to finance imperial wars created a geographic tension, however, between the center of fiscal centralization in London and the colonists falling outside the consolidated fiscal bureaucracy. English policymakers exercised some limited fiscal control in North America at select coastal locations through customs houses. As the case of William Phips and Jahleel Brenton indicates, peripheral power often obfuscated these institutions in practice. This meant that bureaucratic linkages could not determine individual action effectively in the colonies. The colonists functioned as a necessary part of the flow of commodities and credit within the state. However, this colonial participation did not and could not emerge from centralized metropolitan dictate. This participation was socially emergent rather than the result of policy. Colonial merchants, for example, often worked towards, and benefited from provincial monetary autonomy during wars. Such autonomy was against the will of Whitehall as in the case of colonial paper money New Englanders issued between 1740 and 1751 as a means of facilitating their activity during the War of Austrian Succession.

News of war with Spain reached Thomas Hancock in 1740, when Governor William Shirley initiated the printing of colonial notes to fund military expeditions. Provision prices

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<sup>35</sup> See the unfunded proportion of the British debt and total debt charges as a percentage of revenues in Brewer, *The Sinews of Power*, 118-121. Also see numbers on these sources of public expenditure and income in Mitchell, *British Historical Statistics*, 575-580 including unfunded proportion of the British debt on pages 579-80.

increased in response to war demand and Hancock quickly entered the market. He procured local beef and pork and shipped it to the expeditionary forces. In 1741, Hancock funded local privateers operating under British letters of marque. He received payments in British bills backed in sterling specie, but the interaction with other suppliers and ship captains remained contained in the colonies. For example, he procured his flour from mills in Philadelphia, funding the coastal trade which transported it northward.<sup>36</sup>

The majority of Hancock's commercial activity in support of the war depended on inter-port credit networks within the Americas. Hancock established such networks through more than a decade of interaction with other firms. Commercial networks could not emerge spontaneously at London's bequest for the purposes of war. Instead, the military had to rely on existing commercial connections and customary mercantile practice both within the colonies and between the colonies and London. Often, significant overlap existed between colonial mercantile and military networks. Families like the Pepperells of Kittery held prominent roles in mercantile and military life through the first half of the eighteenth century. William Pepperell's financial connections and military leadership proved particularly important during the 1745 expedition which saw a force of primarily Massachusetts colonists capture the French fort at Louisbourg on Cape Breton.

The power of intensive commercial and social connections allowed for local state capacity under the control of colonists. This included social controls military officers implemented during war. These local social controls included enforcing monetary regimes. This included regulation of physical coinage, the issue of paper bills, and maintaining credible threats against counterfeiters. Colonial politicians and military officers, like William Shirley, saw such

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<sup>36</sup> Baxter, *The House of Hancock*, 78-79, 82-83.

injunctions against counterfeiting as particularly important during war when monetary stability and state credibility was necessary to maintain financial obligations supporting the military.

In 1748 William Shirley issued a proclamation against counterfeiters of bills of credit discovered in Connecticut. He asserted that the perpetrators had counterfeited bills issued by the governments of Connecticut in addition to neighboring colonies. Counterfeit notes circulated widely between colonies. Shirley described how such bills had been dispersed by accomplices of the counterfeiters in Massachusetts and “a considerable Quantity thereof taken in the Hands of one of them, who was a few Days since apprehended in the Town of *Boston*.”<sup>37</sup> He further notes that two specifically named accomplices Joseph Bill and Isaac Jones had recently been reported at large with Massachusetts. Shirley’s stated purpose in issuing this proclamation was to warn those who had, or were at risk of, receiving these false bills. Furthermore, he intended to require “all Officers and others within this Government, to use their utmost Endeavors for discovering and apprehending the said Joseph Bill and Isaac Jones, and all other persons concerned in the said wicked and pernicious practice who may be found within this Province.”<sup>38</sup> It is significant that the responsibility for apprehension of Jones and Bill fell on provincial enforcers. Monetary uniformity and quantity depended on colonial cooperation. Physical threats against monetary crimes could not come from London but had to arise from other colonists.

Shirley’s proclamation against the counterfeiters further promised to pay any person who should secure Joseph Bill or Isaac Jones fifty pounds for either of them. Shirley additionally granted amnesty for any person involved in the conspiracy who should apprehend and deliver either Bill or Jones in addition to the monetary reward. Shirley directed anyone capable of

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<sup>37</sup> William Shirley, “By His Excellency William Shirley, Esq; ... A proclamation: Whereas discovery has been lately made in the colony of Connecticut, of a combination of divers wicked and dissolute people for counterfeiting the bills of credit, of this and the neighbouring...” Massachusetts Historical Society. Boston, MA.

<sup>38</sup> Shirley, “By His Excellency William Shirley, Esq.”

apprehending the two to bring them to the Majesty's Court of Assize of Massachusetts. In addition to payments made to those who could apprehend the two named criminals, Shirley also offered payments for information. He offered twenty-five pounds out of the public treasury for any person with information concerning the counterfeiters. Shirley's control over payments within the colonies lent him the ability to maintain economic authority during the war. At that time, colonial paper money supported colonial military activity. The financial organizations and state institutions supporting state capacity in the North American theater of the War of Austrian Succession, therefore, were largely indigenous to the colonies rather than extending from fiscal bureaucracies in England.



## Chapter Three

### Province & Empire: The Formation of Factional Interests in Wartime North America, 1745-1763

Between 1745 and 1763, northeastern British North America existed in a state of imperial tension with French American colonists, the Wabanaki Confederacy, and Abenaki allied with the French. Between competing territorial claims and the expansionist pressure of growing colonial populations, North American inhabitants existed in a state of tension in periods of war as well as peace. Mobilizing colonial populations for war in the colonial theaters of the War of the Austrian Succession (1740-1748) and the Seven Years' War (1754-1763) required colonists with shared interests and cultural coinheritances to unite against external threats. Colonists who united for the purpose of war also competed against one another. Towns, firms, and military regiments vied for dominance across New England and New York during periods of war and peace with the French and their Native allies.<sup>1</sup>

Colonists formed regional coalitions to engage in warfare against rival French colonists. Forming wartime coalitions during this period required significant compromise between towns, provincial governments, and military regiments. Colonial governments and military regiments formed coalitions with metropolitan financiers and policymakers in England. Compromise

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<sup>1</sup> *A Complete History of the Present War, from Its Commencement in 1756 to the End of the Campaign, 1760. In Which, All the Battles, Sieges, and Sea-Engagements; with every other Transaction worthy of Public Attention, are Faithfully Recorded; with Political and Military Observations* (London: W. Owen, L. Davis, C. Reymers, J. Scott, 1761), 1-8; Fred Anderson, *A People's Army: Massachusetts Soldiers and Society in the Seven Years' War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 3-25; Francis Jennings, *Empire of Fortune: Crowns, Colonies, and Tribes in the Seven Years War in America* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1988), 71-108; William Shirley, "Shirley to Duke of Newcastle, November 23, 1752" in *Correspondence of William Shirley: Governor of Massachusetts and Military Commander in America, 1731-1760*. Vol. II. Charles Henry Lincoln, ed. (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1912), 1-4.

among the members of these coalitions required that the central government cede power to subordinate groups. This coercive power also required capital and financial intermediaries. The economic requirements for coercive state capacity required the participation of colonial merchants. Even when fighting mutual enemies, British-American factions fought amongst themselves for resources and influence. This continued during the interwar period from 1748 to 1754. During this period, mercantile networks competed amongst one another for relationships with the British imperial state. Such contestation included interpersonal networking in major port towns like Boston and New York. Social bonds, like marriage and political patronage, as well as financial credit determined who would have access to lucrative war contracts during the next war.<sup>2</sup>

For the purposes of warmaking, this fractious political system did not necessarily interfere with imperial aims. Regional delegation to colonial military officers like Lieutenant-Colonel John Winslow or financiers like the Apthorp family, benefited imperial expansion by delegating authority to those with the connections necessary to tap local resources and knowledge. Decentralization improved state efficiency by coopting their expertise and financial networks to achieve imperial war aims. In the long term, however, the growth of peripheral factions led to internal competition within the British imperial state and its colonies. Regiments like Winslow's competed with other regiments, particularly those more attached to metropolitan authority in England. Merchant-financiers formed competing networks attached to separate sources of patronage. The strongest divide between merchants pitted those merchants who drew

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<sup>2</sup> On the importance of the formation of commercial networks for competition in early American merchant communities, see Bernard Bailyn, *The New England Merchants in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1955), 168-98; Stuart Weems Bruchey, *Robert Oliver, Merchant of Baltimore, 1783-1819* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1956), 29-47; James Blaine Hedges, *The Browns of Providence Plantations: Colonial Years* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952); Frederick Barnes Tolles, *Meeting House and Counting House: The Quaker Merchants of Colonial Philadelphia, 1682-1763* (New York: Norton, 1948).

primarily on the provincial patronage of colonial legislatures and town governments against those who drew primarily on metropolitan connections originating foremost from London.<sup>3</sup>

War, merchant finance, imperial public credit, and personal relationships intersected in one matrix to enable Britain to wage war in North America. Such a financial system reflected the decentralized relationship between dispersed British subjects and the metropolis which many on the colonial periphery came to recognize as a stable constitutional order. However, because of tensions between internal factions who organized wartime finance, this structural relationship could fall out of equilibrium when conflict between interest groups upset the existing power balance. Fissures emerged between British colonial subjects in colonial wars preceding the American Revolution. The formation of divergent interests within British-American society is reflected in the financial obligations documented in merchant accounts, in town and provincial administrative records, in the exchange and form of money and financial instruments, and in the terms of officers' commissions and other public documents. The outcome of power contests between provincial and imperial interest groups determined the social structures of wartime government, public finance, and political culture in the American northeast through the mid-eighteenth century.

The 1740s saw significant expansions of both British and French territorial claims in the colonial American Northeast. Significant mid-century population expansion, particularly on the part of the British, pushed competing settlements and territorial claims into contested territories.

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<sup>3</sup> Charles Beard and Mary Beard, *The Rise of American Civilization* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1930), 33-121; Richard R. Beeman, "The New Social History and the Search for 'Community' In Colonial America." *American Quarterly*, 29, no. 4, (Oct. 1977): 422-43; Jack P. Greene, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Social Development of Early Modern British Colonies and the Formation of American Culture* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 7-27; Gregory Kennedy, Thomas Peace and Stephanie Pettigrew. "Social Networks across Chignecto: Applying Social Network Analysis to Acadie, Mi'kma'ki, and Nova Scotia, 1670-1751." *Acadiensis: Journal of the History of the Atlantic Region*, 47, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2018): 8-40; James T. Lemon, "Early Americans and their Social Environment." *Journal of Historical Geography* 6 (1980): 115-31.

On disputed frontiers, the competing European powers deployed colonists, soldiers, and Native allies to fortify key strategic posts. Most notable among these was the French fort at Louisburg. Situated on the peninsular Île Royal, or Cape Breton Island, Louisburg exercised significant influence over maritime traffic passing around the Gulf of St. Lawrence. From the French perspective, the fort was of great strategic importance, because it defended access to the St. Lawrence River and the settlements within continental New France.<sup>4</sup>

Control of waterways in the Atlantic Ocean off the coast of Cape Breton held particular importance from the perspective of New Englanders and those in the frontiers of New York. These regional concerns arose from proximity to the contested territory, which stoked century-old anxieties of French and Indian invasion.<sup>5</sup> More specifically, colonists in these regions had strong financial stakes in exercising control of contested territories and North Atlantic waterways. These included merchants and other wealthy colonists in urban port towns who speculated in lands on the frontiers of colonial society.<sup>6</sup> New England had long established significant commercial connections with Newfoundland. The fisheries of the Grand Banks off Newfoundland's coast functioned as a part of the rum trade routes extending from the West Indies up through Boston, other port towns, and the fishing outposts of the British North Atlantic

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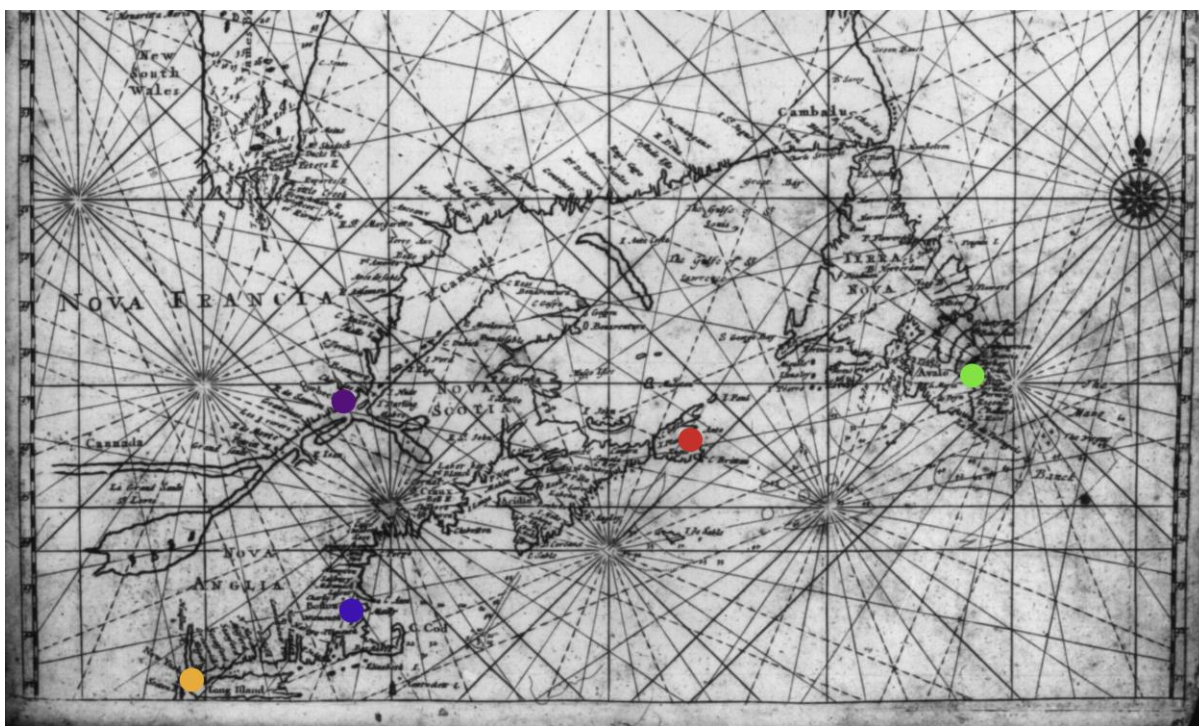
<sup>4</sup> Fred Anderson, *A People's Army: Massachusetts Soldiers & Society in the Seven Years' War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 8, 13, 16-9, 65, 83, 115-7, 141-3, 189-90, 205, 215; Anderson, *Crucible of War: The Seven Years' War and the Fate of Empire in British North America, 1754-1766* (New York: Vintage, 2000), 207-8, 225, 250-9, 297-8, 405, 422; Andrew D.M. Beaumont, *Colonial America and the Earl of Halifax, 1748-1761* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 67, 114, 192, 197-8; A. J. B. Johnston, *Endgame 1758: The Promise, the Glory, and the Despair of Louisbourg's Last Decade* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2007), 54-92, 129-33, 203-8; 231-9, 247; William R. Nester, *The First Global War: Britain, France, and the Fate of North America, 1756-1775* (Westport: Praeger, 2000), 40-1, 45-52, 74-5, 82-94, 115, 126, 219.

<sup>5</sup> Anderson, *A People's Army*, 4, 15; Anderson, *Crucible of War*, 11-32, 66-76; Nester, *The French and Indian War and the Conquest of New France*, 115-150.

<sup>6</sup> Urban merchant families with financial interests in western lands includes the Apthorps and DeLanceys. Charles Ward Apthorp, *Accounts (1755-1768)*. Charles Ward Apthorp papers, 1727-1858. Massachusetts Historical Society. Boston, MA; Apthorp, *Accounts*. Charles Ward Apthorp collection, 1756-1908. New York Historical Society. New York, NY.

before circulating back downward.<sup>7</sup> Merchants organized this interregional exchange through webs of credit obligations and dispersed commercial networks. Land speculation also increased the territorial reach of British-American commerce. The British state shared in the benefits of this expansion because it augmented the pool of resources on which the state could draw on for revenue and other resources when it came time to defend contested territories and engage in offensive operations against rival settlements.

FIGURE 3.1 DETAIL OF A MAP OF NORTHEASTERN REGION CONTESTED BETWEEN 1745 AND 1760



Detail of a navigational map originally published in 1689 entitled *A chart of ye North part of America: for Hudsons Bay comonly called ye North West Passage* by London mapmaker John Thornton. British subjects in North America around the turn of the eighteenth century, including the Massachusetts officer Cyprian Southack, used this map to coordinate attacks against Cape Breton, Quebec, and French fortifications along

<sup>7</sup> On Newfoundland's trade and place within trade and social structure of Greater New England and commercial competition with the French, see Jerry Bannister, *The Rule of the Admirals: Law, Custom, and Naval Government in Newfoundland, 1699-1832* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 148-9, 241-2; Gillian T. Cell, *English Enterprise in Newfoundland 1577-1660* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969); McCusker and Menard, *The Economy of British America*, 98-116; D. W. Meinig, *The Shaping of America. Volume I: Atlantic America, 1492-1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 25, 58-61, 87-8, 97, 109, 221, 259, 269, 324; Peter E. Pope, *Fish into Wine: The Newfoundland Plantation in the Seventeenth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 14, 22-3, 27, 209, 419, 440-1.

the southern coast of Newfoundland. Major settlements as they existed by 1745 are color-coded. Louisbourg = RED, Boston = BLUE, New York City = ORANGE, Quebec = PURPLE, and the primary commercial port of Newfoundland, St. John's = GREEN. Note the position of Louisbourg guarding access to the Gulf of St. Lawrence and the mouth of the St. Lawrence River on which the French settled Quebec. Also, note the lined region off of the southeast coast of Newfoundland demarcating the commercially significant cod fisheries of the Grand Banks. John Thornton, *A chart of ye North part of America: for Hudsons Bay comonly called ye North West Passage*. Cyprian Southack letters, 1697-1705. Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society Boston, MA.

Conflict between British and French subjects in the North Atlantic escalated because of economic competition. British colonial traders and farmers saw the region as falling within their commercial sphere of influence. French subjects operating along the St. Lawrence River, and fishing off the coast of Newfoundland, likewise claimed commercial priority to resources within the region. Merchants and proprietors, both British and French, sought to maximize their individual shares of scarce resources and exploitable territory. One can think of the eighteenth-century colonial wars as collisions of socio-economic machines in which commerce directed resources from individuals for the needs of the state. Social units, like merchant firms and military regiments, each with varying degrees of autonomy, coalesced in opposition to common threats. However, these units, united for the purpose of war, did not exist in stable relationships. Ruptures between cooperating coalitions happened sporadically when individual interests diverged. The perception of excessive demands on a group, or irreconcilable strategic goals, could doom a war effort by causing fissures within a state.

Merchant credit proved a tool that authorities used to manage tense relationships between competing domestic interest groups. British-American colonists, and indeed most early modern imperial subjects, made frequent use of credit.<sup>8</sup> Individuals could make beneficial transactions

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<sup>8</sup> Craig Muldrew, *The Economy of Obligation: The Culture of Credit and Social Relations in Early Modern England* (London: Macmillan Press, 1998); Ellen Hartigan O'Connor, *The Ties that Buy: Women and Commerce in Revolutionary America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2009); Claire Priest, *Credit Nation: Property Laws and Institutions in Early America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021); David Stasavage, *Public Debt and the Birth of the Democratic State: France and Great Britain, 1688-1789* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); David Stasavage, *States of Credit: Size, Power, and the Development of European Politics* (Princeton:

without the immediate need to provide a good, service, or money. Delayed completion of an exchange allowed a colonist to employ borrowed capital toward some venture and then repay principal and interest with the proceeds. By these means, public credit functioned as a tool of early modern imperial expansion.<sup>9</sup> During colonial wars, governments and merchant contractors viewed participation in imperial expansion as precisely this type of venture.<sup>10</sup> Merchants used financial experience and connections to move resources using personal credit. The state used public credit to fund merchants and other financial intermediaries, like military officers, for their services. The social structure of a militarized society depended on cascading obligations down a hierarchy of payments and administrative authority from the state, to merchants and officers, and finally to the general population.

The goal of wartime commercial ventures was to secure victory, expand the wealth of the state and its constituents, and then remit on obligations down the hierarchy from the expanded resource pool.<sup>11</sup> Contemporary observers like Thomas Hutchinson of Massachusetts rightly observed that periods of colonial war incentivized an expansionary fiscal policy particularly at the provincial level. Massachusetts emitted large amounts of colonial paper currency to the

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Princeton University Press, 2011); Daniel Vickers, "Errors Expected: The Culture of Credit in Rural New England, 1750-1800." *Economic History Review* 63 (2010), 1032-1057.

<sup>9</sup> Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990-1992* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1992), 87-90.

<sup>10</sup> Port town mercantile communities depended on interpersonal credit for all aspects of life and commerce. During war, merchants could extend debts further to meet the demands of war policy. On merchants' use of credit in imperial wars in general, and specialization in war finance and provisioning in domestic and West Indian markets, see William T. Baxter, *The House of Hancock* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1945), 62-125; Thomas M. Doerflinger, *A Vigorous Spirit of Enterprise: Merchants and Economic Development in Revolutionary Philadelphia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1986), 82-5, 97-122; Hancock family accounts and receipts, 1728-1829. Massachusetts Historical Society. Boston, MA; David Hancock, *Citizens of the World: London Merchants and the Integration of the British Atlantic Community, 1735-1785* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 221-78; Cathy Matson, *Merchants & Empire: Trading in Colonial New York* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 73-120, 265-312.

<sup>11</sup> During war, early modern imperial states depended on capital and financial services provided by the developing merchant class. Charles Tilly refers to such cases of co-development between capital-intensive commercial communities and state power as "capitalist trajectories" and the outcome as "capitalized coercion." On merchants financing military actions to secure victory against imperial rivals and expand the wealth of the state, see Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States*, 192, 87-90, 143-60.

benefit of debtors within the province. After 1745, merchants in port towns like Boston like Thomas Hancock and Charles Apthorp Sr. utilized debt to purchase goods and finance payments toward the expeditions in Atlantic Canada including the siege of Fort Louisburg. Merchants funding such activity on personal credit benefited from inflationary monetary policy in the colony and many supported augmenting the money supply under the mid-century land bank system. Not all colonists supported such policies, nor did many policymakers in England because metropolitan and colonial creditors saw the reduction of the real values of debtors' obligations.<sup>12</sup>

Officials delegated financial tasks to northeastern colonists during periods of colonial war, which required postwar policies which reigned in colonial monetary control during subsequent peace. This explains the reforms initiated under the Currency Acts of 1751 and 1764 which followed the end of the War of Austrian Succession and the Seven Years' War, respectively. The Currency Acts curtailed the ability of colonial legislatures, particularly that of Massachusetts in 1751, to print colonial notes independent of Parliament's control. The 1764 Act further prevented the payment of revenues to the crown's customs officers in any currency save those which issuers backed with bullion.<sup>13</sup> From the metropolitan perspective, this checked the

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<sup>12</sup> John Asgill Nicholas Barbon, and John Briscoe. *Proposals Made to the Honorable House of Commons, by the Land Bank United, for Raising Two Million, or More*. London, 1696; George Athan Billias, *The Massachusetts Land Bankers of 1740* (Orono: University of Maine, 1959); Theodore Thayer, "The Land-Bank System in the American Colonies." *The Journal of Economic History*, 13, no. 2, (Apr. 1953): 145-59; On creditors' general opposition to currency emissions, and metropolitan support of these measures in the eighteenth-century context, see Bernard Bailyn, *The Ordeal of Thomas Hutchinson* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1974), 133-138; Malcolm Freiburg, "Thomas Hutchinson and the Province Currency," *The New England Quarterly*, 30, no. 2 (Jun. 1957): 190-208; Thomas Hutchinson, "The Protest of Andrew Oliver and Thomas Hutchinson, 4 April 1751," in *The Correspondence of Thomas Hutchinson*. John W. Tyler and Elizabeth Dubrulle, eds. Vol. I. Boston: The Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 2014.

<sup>13</sup> Leslie V. Brock, *The Currency of the American Colonies, 1700-1764: A Study in Colonial Finance and Imperial Relations* (New York: Arno Press, 1975); Elizabeth E. Dunn, "'Grasping at the Shadow': The Massachusetts Currency Debate, 1690-1751." *The New England Quarterly*, 71, no. 1, (Mar. 1998): 54-76; Joseph Ernst, *Money and Politics in America, 1755-1775: A Study in the Currency Act of 1764 and the Political Economy of Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1973); William R. Nester, *The First Global War: Britain, France, and the Fate of North America, 1756-1775* (Westport: Praeger, 2000), 246; Edwin J. Perkins, "Conflicting Views on Fiat Currency: Britain and Its North American Colonies in the Eighteenth Century." *Business History*, 33, no. 3, (Jul. 1991): 8-30.



ability of American colonists to lessen the extent of their obligations to creditors. From the provincial perspective, by contrast, such reforms functioned as an about-face reversal of wartime fiscal norms. Provincial middlemen who used debt to provide the liquidity that made it possible to requisition goods and supplies found these debts harder to pay under the new regulations.<sup>14</sup> Colonial merchants and officers with primary connections to provincial institutions pushed back against these fiscal rules that harmed their interests, because they held depreciated currency and outstanding debts now denominated exclusively in pounds sterling. State directives originating from the crown and Parliament had to filter through provincial government where local interests distorted them for their own advantage.<sup>15</sup>

The imperial and provincial political networks which emerged in the colonies after 1745 in response to war opened opportunities for merchants with strong connections to legislative bodies and colonial administrators. These opportunities to supply and finance rapidly expanding military fortifications and towns augmented by soldier populations increased the range of profitable commercial opportunities for those with strong local political connections. Because of competition for political patronage, these wartime opportunities did not extend evenly to all colonial merchants. Ordnance officers and contractors in England turned toward the most established merchants with reputation and credit.<sup>16</sup> Military administrators considered reputation as an indicator of merchants' capacities to use debt to mobilize resources for war. Consequently,

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<sup>14</sup> Attempts at imperial state centralization included commercial regulation and legal tender laws meant to prevent provincial monetary autonomy. Patrick Griffin, *The Townshend Moment: The Making of Empire and Revolution in the Eighteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 20-7, 29-30; Great Britain, Parliament, House of Lords, 2-5 April 1764, in *Proceeding and Debates of the British Parliaments Respecting North America: I, 1754-1764*. R.C. Simmons and P.D.G. Thomas, eds. (Millwood: Kraus International, 1982), 519-20.

<sup>15</sup> Richard L. Bushman, *King and People in Provincial Massachusetts* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 55-84, 91-98; J. Allen Smith, *The Spirit of American Government* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1965), 3, 8-11; Ian K. Steele, *Politics of Colonial Policy: The Board of Trade in Colonial Administration, 1696-1720* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968).

<sup>16</sup> H.C. Tomlinson, *Guns and Government: The Ordnance Office under the Later Stuarts* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1979), 1-98.

longstanding commercial relationships with London, patronage connections, and kinship networks were primary determinants of success in these markets between 1745 and 1763. Self-representation and a degree of cosmopolitan cultural conformity improved merchants' choices of access to lucrative wartime contracts.<sup>17</sup> This period also saw the emergence of distinct, and increasingly mutually exclusive, provincial and metropolitan networks for wartime financial services. The experiences of the Apthorp and Hancock families over this period illustrate this larger division between provincial and imperial interests.

The Boston merchants Thomas Hancock and Charles Apthorp Sr. first challenged each other for contracts in 1745. In that year, they both received shares in a contract for victualling troops at Annapolis Royal in preparation for the 1745 siege of the French fort at Louisburg. Hancock had an advantage in that his agent, Christopher Kilby, was on good terms with the Board of Ordnance, and Hancock actively sought assignments from within that department. Hancock soon received contracts from the Board's representative in Nova Scotia and realized that Apthorp had also received a share of the provisioning contracts. The Board of Ordnance in London could revoke either Hancock's or Apthorp's contract at any time. This meant that the two could not rely on government protection against the other's competition. They began to try to seek favor among government officials to push the other out of the provisioning trade.<sup>18</sup> Hancock instructed Kilby in 1745 to secure all forthcoming contracts even if it meant paying off the members of the Board of Ordnance. He also told him to petition the Board to fix the rates on contracts to avoid competitive bidding. By the end of 1745, the Board prolonged Apthorp's and

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<sup>17</sup> Bernard Bailyn, *The New England Merchants in the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Harper & Row, 1955); Phyllis Whitman Hunter, *Purchasing Identity in the Atlantic World: Massachusetts Merchants, 1670-1780* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 2001).

<sup>18</sup> William T. Baxter, *The House of Hancock: Business in Boston, 1724-1775* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1945), 98. Hancock family accounts and receipts, 1728-1829. Hancock family papers II. Massachusetts Historical Society. Boston, MA.

Hancock's contracts, fixed rates for the contracts, and then decided to make their positions permanent until the end of the Louisburg campaign.<sup>19</sup>

Securing contracts for supplying the military required merchants to maneuver a social system in which displays of wealth and status determined how imperial officials and other merchants perceived a potential contractor. Following the 1745 siege of Louisburg, Thomas Hancock travelled to London. By this time, Hancock's involvement in war provisioning for the Louisburg siege and outfitting vessels to fight the Spanish in the Caribbean had returned income exceeding £12,000 sterling.<sup>20</sup> Colonists would have considered this a considerable fortune.<sup>21</sup> The War of the Austrian Succession, particularly during the 1745 Louisburg siege, provided select merchant-financiers with opportunities not present in peacetime. Wartime needs for their services allowed them to outcompete less-connected merchants and contributed to an increasing wealth inequality in the merchant community.

The end of the War of the Austrian Succession saw simultaneous reductions of public contracts and reforms promoting deflation and fiscal austerity. This reversed the benefits of merchants who held colonial bills issued during the war and who relied on the circulation of private debt to fund their businesses. Rapid transition did not allow for tapered adjustment by merchants nor port town commercial communities in general.<sup>22</sup> These colonists moved quickly

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<sup>19</sup> Baxter, *The House of Hancock*, 98-100. Hancock family accounts and receipts, 1728-1829.

<sup>20</sup> Nash, *The Urban Crucible*, 169.

<sup>21</sup> Allan Kulikoff, "The Progress of Inequality in Revolutionary Boston." *William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 28, no.3, (1971), 375-414; Gloria L. Main, "Inequality in Early America: The Evidence from Probate Records of Massachusetts and Maryland." *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 7, no. 4, (Apr. 1977): 559-581; Gloria L. Maine, "The Standard of Living in Colonial Massachusetts." *Journal of Economic History* 43 (1983), 101-108; Gary B. Nash, "Urban Wealth and Poverty in Pre-Revolutionary America," in Stanley N. Katz and John M. Murrin eds. *Colonial America: Essays in Politics and Social Development*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Knopf, 1983), 447-484; Joshua Pico Sr., Will. November 7, 1735. Joshua Pico Business Record. Baker Library, Harvard Business School. Cambridge, MA.

<sup>22</sup> On the interwar depression as it affected merchants in the commercial community of New York City, see Matson, *Merchants and Empire*, 265-312.

from activities supporting military activity to those supporting common forms of trade. This rapid adjustment came with costs associated with reallocating resources and labor to new trades. As a result, traders had a strong incentive to encourage the resumption of conflict with the French. They wanted to return to the commercial conditions of the 1739-1748 period, when contracts and payments flowed from London to New England. Merchants like the Apthorps and Thomas Hancock prepared by establishing the connections necessary to obtain contracts during the next escalation of conflict with the French, as would occur in 1754. However, the reforms of the 1751 Currency Act remained in place, and so the merchants would have to adapt their financial practices by relying less on colonial paper issues and more on their own circulation of private promissory notes in order to make trade possible without an alternative medium of exchange.<sup>23</sup> During the Seven Years' War, however, merchants, legislators, and military officers found this strategy inadequate. Reliance on provincial government and localized merchant networks prevented the streamlined function of a hierarchical military state.

In 1749, the Massachusetts legislature redeemed its issues of paper bills for stores of British silver. Thomas Hancock criticized this policy because he had accumulated a large amount of paper money through his war provisioning work during King George's War. As a result of its passage, Hancock experienced a decline in income until conflict with France escalated in 1754.<sup>24</sup> As early as 1755, Hancock expressed dissatisfaction with the costs that the Massachusetts legislature levied on Bostonians. That year, he and fifteen other merchants threatened to relocate if the legislature did not reduce taxes.<sup>25</sup> Between 1745 and 1750, merchants like Thomas

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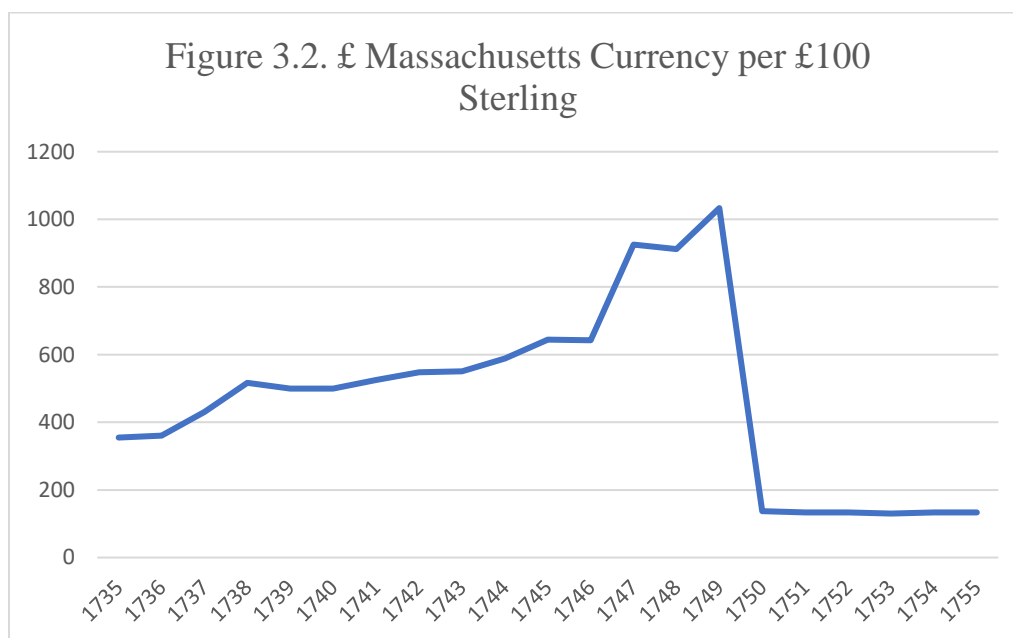
<sup>23</sup> The significance of the Currency Acts and merchants' use of promissory notes for war finance is addressed in Chapter 4. On the effects of the acts in general and their political context, see John L. Bullion, *Prelude to Disaster: George III and the Origins of the American Revolution, 1751-1763* (New York: Peter Lang, 2017), 3-15; Joseph Ernst, *Money and Politics in America, 1755-1775: A Study in the Currency Act of 1764 and the Political Economy of Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1973); Dunn, "'Grasping at the Shadow'," 54-76.

<sup>24</sup> Baxter, *The House of Hancock*, 111-114. Hancock family accounts and receipts, 1728-1829.

<sup>25</sup> Baxter, *The House of Hancock*, 134-135.

Hancock had ingratiated themselves to imperial paymasters and generals. They had benefited from colonial inflation while they financed and provisioned British forces on personal credit.

The War of Austrian Succession saw a marked decrease in the purchasing power of Massachusetts currency relative to the silver pounds sterling. The economic demands of war produced an incentive for inflationary monetary policy to support large-scale provisioning and financing on mercantile credit. While debt supported warfare, this inflationary trend continued. At the end of the war, a rapid transition occurred largely as the result of the reforms of Parliament's 1751 Currency Act which curtailed Massachusetts's ability to issue its own paper notes. Such rapid transition would have hurt those who held significant debt and would have motivated many colonists to support a return to wartime conditions like that of 1739 to 1748.



Source: Adapted from John J. McCusker, *Money and Exchange in Europe and America, 1600-1775: A Handbook* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978), 138-45, 151-52.

During eighteenth-century colonial wars, shipwrights, cordwainers, coopers, and carters borrowed from merchants. They also, however, held debts against other urban workers and suppliers of raw materials in the colonial hinterlands. Such resources included wood, potash, and naval stores.<sup>26</sup> Bostonians paid on credit to producers on the frontiers of New England, and other colonies, for such supplies. Northeastern farmers also paid for goods using credit because of the cyclical rhythm of agricultural cycles. Such cycles required agrarian communities to make purchases in anticipation of income from harvests, months in advance. Postwar shifts in fiscal and monetary policy had far-reaching implications beyond a narrow financial class in port towns.<sup>27</sup>

Colonists undertook much of the activity supporting mid-century colonial wars on their own accounts. Merchants and other provincial commercial participants funded the conflict using short-term debt. Policymakers in England arranged for bullion payments to cover colonial costs, but they lacked the ability to fulfill all outstanding obligations between colonists. Much of the state capacity to surveil and organize financial relationships over colonial territory remained in hands of colonial governments and mercantile agents who performed such tasks on these governments' behalf. Postwar policy shifts concerning monetary autonomy and fiscal reform only exacerbated the costs colonists undertook during the war. The brief period of interwar peace from 1748 to 1754 did not last long enough to force this issue before colonial war resumed and

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<sup>26</sup> Joseph J. Malone, *Pine Trees and Politics: The Naval Stores and Forest Policy in Colonial New England, 1691-1775* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1964).

<sup>27</sup> On the interconnection between credit, agriculture, port town-hinterland connections, colonial development, and capital, see Richard D. Brown, *Modernization: The Transformation of American Life, 1600-1865* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1976), 43, 51-2, 55-7, 124-6, 153-4; Lewis Cecil Gray, *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States to 1860*. 2 vols. (1933; Clifton: Augustus M. Kelley, 1973), 1: 409-436; Gary Kulik, "Dams, Fish, and Farmers: Defense of Public Rights in Eighteenth-Century Rhode Island," in Steven Hahn and Jonathan Prude eds. *The Countryside in the Age of Capitalist Transformation: Essays in the Social History of Rural America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 25-50.

colonists again mobilized against New France. Merchants and military officers again shifted their activities to serve these new demands of the Seven Years' War economy.

In 1755, Thomas Hancock and Charles Apthorp Sr. agreed to resume joint provisioning of Nova Scotia in preparation for the siege of Fort Beausejour beside the Bay of Fundy. Hancock soon had difficulty acquiring funds at the provincial level as Parliament had banned printing paper money in Massachusetts. Bullion money proved scarce in the colonies relative to the metropole, and so Hancock needed an adequate supply of paper currency to pay those from whom he obtained supplies.<sup>28</sup> Hancock responded by shifting his attention to acquiring notes from the British Treasury and then obtained additional British bills from New York. Hancock heard that Charles Ward Apthorp had settled in New York, and he wrote him a letter asking him to procure cash in the city on his behalf. Hancock remained hopeful that he could tap the Apthorps' New York network until May 1755 when he lost the contract for supplying bills to pay for wages and provisions at garrisons in Nova Scotia.<sup>29</sup> That same year, Christopher Kilby resigned as Hancock's intermediary in Nova Scotia to take a new position as a victualling agent in the military. The military office for the provisioning trade shifted to New York, where Hancock and his Boston compatriots could not compete with the local merchants to secure provisions.<sup>30</sup> As Hancock's fortunes waned, the Apthorps' rose. The Apthorp firm would serve as direct financial contractors for the Paymaster-General in North America. To salvage what profits

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<sup>28</sup> "An Enquiry into the State of the Bills of Credit, Etc." in *Colonial Currency Reprints, 1682-1751*. Vol. IV. Andrew McFarland Davis ed. (Boston: The Prince Society, 1911), 149-209; "An Account of the Rise, Progress and Consequences of the Two Late Schemes, Etc." in *Colonial Currency Reprints, 1682-1751*. Vol. IV, 237-349; Andrew David Edwards, "Grenville's Silver Hammer: The Problem of Money in the Stamp Act Crisis." *Journal of American History*, 104, no. 2, (Sep. 2017): 337-362; Dror Goldberg, "The Massachusetts Paper Money of 1690." *The Journal of Economic History*, vol. 69, no. 4, 1 Dec. 2009, pp. 1092-1106; Farley Grubb, "Chronic Specie Scarcity and Efficient Barter: The Problem of Maintaining an Outside Money Supply in British Colonial America." *NBER Working Papers* (May 2012): 1-40.

<sup>29</sup> Baxter, *The House of Hancock*, 130.

<sup>30</sup> Baxter, *The House of Hancock*, 136.

he could, Hancock turned to the provincial government of Massachusetts where he received the patronage of the Massachusetts General Court and colonial governors including Thomas Pownall and Francis Bernard. In this competition for wartime contracts between Hancock and the Apthorps, each side gravitated to a different node of power within the empire. Their firms' disputes and competition reverberated into the social and political networks of the Northeast during the Seven Years' War. Those aligned with the province and its government, like Hancock, increasingly saw the Apthorps and other New York merchants who monopolized metropolitan war contracts, as rivals.

Colonial merchants exercised significant control of the capital that the British military used in the American colonial conflicts between 1745 and 1763. In this period, which included the War of the Austrian Succession and the Seven Years' War, the number of British-American firms with direct connections to imperial administrators controlling the finance of these conflicts decreased. Imperial policymakers and merchant lobbyists issued contracts only to firms with whom they had strong preexisting connections. Consequently, barriers to entry increased dramatically as firms with little connection to London merchants and regular military officials could not supply the military.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, the wars consumed large amounts of colonial resources and financial capital. This diverted resources available in other potential markets into

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<sup>31</sup> Competition proved limited by barriers to entry and rent-seeking imposed by transatlantic and colonial merchants with connections to state authority. This interpretation builds on the theoretical framework provided by Douglass C. North, Robert Paul Thomas, John Joseph Wallis, and Barry R. Weingast who emphasize the importance of non-market competition, rent-seeking arising from transaction costs to market interaction, and the distinction between "natural state" and "open access orders," the former of which were those institutional arrangements predominant in the early modern period in which closed market systems used state coercion to prohibit the entry of new members. A concrete case of this was competition between merchants for rights to legal quays in late-seventeenth-century London. Douglass C. North and Robert Paul Thomas, *The Rise of the Western World: A New Economic History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 1-18; Douglass C. North, John Joseph Wallis, and Barry R. Weingast, *Violence and Social Orders: A Conceptual Framework for Interpreting Recorded Human History* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2009), 1-26; Nuala Zahedieh, *The Capital and the Colonies: London and the Atlantic Economy 1660-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 103-136.



the war effort through taxation, conscription, and private investment in the military in lieu of local craft trades, regional commerce, and subsistence farming.<sup>32</sup> British policymakers determined geographic range of contracted firms' influence through their separation of colonial wars into distinct theaters. In the Seven Years' War, for example, Parliament appointed London merchants to issue contracts to colonial merchants in the "northern theatre," or that area including the northeastern port towns of Philadelphia, New York, and Boston, their hinterlands, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland.<sup>33</sup>

The Apthorps secured a dominant position in these wartime trades through political appeals to officials connected to the metropolitan government in London. The Apthorps' competition, most significantly Thomas Hancock's firm in Boston, established political connections primarily with provincial government.<sup>34</sup> The origin of these distinct spheres of merchant influence emerged through years of political networking and the gradual development of reputations in British Atlantic trade. Merchants' success depended not just on the technical skills of their profession but on their social status within their community. Accurate bookkeeping and the ability to see opportunities in new markets meant little if a merchant could not maintain connections with the government and other merchants.

The economy of the eighteenth-century British Atlantic rested on reputation. This proved especially true in the specie-scarce colonies where everyone relied on personal credit to make transactions. One needed to know if a potential debtor could exercise their influence to recoup what they borrowed. This gave those with titles, contracts, and valuable possessions a strong

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<sup>32</sup> Gary B. Nash, *The Urban Crucible: The Northern Seaports and the Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 155-165; Nash, "Urban Wealth and Poverty in Pre-Revolutionary America," in Stanley N. Katz and John M. Murrin eds. *Colonial America: Essays in Politics and Social Development*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Knopf, 1983), 447-484.

<sup>33</sup> Aaron Graham, "Corruption and Contractors in the Atlantic World, 1754-1763," *English Historical Review*. 133, Issue 564, 5 October 2018.

<sup>34</sup> Hancock family accounts and receipts, 1728-1829.

advantage, because these agreements presented proof of their creditworthiness. For merchants like Hancock and Apthorp, this meant that their success hinged on cultivating prominent networks through business relations, but also through marriage, friendship, and political advocacy. Competition for this social influence proved increasingly heated in eighteenth-century British America. This competition created a tiered system in which some merchants like Thomas and John Hancock came to hold sway over local provincial assemblies while the Apthorps exercised influence over royal officials and Parliament's appointees. From the perspective of these merchants, the Apthorps possessed an advantageous position in this imperial network.

In terms of direct connections with colonists, the British imperial state proved a weak force for war finance. Communication between policymakers in London and colonial financiers took weeks. Officials had to use specie in the Royal Treasury, and procure it from chartered corporations, to spend it in England and Continental Europe in addition the colonies in America, West Africa, India, and the Philippines. The British mainland proved adept at exporting industrial goods like textiles and firearms, but armies in the colonies also required colonial resources and labor as well for success against the French. These British Americans had to eat to eat their own food, build their own ships, and supply their own arms and clothes when the speed of allocation from England to America did not allow otherwise. The immediacy of this business meant that British officials had to delegate financial responsibilities to colonial financiers like the Apthorps. Contrary to the interpretation of the colonial economy as dependent on British capital, these war years show that colonial markets did not necessarily rely on metropolitan supply chains. Colonial financiers allocated colonial resources, and their contracts from crown and Parliament promised that, for every good or service purchased on credit in the colonies, the central British government

would offer a source of funding to pay off such debts.<sup>35</sup> London merchants issued the initial contracts and provided colonial merchants information regarding the plans of military officials. British regulars and generals functioned as a significant part of the demand side of colonial war markets but ultimately relied on colonial contractors to fulfill that demand. In other words, the traditionally recognized core-periphery market relationship reversed itself in this case. British regulars, under commands from the British state in metropolitan London, required resources in the short term that only local colonists could supply and allocate through their financial institutions.

In the early modern period, British policymakers and military officers turned to known firms like the Apthorps' and the Hancocks'. These firms served as financial intermediaries which had already used their local reputations and credit networks to raise large sums for their own trades. Instead of requiring financial instruments to fund the construction of a new ship, or an expansion of a wharf, the Hancocks and Apthorps could use these same credit channels to raise funds quickly to send to paymasters for military ventures.<sup>36</sup> This allowed British Generals to draw quickly on colonial resources. The Apthorps and Hancocks knew that potential creditors would jump at the opportunity to hold their debt if they knew the Royal Treasury would back it. Furthermore, they knew that Parliament could only issue so many contracts, creating de facto barriers to entry, increasing their market share if they could obtain a coveted contract. These were the stakes of mercantile competition in the British colonial wars.

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<sup>35</sup> Baxter, *The House of Hancock*, 98-100.

<sup>36</sup> Business Instruments Collection, 1600-1964. Baker Library, Special Collections, Harvard Business School. Cambridge, MA; Charles Ward Apthorp, Accounts (1755-1768). Charles Ward Apthorp papers. 1727-1858. Massachusetts Historical Society. Boston, MA; Hancock family accounts and receipts, 1728-1829. Massachusetts Historical Society. Boston, MA; Hancock family papers II. Massachusetts Historical Society. Boston, MA.

Service to the British Empire shaped the decisions of war financiers and determined their subsequent successes and failures. However, the war markets remained isolated from the metropole save irregular, and relatively insubstantial, interjections of specie.<sup>37</sup> In the short term, the economic contributions toward the war arose from colonial communities. Farmers contributed their crops to feed soldiers and militiamen fighting to the north and west on the promise of future payments. In keeping with the norms of the time, these farmers entered the exchanges in their personal accounts, if they even kept them, expecting payment in kind that never came. Agrarian communities relied on informal methods of tracking peers' creditworthiness such as diary entries that differed substantially from merchant accounts.<sup>38</sup> This incompleteness does not imply unimportance. Domestic credit networks evolved into dense webs of interconnection across agricultural and urban economies. Local credit extended into major port towns, where artisans shifted their efforts into building ships and other war-related production, relying on future payment from the Apthorps' sub-contracted agents in Boston and New York. Ropemakers and carters worked under artisans and merchants.<sup>39</sup> They too relied on the pyramids of credit extending downward from the networks of imperial and provincial contractors for their welfare. Traditionally, historians have represented worker's debt as a means by which higher class strata enforce their will over labor.<sup>40</sup> However, the exact opposite occurred in the wartime origins of the American imperial crisis. Farmers, artisans, and urban labor actively

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<sup>37</sup> Charles Ward Apthorp, *Accounts (1755-1768)*. Charles Ward Apthorp papers, 1727-1858. Massachusetts Historical Society. Boston, MA.

<sup>38</sup> Daniel Vickers, "Errors Expected: The Culture of Credit in Rural New England, 1750-1800." *Economic History Review* 63 (2010): 1032-1057.

<sup>39</sup> Joshua Pico, *Accounts*. Joshua Pico Business Record. Baker Library, Harvard Business School. Cambridge, MA.

<sup>40</sup> Daniel Vickers, *Farmers and Fishermen: Two Centuries of Work in Essex County, Massachusetts, 1630-1850* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 100-115.

sought positions as creditors to their perceived social superiors. They held, albeit in a largely unrecorded fashion, the debts that merchants took on to expand their firms' operations.<sup>41</sup>

The exclusionary tendency of wartime contract markets meant that northeastern colonists did not share in a general economic prosperity in the eighteenth century.<sup>42</sup> Contracts and military demand consolidated colonial capital and placed it under increased control of a small financial elite. This process incrementally excluded middling artisans, most merchants, and the vast majority of those inhabiting North America. Urban colonists experienced this disparity in the share of access to colonial credit at least as early as 1745, and it increased to include much of the northeastern British American population by 1763. Growing financial inequality provoked political animosity well before the imperial administrative reforms of the 1760s. The mid-eighteenth century saw a relative increase in metropolitan influence in colonial financial and provisioning markets. This made social interconnections with those closest to metropolitan policymakers and administrators a key strategic priority for elite merchants. The Apthorps recognized this and acted accordingly during the interwar period.

In February 1755, Charles Ward Apthorp, then in his mid-twenties, traveled to New York on his way to Philadelphia to marry Mary McEvers, the daughter of the prominent New York City merchant John McEvers, and brother of James McEvers. James McEvers had married Elizabeth Apthorp, Charles Ward's sister.<sup>43</sup> Upon Apthorp's arrival in New York, Barlowe

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<sup>41</sup> Craig Muldrew, *The Economy of Obligation: The Culture of Credit and Social Relations in Early Modern England* (London: Macmillan Press, 1998); Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, "'A Friendly Neighbor': Social Dimensions of Daily Work in Northern Colonial New England." *Feminist Studies*, 6, no. 2, (Jul. 1980): 392-405; Daniel Vickers, "Errors Expected: The Culture of Credit in Rural New England, 1750-1800." *Economic History Review* 63 (2010): 1032-1057.

<sup>42</sup> Gordon S. Wood, "Reassessing Bernard Bailyn's *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* on the Occasion of its Jubilee," *New England Quarterly*, vol. XCI, no.1 (March 2018).

<sup>43</sup> Virginia D. Harrington, *The New York Merchant on the Eve of the Revolution* (Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1964), 219; On John McEvers, and the relationships among the McEvers family, see John McEvers memorandum, [1739]. New York Historical Society. New York, NY.

Trecothick extended an invitation on behalf of a local merchant named William Bayard who had previously married Apthorp's new sister-in-law. Bayard's offer included lodging for Apthorp while he stayed in New York, which Apthorp graciously accepted. He stayed there for four days before setting off to Philadelphia with Bayard. Following his wedding, Apthorp stayed at John McEvers's house, before leaving on a sojourn to Maryland with General Edward Braddock and the Lieutenant-Governor of New York, James Delancey.<sup>44</sup>

Merchants like the Apthorps engaged in both financial and wholesale services between 1748 and into the Seven Years' War.<sup>45</sup> While he stayed in New York, Charles Ward Apthorp purchased a quantity of peas to ship to Boston, which William Bayard procured for him for a commission of 5 percent. At that same time, Apthorp drew several bills of exchange on the London firm Thomlinson, Trecothick & Co. John Thomlinson, a partner in this firm, served as a preeminent military contractor with another merchant named John Hanbury.<sup>46</sup> Charles Ward Apthorp's brother, John, served as a junior member of Thomlinson and Hanbury's firm, living in London beginning in 1754.<sup>47</sup> Thomlinson and Hanbury, along with two other London merchants, George Colebrook and Arnold Nesbitt, served as the primary financial contractors to the British Treasury during the Seven Years' War in North America.<sup>48</sup> Barlowe Trecothick replaced Hanbury after his death in 1756.

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<sup>44</sup> Apthorp v. Bayard. Charles Ward Apthorp Papers, 1727-1858. Massachusetts Historical Society. Box 4, Folder 30.; DeLancey became Lieutenant-Governor of New York in 1753. In 1755, Sir Charles Hardy arrived in New York, replacing DeLancey until his departure for Louisburg, at which point DeLancey resumed the Lieutenant-Governorship, which he held until his death in 1760. On Delancey see D.A. Story, *The Delanceys: A Romance of a Great Family* (Salem: Higginson Book Company, 1931), 17.

<sup>45</sup> On merchants' wholesale trade in dry goods and agricultural commodities, see Doerflinger, *A Vigorous Spirit of Enterprise*, 78-121; Hancock, *Citizens of the World*, 115-142; Matson, *Merchants and Empire*, 37-72, 170-214.

<sup>46</sup> Charles Ward Apthorp, Apthorp v. Bayard transcript. Charles Ward Apthorp Papers. Massachusetts Historical Society. Box 4, Folder 30.

<sup>47</sup> Harrington, *The New York Merchant on the Eve of the Revolution*, 294.

<sup>48</sup> Aaron Graham, "Corruption and Contractors in the Atlantic World, 1754-1763," *English Historical Review*. 133, Issue 564, (5 October 2018), 1093.

Charles Apthorp & Son served as sub-agents for Thomlinson and Hanbury in both Boston and New York City. Hanbury and Thomlinson contracted the Apthorps to send funds to Halifax for the payment of troops under British generals.<sup>49</sup> Abraham Mortier, a New York merchant and associate of the Apthorps served as paymaster for the royal forces in Nova Scotia.<sup>50</sup> In 1754, the ministry in London sent General Edward Braddock to New York with two regiments and instructed him to recruit two more upon his arrival in the colonies. The ministry instructed him to assemble this force and engage the French in the Ohio Valley.<sup>51</sup> Neither Parliament nor the Crown had established a centralized department for supplying the military. Dispersed officials divided this role between three departments. The Board of Ordnance organized the supply of arms and ammunition; the Treasury organized victualing and transportation; and the Paymaster-General coordinated the payment of troops.<sup>52</sup>

In 1755 the British military in North America launched an expedition against the French inhabitants of the Bay of Fundy, and Hanbury and Thomlinson requested the Apthorps to collect and ship funds to the paymaster in Nova Scotia. Charles Ward Apthorp went to New York to raise funds while his father managed the firm's business in Boston. While in New York, Charles Ward Apthorp used the help of Delancey, Bayard, and Delancey's brother-in-law, the merchant John Watts, to introduce him to other members of the New York commercial elite.<sup>53</sup> On March 3,

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<sup>49</sup> For an account of the Apthorps' securing of this contract see: Apthorp, Apthorp v. Bayard transcript. Charles Ward Apthorp Papers. Massachusetts Historical Society. Box 4, Folder 30; and Graham. "Corruption and Contractors in the Atlantic World, 1754-1763," 1093.

<sup>50</sup> Harrington, *The New York Merchant on the Eve of the Revolution*, 23.

<sup>51</sup> Paul E. Kopperman, *Braddock at the Monongahela* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1977), 3-30; Nash, *The Urban Crucible*, 234; David L. Preston, *Braddock's Defeat: The Battle of the Monongahela and the Road to Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 1-72.

<sup>52</sup> Baxter, *The House of Hancock*, 98; Henry Roseveare, *The Treasury 1660-1870* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1973), 17-45, 119-20; H.C. Tomlinson, *Guns and Government: The Ordnance Office under the Later Stuarts* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1979).

<sup>53</sup> On the connections between the Delancey and Watts families see Harrington, *The New York Merchant on the Eve of the Revolution*, 292.

1755, Charles Apthorp Sr. wrote a letter instructing his son to draw bills and cash from New York lenders, a task he could not accomplish in Boston.<sup>54</sup> He directed Charles Ward to learn how Delancey and Watts ship funds to Halifax so that he could mirror their methods.<sup>55</sup> Twenty days later, Charles Apthorp Sr. received a letter from Thomlinson and Hanbury in London instructing him to stockpile wages. Additionally, they instructed him to acquire Spanish specie when he could. Merchants found such foreign money more available than British pounds, more stable than colonial paper currency, and more flexible in its uses than commodity payments or credit.<sup>56</sup>

In May 1755, Delancey informed Charles Ward Apthorp of an extension of his commission, which Apthorp communicated to Apthorp Sr. in Boston. His father, foreseeing the need for an expansion of the work to accomplish this task, wrote to William Bayard, then in New York with the younger Apthorp, and offered him a two percent cash commission on the acquisition of these funds. Apthorp Sr. immediately notified his son of Bayard's inclusion and advised him to acquire £6000 sterling and then return to Boston with it.<sup>57</sup> The Apthorps' use of an agent in New York indicates a conscious effort to expand their commercial network within the colonies. In the summer of 1755, General Braddock suffered a defeat against the French on the Monongahela River, losing his life in the process.<sup>58</sup> This loss provoked a further expansion of the British military in the colonies just months after Hanbury and Thomlinson appointed the Apthorps as their sole agents in North America. Braddock's defeat served as a catalyst for administrative change, which opened opportunities for new relationships between merchants and

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<sup>54</sup> Charles Ward Apthorp, *Accounts (1755-1768)*. Charles Ward Apthorp Papers, 1727-1858. Massachusetts Historical Society. Boston, MA.

<sup>55</sup> Watts papers, 1689-1870 (bulk 1740-1840). New York Historical Society. New York, NY; William Bayard (1729-1804) Collection, 1754-1790. New York Historical Society. New York, NY.

<sup>56</sup> Apthorp, Apthorp v. Bayard transcript.

<sup>57</sup> Apthorp, Apthorp v. Bayard transcript.

<sup>58</sup> Anderson, *The Crucible of War*, 104-7; Kopperman, *Braddock at the Monongahela*, 50-92, 162-274; Preston, *Braddock's Defeat*, 217-268.



the military. Charles Ward Apthorp later noted that his business expanded daily after Braddock's defeat. The Apthorps supported this expansion with warrants "for very large sums," which they received from General William Shirley.<sup>59</sup>

In December 1755, the Board of Trade wrote to Governor Delancey informing him that they considered New York the best location to establish a magazine for arms and military stores. They informed him that they would organize distributions of arms and stores by sending supplies through New York in monthly packets. Planners in New York would then ship these supplies to Boston, Philadelphia, and Norfolk, which would serve as subsidiary ports for local distribution.<sup>60</sup> Through the commercial and political influence of the Delanceys, Apthorps, Wattses, and other New York merchant families, colonists saw wartime finance increasingly consolidated in that city. Much of this influence arose from proximity to royal soldiers and top leadership. A disproportionate amount of Amherst's activities occurred there, particularly in contrast to Shirley, who maintained closer connections to Albany and Boston in the first two years of the war. This geographic shift of the financial center of the war correlated with attempts, first under Lord Loudon, and then more successfully under Amherst, to centralize authority under metropolitan control.<sup>61</sup> However, centers of provincial power remained, particularly in colonial legislatures and town governments. The approval of these provincial institutions remained necessary for levies and recruitment of colonial militiamen.

In May 1756, the Massachusetts House of Representatives voted to appoint Thomas Hutchinson and Stephen Sewall, two Bostonians, to a committee to assess a proposal from Hanbury and Thomlinson.<sup>62</sup> By December of that year they had approved a proposal from

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<sup>59</sup> Apthorp, Apthorp v. Bayard transcript.

<sup>60</sup> Harrington, *The New York Merchant on the Eve of the Revolution*, 291.

<sup>61</sup> Anderson, *A People's Army*, 8-12, 168-79.

<sup>62</sup> Massachusetts House of Representatives. *A Journal of the Honourable House of Representatives*. May 26, 1756.

Parliament granting £115,000 for colonial assemblies to distribute in New England, New York, and New Jersey. Parliament assigned Hanbury and Thomlinson to exchange and ship the money granted, which the London firm agreed to do without any charge or commission.<sup>63</sup> By 1756, Parliament and military leadership continued to pursue a policy that depended on provincial assemblies. This continued a pattern of war finance used during the War of the Austrian Succession and, in large part, to the late seventeenth century under the leadership of William Phips, Cyprian Southack, and other colonial military leadership. Working through local assemblies to organize resources and recruit soldiers drew on local connection that colonial military leaders like William Pepperell, William Shirley, and John Winslow cultivated. Increased British military expenditures in North America during the Seven Years' War animated this traditional, colonial system for outfitting and supplying troops in the field.

William Bayard acted largely autonomously as agent to Charles Apthorp & Son in New York until 1757. At this time, Charles Apthorp Sr. decided it would be more effective for Charles Ward Apthorp to conduct the business in New York and instructed him to take over Bayard's tasks upon arrival. Bayard expressed concern at this news and sent the Apthorps an alternative offer. He offered to continue the work of the firm in New York, under the direction of the younger Apthorp, without a commission. Charles Apthorp Sr. received this offer as Charles Ward Apthorp moved to New York. Therefore, the younger partner did not learn of Bayard's offer until he met him in person. Bayard expressed his uneasiness at the thought of the Apthorps discontinuing him. In part as a gesture of civility toward a family member, Charles Ward Apthorp agreed to Bayard's new terms. Apthorp would claim a decade later that he made this decision at

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<sup>63</sup> New York General Assembly. *New York: Votes and Proceedings of the General Assembly, 21 Sep 1756-1 Dec 1756*. CO 5/1216. National Archives, Kew.

the bequest of his wife whose family informed her that Bayard felt distressed by difficult financial circumstances.<sup>64</sup>

Intergenerational transition exacerbated the changes in mercantile practice in firms like Charles Apthorp & Son. The rise of younger merchants more amenable to new metropolitan connections sped the transition away from segmented financial structures toward the centralized model that Amherst preferred. This strengthened the emerging connection between the New York merchant houses and royal military leadership. Charles Apthorp Sr. died on November 11, 1758. Charles Ward Apthorp received a letter from friends in Boston stating that they would not bury his father until he arrived in Boston. This news impelled him to leave New York quickly without completing his current business there to a standard he preferred. Apthorp left William Bayard control of the firm's affairs in New York while he set out to Boston.<sup>65</sup> Following Apthorp Sr.'s death, Charles Ward Apthorp increasingly used social connections to convince imperial agents to exclude competitors from contracts. This activity promoted a stratification of wealth and a disparity of political influence as other merchants lost out on potential business opportunities. These opportunities depended on the contest for influence and resources among British regiments in North America.

In 1755, William Shirley and Charles Lawrence led an expedition for the capture of Nova Scotia from the Acadians. The campaign's leadership included a mix of colonists and regular British officers. Some colonial officers including Shirley and Lt. Col. John Winslow, had previous experience with conflict in Atlantic Canada and Newfoundland extending back to the War of Austrian Succession and, specifically, the 1745 siege of Louisbourg. The English officers, on the other hand, had mixed experience in the region. Lawrence, for example, had extensive

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<sup>64</sup> Apthorp, Apthorp v. Bayard transcript.

<sup>65</sup> Apthorp, Apthorp v. Bayard transcript.

experience fighting in Continental Europe and the West Indies during the War of Austrian Succession, but had little connection to the mainland American colonies until his appointment as Lieutenant-Governor of Nova Scotia at the end of the war. Soon after the conclusion of peace in 1748, he participated in a series of conflicts with local Catholic Acadians and the indigenous Mi'kmaq in what would be called Father Le Loutre's War.<sup>66</sup> The war would result in the Acadian expulsion before blending into the larger French and Indian War after the resumption of formal hostilities with the French colonists in 1754. Despite his experience in Nova Scotia, Lawrence had a limited relationship with the more populated, resource-rich, colonies like Massachusetts to the south. Other military officers with origins in England did not arrive until soon before 1754. Colonel Robert Monckton, for example, had been in Nova Scotia as a commander of the recently built Fort Lawrence before the 1755 expedition under Shirley and Lawrence.<sup>67</sup>

Between 1755 and 1758, military officers like Shirley played a direct role in the financing of military expenses in North America. During the 1755 expedition into Canada, the Newcastle administration granted £800 sterling to individual officers to pay for clothing and other necessities within their respective regiments. The officers initially received these payments in the form of bills of credit against the state. John Winslow recorded that the intention was for the ultimate redemption of these notes by the crown treasury, though in the meantime deductions for supplies came directly from officers' pay.<sup>68</sup> Because of such short-term debits, officers' salaries and private accounts functioned as flexible public funds which the British state used as an intermediary financial tool. Debt financing through officers' accounts allowed for liquidity and

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<sup>66</sup> John Bartlet Brebner, *The Neutral Yankees of Nova Scotia* (1937; Toronto: Carleton Library, 1969); Andrew Hill Clark, *Acadia: The Geography of Early Nova Scotia to 1760* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1968); Andrew Hill Clark, "New England's Role in the Underdevelopment of Cape Breton Island During the French Régime, 1713-1758." *Canadian Geographer*, vol. 9, no. 1, 1 Mar. 1965, pp. 1-12.

<sup>67</sup> William Shirley, Letter to John Winslow. John Winslow Journal. Vol 1. (Microfilm) Massachusetts Historical Society Collections. Boston, MA.

<sup>68</sup> William Shirley, Letter to John Winslow.

rapid deployment of payments. Chains of command overlapped with fiscal obligations under the auspices of the imperial state.

High-ranking officers receiving the £800 grants organized their own regiments, appointing officers and enlisting private men as outlined in their initial orders. Appointed officers were to raise men from the colonies such that companies within regiments consisted of one captain, two lieutenants, one ensign, four sergeants, four corporals, and ninety private men. The orders required the officers to enlist the recruited soldiers for one year beginning at “the time of their Embarkation.” Orders from England granted colonial officers enlisted from the colonies the same pay “as is to other his Majesties [sic] Forces Serving with them.”<sup>69</sup> These officers received two months advanced pay after the complete enlistment of their companies and before leaving ports of origin for British fortifications at Nova Scotia. Financial obligations accompanied the recruitment of colonial officers. Orders required high-ranking officers like Lieutenant-Colonel John Winslow to advance a sum of money to each officer to enable them to raise men from within the colonies. Lower-ranking officers were to give personal “bonds with sureties” to ensure they would be responsible for these financial advancements.

Orders from London required generals and colonels like Shirley and Winslow to advance lower officers two dollars per man they enlisted in reserve for “Extraordinary expenses.” Additionally, bonds and sureties held by individual officers made them financially responsible for desertions or “Mens [sic] not passing muster.” Lower officers had further responsibility of paying enlisting soldiers at the rate of £15 old tenor per man. The requirements mandated these payments in two parts, the first nine-shilling installment at the time of enlistment and the remainder when “Mustering at the place of Rendezvous.” The orders required the lower officers

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<sup>69</sup> William Shirley, Letter to John Winslow.

to procure supplies for each Company. This included dining supplies for messes containing units of six men. These supplies included bowls, platters, and “every man a Spoon.” Additionally, the orders mandated that the officers procure a blanket for every man.<sup>70</sup> The procurement process originated within the regiment, requiring planning and financing on the part of individual regiments. This reduced the interdependency of regiments and dependence of regiments on the metropolitan state.

Boston played a significant role in the enlistment and payment of colonial troops. John Winslow’s commission, signed by William Shirley, required him to have all enlisted men appear at Boston on March 25, 1755. Organizing the movement of troops and supplies required an entrepot where officers could utilize existing commercial linkages to move people and supplies to Nova Scotia. In these centralized urban locations, they observed all movements of soldiers and supplies for which they held responsibility. Orders required lower officers to make records of enlistments and submit them to Shirley. Each officer had to meet a recruitment quota predetermined by their respective ranks. Senior officers organizing the expedition out of Halifax required the captains to enlist fifty men, lieutenants twenty men, and ensigns fifteen men. Recruiting officers held continuous responsibility to observe, categorize, and communicate information concerning these enlisted men. The officers submitted reports to this effect every Monday morning during the expedition. Boston continued to serve as a point of rendezvous during the expedition after the initial recruitment period. Shirley tasked Winslow specifically with remaining in Boston between March and April where he would continue to outfit and embark battalions to Nova Scotia along with ordnance stores.

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<sup>70</sup> William Shirley, Letter to John Winslow.

Orders given to officers like Winslow made them responsible not only for the recruitment of soldiers, but also for organizing their discharge and return to their town of origin. Records held by Shirley and other officers recorded the enlisted men along with their hometowns and, often, place of birth and occupation. The costs of this transportation fell on the government of Nova Scotia under the terms of officers' commissions. In the short term, shortages of funds necessary for the transportation of soldiers hindered the movement of men and supplies. Shirley's instructions to Winslow stated: "whereas diverse sums are daily wanted to carry on this design you are to Apply for Supplies to the said Lieutenant Colonel Monckton..."<sup>71</sup> In addition to the short-term inadequacies of funds, Shirley's instructions to Winslow recognized the inability to foresee potential accidents in the movement and funding of personnel and supplies. In response, Shirley attempted to organize and inform other regiments to ease Winslow's ability to mobilize his troops. Shirley issued the following statement: "And the Colonel with the other Officers of this Regiment within this Province are hereby Commanded not to give the said John Winslow any Obstruction, or Molestation."<sup>72</sup> Such possible frictions between commanding officers, especially with different loyalties to province or empire, proved a hurdle to the efficient recruitment and transportation of colonial soldiers. Inter-regimental competition emerged from resource constraints. Conditions of scarcity made regiments competitors even when pursuing the same conflict against the French. Public finance did little to alleviate such tensions by this time because provincial legislation capped the total levies, taxes, and labor allowed toward the war effort.

A case of specific tension between regiments occurred when they competed for the recruitment of troops in the same region. This required the involvement of military leaders,

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<sup>71</sup> Shirley, Letter to John Winslow.

<sup>72</sup> Shirley, Letter to John Winslow.

specifically William Shirley, to resolve these arguments. For example, John Winslow wrote to another officer recruiting soldiers in Massachusetts:

I am Directed by his Excellency to acquaint you that he has been informed that you have encouraged People belonging to this Province to enlist in the Service of the other Governments without his...License, which may be injurious Sir as he is about to raise men for his Majesties [sic] Service of this Province you are therefore immediately to desist, and come directly to Portsmouth, where you shall have his Beating Orders. I now write to Colonel Blanchard to put a Stop to any enlistments in his Regiment, till this Province has Raised as many men as is proposed.<sup>73</sup>

John Winslow's concerns about the competing enlistments of soldiers in Massachusetts arose largely from the activity of Captain Robert Rogers, who had been recruiting soldiers outside William Shirley's formal orders. Competition arose largely from the methods by which regiments recruited men in dispersed towns. Officers travelled between towns with part of their regiments beating drums upon their arrival.<sup>74</sup> Instead of a set structural relationships between the military and civil arms of colonial government, such recruitment practices relied instead on autonomous regiments operating under loose directives from Shirley. Officers ultimately submitted records to Shirley for review, but in the interim, necessary delegation gave dispersed officers significant authority until the end of the recruitment process.

Dispersed authority of officers came under more centralized authority when all recruits and officers united at entrepots and forts. Boston specifically served as a key point for more effective oversight of lower-level officers and, consequently, promoted the effective centralized control of their activities. Entrepots served as junctions for the organization of soldiers for expeditions.<sup>75</sup> Shirley's orders to captains required them to provide muster rolls upon arrival in

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<sup>73</sup> John Winslow, Journal. Vol 1. Microfilm. Massachusetts Historical Society Collections. Boston, MA.

<sup>74</sup> Winslow, Journal. Vol 1.

<sup>75</sup> This meets the purpose and definition of state capacity provided by James C. Scott. Categorization and organization falls under management ideology of the "high-modernist" ideology Scott describes. This event is



Boston and to have all men under their command to congregate on Boston's Long Wharf. At the Long Wharf, soldiers awaited transports and received their pay.<sup>76</sup> Shirley's orders explicitly mandated that soldiers would receive their pay precisely at the point of embarkation. Such requirements kept the transfer of funds and surveillance of recruits closely tethered.

The second reason why entrepôts like Boston served as critical junctures of the organization of troops arose from the density of commercial connections, financial services, and capital. Early modern port towns contrasted distinctly with rural hinterlands in the degree of their commercial development and interconnection with the wider British Atlantic.<sup>77</sup> From the perspective of Shirley and other officers, mobilizing a large-scale military expedition required persuasion of, and negotiation with, local actors who could help manage the many financial needs of this process. They provided incentives to soldiers as well as commercial intermediaries outside the formal command of the military. Towns in the colonial Northeast often relied on full communal participation in agricultural work and suffered from a shortage of farm laborers when able-bodied men joined a regiment and agreed to fight for the British Army. They expected concessions from imperial and provincial states to offset the costs of labor and resources directed away from the domestic economy. This required wages and payments for goods and services at the town level. It also depended on paying the costs of transport which brought people and

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further significant in that such categorization emerges alongside coercive military activity. This coevolution of state capacity and war supports the broader argument for this relationship in the work of Bruce Porter. It also indicates that Colonial America had its own indigenous co-development between war and politics independent of that in early modern Europe as described by David Kaiser. Kaiser, David Kaiser, *Politics and War: European Conflict from Philip II to Hitler* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 139-202; Bruce D. Porter, *War and the Rise of the State: The Military Foundations of Modern Politics* (New York: Free Press, 1994), 63-104; Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, 2-3, 13-21.

<sup>76</sup> Winslow, *Journal*. Vol 1.

<sup>77</sup> Richard D. Brown, *Modernization: The Transformation of American Life, 1600-1865* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976), 49-73; Bruce C. Daniels, *The Connecticut Town: Growth and Development, 1635-1790* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1979); Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System I: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (1974; Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011); Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System III: The Second Era of Great Expansion of the Capitalist World-Economy, 1730s-1840s* (1989; Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011).

resources to sites of conflict. The aggregated direct payments, particularly from the most distant towns, depended on complicated management of obligations and financial remittances. Save the wage payment delivered at the Long Wharf in Boston, these obligations did not fall wholly within the orders that Shirley provided. Instead, merchants like Thomas Hancock and the Apthorp family organized financial obligations and transportation coordination on behalf of the officers.<sup>78</sup>

When colonial forces congregated in Boston prior to the 1755 expedition, the influx of people put new demands on limited resources, including food and fuel. As soldiers awaited transport, towns depended on the military to maintain social order and engaging in the policing of the troops. Under Shirley's command, lower officers in Boston maintained a rigid disciplinary regime regulating the movement and activity of enlistees. For example, Shirley's instructions required all personnel to remain on board transport ships in Boston harbor or else go to church. Shirley and his officers prohibited movement outside of these two options.<sup>79</sup> Such social controls demonstrates how regiments functioned as autonomous agents of the state, entirely independent of the provincial civil government on which they depended for an array of vital supplies and financial services.

One officer from every company held responsibility for regularly reporting the whereabouts of enlistees to ensure compliance. Meeting of these officers occurred every day at noon to receive orders concerning the men under their authority. Shirley's instructions further mandated public controls to maintain the health of soldiers as well as the townspeople. This

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<sup>78</sup> Newcastle Papers Vol. LII. British Library, Department of Manuscripts. London, UK; Newcastle Papers Vol. CCCXLIV. British Library, Department of Manuscripts. London, UK; Lincoln, Charles Henry, ed. *Correspondence of William Shirley: Governor of Massachusetts and Military Commander in America, 1731-1760*. 2 vols. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1912).

<sup>79</sup> Winslow, Journal. Vol 1.

included ordering soldiers to adequately prepare and store meat along with sweeping ship platforms every morning. Shirley's ordered soldiers to "keep themselves as clean as possible" and prohibited them from wearing "their Blankets about Town." Shirley tasked his Lieutenant Colonels to not allow any men, neither enlistees nor commissioned officers, from leaving town without first explicitly granting them leave.<sup>80</sup> Shirley's rigid social controls prevented any disorder from spilling into local civil society outside of formal military control.

The military's role in maintaining order within its ranks faced a threat of legitimacy within the empire. Communication between Shirley, Winslow, and Thomas Hutchinson in April 1755 expressed concern about the perception of their New England Regiment prior to the Cape Breton Expedition. Winslow wrote to Shirley:

[I] am Concerned to think that this Regiment does not meet with the same kind Treatment with his Excellencies other Regiment and Sir William Pepperell's, which perhaps may arise from your Excellence not being acquainted with its foundation, which briefly is this\_ We are paid, cloathed [sic], and provided for the King, and are in every Respect as much his Majesty's Regiment for the time enlisted for, as any in the Service and declined to Joyne [sic] other forces in Nova Scotia for removing the Incroachments [sic] made by the French King's Subjects.<sup>81</sup>

Winslow's concerns about the stature of the New England Regiment within the wider structure of the British military revolved around the costs of the regiment on the colonial population. He framed this concern about the colonial burden in terms of tension with the British imperial regulars. He noted that the "settlement and defense" of English settlements in Nova Scotia and the northern frontiers had cost British subjects in America "an immense Sum." Winslow felt that imperial strategies for the 1755 expedition risked an extraordinary waste of colonial resources and effort already undertaken. From Winslow's provincial perspective, this was more than a

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<sup>80</sup> Winslow, Journal. Vol 1.

<sup>81</sup> Winslow, Journal. Vol 1.

slight on the colonists, but a distinct regional security risk. He wrote that if “Troops from the Northern Colonies are discouraged and Prevented from Proceeding to their Assistance, it is Probable they must fall as Prey to the Enemy.”<sup>82</sup> Winslow’s primary complaint against favoritism for British regulars over colonial enlistees, was that it hindered recruitment of men as the result of inter-regimental competition. He considered this to be a problem of governance and public finance rather than simply a competition over regimental reputations. Imperial favoritism in military policy resulted in funds directed toward specific regiments. As of 1755, Winslow expected to obtain the funds necessary for his New England regiment from London. He discovered that metropolitan money implied metropolitan control. Winslow sought to remedy conflicts of interest between regiments by appealing to the Secretary of State, the Secretary of War, and the Board of Trade, but received no response in his favor. As these regiments were formed and sent into battle, each constituted a body of people connected by financial obligations, and each needed to compete in a local markets for goods and services necessary to obtain the supplies, pay the troops, police them, and transport regiments to the sites of conflict throughout the region. Winslow’s statements indicate that the total forces in New England under this system operated in a largely corporate structure wherein regiments all shared the same goal of capturing territory in French Canada but otherwise managed themselves as autonomous governing units. This contention over access to metropolitan funds which had emerged by 1755 further indicates a lack of unity in the administration of military finances.<sup>83</sup>

On April 15, 1755, Winslow met with the commanding officers of each of the companies within his regiment including parties arrived but not yet organized into formal companies.

Winslow requested the officers to provide lists of men’s names and number of arms in each unit.

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<sup>82</sup> Winslow, Journal. Vol 1

<sup>83</sup> Winslow, Journal. Vol 1.

He further ordered each to submit a payroll for the men within their companies. Until this point, financing occurred on the accounts of individual officers with loose centralized oversight. The officers kept track of their own expenditures and then reported obligations up the chain of command to Winslow. The officers prepared and settled accounts by submitting information on the money that had they had already received and the balance due. Winslow then received any remaining money and paid the debts remaining on the lower officers' accounts.<sup>84</sup>

After Winslow's embarkation to Canada, merchants organized transportation, managed the payment of wages, and worked to secure provisions. Specifically, Winslow's journal for the remainder of 1755 and 1756 show frequent interactions with Thomas Hancock and the elder Charles Apthorp. The services that the merchants provided included food, officer's rent for winter quarters, and recruiting of soldiers undertaken on the military's behalf. Hancock and Apthorp received warrants granting them payments from the military accounts. These warrants served as credits held against individual officers. For example, in July 1756, Charles Ward Apthorp held warrants of £14,070 payable to Sir Thomas Ebrington and £22,655 payable to Captain John Moore.<sup>85</sup> These officers served as financial intermediaries for the regiments under the commands of William Shirley, William Pepperell, William Johnson, and Charles Craven. Likewise, on April 24, 1756, John Winslow wrote: "The Committe [sic] of War are getting Forward and Imagine every thing will be right...and that we Shall be able to March on the proposed 6<sup>th</sup> of May...In regard to the Independent Companys [sic] there are all the Necessary Papers Wanting as Directions to Mr. Apthorp & Hancock or Other Persons for the Supply of the

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<sup>84</sup> Winslow, Journal. Vol 1.

<sup>85</sup> Charles Ward Apthorp, Accounts (1755-1768). Charles Ward Apthorp papers, 1727-1858. Massachusetts Historical Society Collections. Boston, MA.

money.”<sup>86</sup> The interregional organization of soldiers required merchants capable of moving goods, credit, money, and men.

As Shirley raised troops for the Cape Breton expedition in 1757, he worried that Massachusetts would not supply enough recruits. Consequently, colonial officers turned to neighboring colonies. The separation between colonial governments meant that, rather than a streamlined relationship between officers and the general population, recruiting had to navigate a segmented web of political institutions and interests. Winslow estimated necessary regiment requirements to consist of at least one thousand men along with the resources necessary to outfit them. Winslow realized that inter-regimental competition would prevent him from reaching this goal within Massachusetts, and so he turned to the colonial government of New Hampshire at Portsmouth.<sup>87</sup> Recruiting soldiers from any province ran into the problem of popular opposition to the depletion of local labor. In many towns, the men diverted toward the war effort served important roles as farmers and artisans.<sup>88</sup>

The Crown Point expedition captured France’s Fort Saint-Frédéric at the strategic southern point of Lake Champlain in 1759, a significant victory that depended on scale of colonial participation to succeed.<sup>89</sup> During this period, generals, colonial governors, and the Newcastle administration in London made ongoing demands on Northeastern towns. The province of Massachusetts maintained a supply store at Albany stocking bread, bedding, pork, rum, sugar, barley, molasses, fish, oil, rice, flour, saws, lanterns, bowls, tents, guns, and many other goods. Much of the expenditure for procuring supplies continued to fall on individual

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<sup>86</sup> Winslow, “John Winslow to Shirley from Boston April 24, 1756,” John Winslow Journal. Vol 1. Massachusetts Historical Society Collections. Boston, MA.

<sup>87</sup> Winslow, Journal. Vol 1.

<sup>88</sup> “Annapolis Royal May 28 1755,” in Winslow, Journal. Vol 1.

<sup>89</sup> Anderson, *A People’s Army*, 10, 18-9, 120, 198, 207; Anderson, *Crucible of War*, 68-9, 88, 91-2, 110-123; Jennings, *Empire of Fortune*, 161-4, 313.

regiments under management of officers like Winslow. Concerning Massachusetts's stores at Albany, Winslow recorded in March 1756 that he was "Indebted to Mr. Hovenson," a colonist in Rhode Island, after having overrun his proportion of a grant from the colonial government of Pennsylvania.<sup>90</sup> Winslow had to seek credit from provincial colonists for funding not adequately covered by provincial governments.

An unintended consequence of the military's use of merchants for commercial services was the tendency for merchants to forum shop between regiments. Between 1755 and 1758, administrators in London initiated several changes in military leadership in North America, and new military leaders sometimes relocated their force's headquarters, shifting the geographic and social network that regimental commanders needed to engage to fund, supply, and manage their troops. Competing networks also held conflicting political preferences and allegiances. Contemporaries identified a strong split between those networks allied foremost with inland trading centers like Albany and burgeoning coastal ports like New York City. Such inter-entrepot competition mapped onto preexisting political factions with long histories in colonial politics. The success of merchant firms had depended upon navigating these political factions since the beginning of the eighteenth century. Many of the key figures of such factions were themselves merchants, such as the members of New York City's Delancey family.<sup>91</sup> The increased authority of the DeLancey family and other New York City merchant elites after 1756 allowed for networked merchants to benefit from the financial needs of individual regiments. Regiments sought the financial services of New York merchants to manage the unprecedented expenses of Britain's military deployments in the regions during the second half of the 1750s. As late as 1762, regiments continued to struggle with maintaining adequate resources. Jefferey Amherst

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<sup>90</sup> "Winslow Letter, March 1756," in Winslow, *Journal*. Vol 1.

<sup>91</sup> Michael G. Kammen, *Colonial New York: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975).

appointed Governor-General of British North America in 1760, solicited merchants and firms who could tap into local credit and exchange markets to enable Britain's massive ongoing fiscal commitments to its forces deployed in the field. Merchant firms and families networked strategically to insure access to political figures with the most extensive control. By holding mixed political alliances, and by integrating one's firm into the financial structure of multiple towns, merchants practiced a form of diversification. This interregional diversification mitigated the risks of political transition, when senior military officers established new central command posts in new towns. The Apthorp family maintained commercial footholds in Boston, New York, and London from 1745 to 1762.<sup>92</sup>

The Apthorps further entrenched themselves within these communities through their participation in local political and religious matters. In Boston, the elder Apthorp along with his son East had a close relationship with the town's Anglican community. Charles Apthorp Sr. bankrolled the construction of the Anglican King's Chapel in Boston, and East Apthorp served as a minister there.<sup>93</sup> Charles Ward Apthorp provided East with funds supporting the church in Boston even after his relocation to New York City in 1755. The Apthorps also maintained correspondence with prominent colonial political families like the DeLanceys of New York and the London merchant, and member of Parliament, Barlowe Trecothick. Charles Ward Apthorp's sister Grizzel married Trecothick in 1747. These political and familial connections allowed for patronage and influence over contracts through the Seven Years' War.

By 1758, Boston merchants like Thomas Hancock faced increased competition for London military contracts. He received contracts from provincial officers funded by colonial

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<sup>92</sup> Charles Ward Apthorp, *Accounts (1755-1768)*. Charles Ward Apthorp papers, 1727-1858. Massachusetts Historical Society. Boston, MA.

<sup>93</sup> Charles Ward Apthorp, *Accounts (1755-1768)*. Charles Ward Apthorp papers, 1727-1858. Massachusetts Historical Society. Boston, MA.



governments. These provincial connections allowed Hancock to access a much smaller pool of financial capital compared to that which Charles Ward Apthorp could access in New York.<sup>94</sup> Hancock continued to provide funds for raising Massachusetts troops, paying them temporary wages until their arrival in northern garrisons.<sup>95</sup> Hancock maintained a commercial connection with General John Henry Bastide, who controlled fortifications in Halifax. Between 1760 and 1762, Bastide granted Hancock a part of the supply of those fortifications. In 1762, however, the Board of Ordinance insisted that Bastide discontinue Hancock as an agent.<sup>96</sup>

In March 1761, Jeffrey Amherst contacted the governor of Massachusetts, Francis Bernard, with a request to procure troops from the colony. Amherst instructed Bernard to convene the Massachusetts Assembly and to present them with a letter from the Secretary of State requesting 4,000 troops which Amherst required in Canada. Amherst conveyed that he expected Bernard to use his influence as governor to induce the Massachusetts Council and Assembly to raise and dispatch the requested troops immediately. Amherst added that Bernard and the Council should supply the soldiers they raised with food, arms, and tents, which the crown would thereafter refund. Amherst stated that “Strong Recommendations will be made to Parliament in their session next year” for the purpose of refunding the colonies for the costs they incurred outfitting and transporting the soldiers.<sup>97</sup>

When Bernard presented Amherst’s requests to the Assembly and Council, the two Houses voted to send only 3,000 men, 1,000 fewer than the general had requested. Bernard

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<sup>94</sup> Charles Ward Apthorp, *Accounts (1755-1768)*. Charles Ward Apthorp papers, 1727-1858. Massachusetts Historical Society. Boston, MA.

<sup>95</sup> In the only other account of the relationship between Thomas Hancock and Charles Apthorp Sr. in *The House of Hancock*, William T. Baxter mistakenly concludes that Apthorp’s death shifted his financial contracts back to Hancock rather than his son Charles Ward Apthorp who maintained the Apthorp firm’s business in both New York and Boston. See Baxter, *The House of Hancock*, 136.

<sup>96</sup> Baxter, *The House of Hancock*, 151.

<sup>97</sup> Francis Bernard. Letter to Jeffery Amherst, March 29, 1761. in Colin Nicolson eds. *The Papers of Francis Bernard Vol. I, 1759-1763*. Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts Vol. LXXIII. 93-94

expressed that he had trouble influencing the Assembly. He also foresaw difficulties in fulfilling his promise to send troops, because he believed few local colonists would invest in the payment of the troops without stronger assurances that the Crown would compensate them. Bernard requested Amherst for such assurances and asked whether he could use Amherst's name "in a more positive manner" to threaten the local government to supply and fund adequate military personnel.<sup>98</sup>

Amherst's plans clashed with those of the Massachusetts House in April 1761, only a month after his partially thwarted request for additional troops. Governor Francis Bernard served again as Amherst's advocate in Boston. Amherst refused to specify where he would send the Massachusetts recruits or whether he would immediately release them from service after a peace agreement. Amherst considered flexibility of movement in Nova Scotia particularly paramount. He stated: "if I should find it necessary to call away any more of the Regular Forces from Nova Scotia, the protection of that Valuable Province may require some of the Massachusetts Troops to put it into a perfect State of Security."<sup>99</sup> These demands met with resistance in the Massachusetts assembly, which used its power of the purse to demand that Massachusetts troops remain primarily with a mandate to defend the boundaries of the province. Representatives were wary about how this significant deployment might deprive the colony's economy of the agricultural labor pool on which it depended. Bernard expressed concern over Amherst's refusal to state where he would bring the Massachusetts recruits. He believed that the colonists would spread rumors that Amherst intended to dispatch these men south to the West Indies, which the House believed lay outside its immediate strategic interests. They feared that tropical diseases would

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<sup>98</sup> Francis Bernard, Letter to Jeffery Amherst, April 4, 1761. in Nicolson eds., *The Papers of Francis Bernard Vol. I, 1759-1763*, 93-94.

<sup>99</sup> Jefferey Amherst, Letter to Francis Bernard, April 9, 1761. in Nicolson eds., *The Papers of Francis Bernard Vol. I, 1759-1763*, 101-102.

kill off the troops sent there.<sup>100</sup> Later that month, Bernard assembled the troops to disembark for Halifax.

Thomas Hancock undertook the victualling of the troops going to Halifax, to be paid by Captain Moncrieff, then at Boston, from the time of their enlistments until they embarked. Once they left Boston, Bernard stated, they “will be supplied with the King’s Provisions.”<sup>101</sup> By June 1761, Amherst requested more troops to support the forces at Halifax. Bernard embarked an additional 420 men but noted that this latest enlistment drive went poorly. Bernard attributed this difficulty to the inability of the local government to pay enlistment bounties and stockpile supplies during a period of wartime scarcity. He claimed that many potential soldiers waited for an expected increase in the bounties which the Assembly rewarded to those who enlisted.<sup>102</sup> Colonists considered such financial incentives as necessary for their military service, creating another interest group with another financial demand that provincial and military authorities relied on local merchants to help satisfy.

In July 1761, Francis Bernard wrote to Amherst. He informed him that the Lords of the Treasury planned to alter their next military grant to the colonies to be proportionate to the number of troops that each colony could raise. He conveyed to Amherst that the Assembly had encouraged expediting the formation of a new regiment.<sup>103</sup> Bernard and the Assembly realized they had inadequate funds to pay troops. Potential soldiers reluctantly accepted enlistment without an increase in their bounties, but the House of Representatives objected on the grounds

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<sup>100</sup> Bernard, Letter to Jeffery Amherst, April 18, 1761. in Nicolson eds., *The Papers of Francis Bernard Vol. I, 1759-1763*, 103.

<sup>101</sup> Amherst, Letter to Francis Bernard, April 26, 1761. in Nicolson eds., *The Papers of Francis Bernard Vol. I, 1759-1763*, 107.

<sup>102</sup> Bernard, Letter to Jeffery Amherst, July 5, 1761. in Nicolson eds., *The Papers of Francis Bernard Vol. I, 1759-1763*, 121.

<sup>103</sup> Bernard, Letter to Jeffery Amherst, July 11, 1761. in Nicolson eds., *The Papers of Francis Bernard Vol. I, 1759-1763*, 123-124.

that “it would have a retrospect to those that were already inlisted [sic].” Bernard recommended that the Assembly grant new troops and additional payment equal to six weeks wages at the beginning of their enlistment. The House agreed to these terms.<sup>104</sup> 1761 and 1762 saw Amherst move away from cooperation with colonial assemblies after their limited compliance frustrated his attempts to recruit new soldiers. From the provincial perspective, metropolitan payments did not adequately offset the burdens which the colonial population undertook up to that time. Other crown officials like Thomas Hutchinson faced similar problems trying to find a stable balance between public financial requirements, provincial military participation, and support of the goals and dictates of Amherst and metropolitan leadership at Whitehall.<sup>105</sup>

By November 1761, General Amherst agreed to a reduction of troops from Massachusetts, which Bernard interpreted as “Very agreeable to [the Assembly], as the want of hands is evry [sic] where very sensibly felt.”<sup>106</sup> Bernard communicated that disease and desertion made enlistment difficult and complicated the allocation of payments.<sup>107</sup> Bernard sent the muster rolls and vouchers to Amherst in New York so that the general could settle the debts which New England investors held against the Crown. No correspondence between Bernard and Amherst indicates that the Crown repaid these debts before the next call for troops in Massachusetts in March 1762.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Bernard, Letter to Jeffery Amherst, July 12, 1761. in Nicolson eds., *The Papers of Francis Bernard Vol. I, 1759-1763*, 125.

<sup>105</sup> Bailyn, *The Ordeal of Thomas Hutchinson*, 14-23, 42, 79-88, 103, 143, 369; Thomas Hutchinson, “To Jeffery Amherst, 3 June 1760,” “To Jeffery Amherst, 7 June 1760,” “To Jeffery Amherst, 21 June 1760,” “To Jeffery Amherst, 7 July 1760,” in *The Correspondence of Thomas Hutchinson: Volume I: 1740-1766*, 144-150.

<sup>106</sup> Bernard, Letter to Jeffery Amherst, November 28, 1761. in Nicolson eds. *The Papers of Francis Bernard Vol. I, 1759-1763*, 162.

<sup>107</sup> Bernard, Letter to Jeffery Amherst, November 28, 1761. in Nicolson eds. *The Papers of Francis Bernard Vol. I, 1759-1763*, 162.

<sup>108</sup> Bernard, Letter to Jeffery Amherst, March 6, 1762. in Nicolson eds. *The Papers of Francis Bernard Vol. I, 1759-1763*, 183.

By 1762, Amherst expressed dissatisfaction towards both the elected government and mercantile community in Massachusetts who failed to provide the troops and resources he demanded. During this same time, Bernard appointed Thomas Hancock to purchase provisions for the Massachusetts troops. On April 15, concerned over illicit trade between North American merchants and the enemy French, Amherst proposed an embargo on all North American ports. Soon after this message reached Bernard, the Assembly complied with his initial orders and assembled a force of 3,220 men to embark to Halifax and granted additional bounties for payment. At the end of the month, Bernard communicated to Amherst that he had declared the embargo but that it met with difficulties. Thomas Hancock specifically warned that an embargo would raise the price of supplies which already had risen because of wartime scarcity of foodstuffs in New England.<sup>109</sup>

Amherst remained resolute that the embargo should continue. In May, Hancock prepared vessels to move more troops to Halifax, and expressed concerns that Amherst's embargo would cause difficulties supplying that venture and those of other merchants. Bernard relayed the message from the Boston merchants to Amherst that if they could not draw provisions from Pennsylvania and Connecticut then they had to stop the provisioning trade altogether for the economic well-being of the town.<sup>110</sup> Amherst continued the embargo despite these requests. On May 6, the Massachusetts Council presented petitions for liberty to transport provisions northward against the dictates of the embargo. The merchants petitioned that Amherst permit them to coast provisions upon giving bond. Bernard sent Amherst a memorial from Thomas

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<sup>109</sup> Bernard, Letter to Jeffery Amherst, April 29, 1762. in Nicolson eds., *The Papers of Francis Bernard Vol. I, 1759-1763*, 204.

<sup>110</sup> Bernard, Letter to Jeffery Amherst, May 5, 1762. in Nicolson eds., *The Papers of Francis Bernard Vol. I, 1759-1763*, 209.

Hancock supporting this request.<sup>111</sup> Amherst responded promptly to the merchants' petitions. He stated that he received papers naming specific Bostonians as complicit in the trade with the enemy French. Amherst wrote: "From what I have told You, and a perusal of the Enclosed Papers, I am persuaded you will Joyn [sic] with me in thinking it highly Necessary to put a Total stop to this Iniquitous Trade."<sup>112</sup> Instead of lifting the embargo, Amherst argued that his embargo had the effects he intended and that it should remain in place. Amherst used the embargo as a tool to force compliance to his demands against the will of many Boston merchants.

The war calmed north of Massachusetts until June 1762, at which time the French unexpectedly captured St. John's, Newfoundland, renewing the need for new recruits and naval supplies in Halifax. Amherst sent a letter to Bernard informing him that Lord Colville sailed from Halifax with three ships, meeting two others in Placentia Bay before proceeding to St. John's.<sup>113</sup> With conflict escalating to the north, Bernard ordered soldiers to the barracks at Castle William where Thomas Hancock provided temporary provisions. However, he could not pay the men as Hancock refused, and no other merchant proved able or willing. In September, the Assembly passed a vote to reenlist men already in Halifax, and Hancock and Boston's mercantile community declined any financial involvement. The Assembly sent all men who reenlisted in Boston to New York where Amherst and New York contractors like Charles Ward Apthorp, could pay them and determine their departures.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Bernard. Letter to Jeffery Amherst, May 6, 1762, in Nicolson eds. *The Papers of Francis Bernard Vol. I, 1759-1763*, 210.

<sup>112</sup> Amherst. Letter to Francis Bernard, March 6, 1762, in Nicolson eds. *The Papers of Francis Bernard Vol. I, 1759-1763*, 211.

<sup>113</sup> Amherst, Letter to Francis Bernard, July 11, 1762, in Nicolson eds. *The Papers of Francis Bernard Vol. I, 1759-1763*, 242.

<sup>114</sup> Bernard, Letter to Jeffery Amherst, August, 29, 1762, in Nicolson eds. *The Papers of Francis Bernard Vol. I, 1759-1763*, 257-258.

The British army in North America suffered a string of consecutive defeats against the French in Canada and the Ohio Valley until 1758. In that year, the British captured the French fort at Louisburg on Cape Breton Island and Fort Frontenac on Lake Ontario. The capture of these forts shifted strategic advantage in the North American theater of the war in favor of the British. In 1759, the British captured Fort Niagara on Lake Ontario. In 1759 General James Wolfe's victory at Quebec led to the French surrender of Canada a year later. These battles coincided with a growing role of New York City as a center of organizing the war effort.<sup>115</sup> The port city's location served the strategies General Jefferey Amherst executed because of its proximity to the Mohawk Valley and Lake Champlain for staging assaults against the French beginning in 1754. In 1760, the British expended £1,344,309 in direct payments into the colonies. They spent an estimated £55,691 more in military subsidies to colonial governments over the course of the war.<sup>116</sup> Meanwhile, royal officials attempted to reduce the power of provincial government. In 1760, Thomas Hutchinson stirred controversy in Boston as he attempted to assert the rights of the Crown's officials to pass laws against the will of the local town meetings. Critics published condemnations of Hutchinson's policies and indicating his ties to elite interests which ran counter to the public good. Boston's presses cited Charles Ward Apthorp as one member of this elite group.<sup>117</sup> The year 1760 marked two shifts in British

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<sup>115</sup> Anderson, *Crucible of War*; 233-5, 257, 314, 365-9; Stephen Brumwell, "'One More Card to Play': Revisiting Wolfe's Final Strategem at Quebec," in *Revisiting 1759: The Conquest of Canada in Historical Perspective*. Phillip Buckner and John G. Reid, eds. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 19-43; Richard Holmes, *Redcoat: The British Soldier in the Age of Horse and Musket* (London: Harper Collins, 2001), 16-21, 34, 267, 293, 343, 393; Matthew C. Ward, "Crossing the Line? The British Army and the Application of European 'Rules of War' in the Quebec Campaign," in *Revisiting 1759*, 44-68.

<sup>116</sup> Nash, *The Urban Crucible*, 235-6. On British imperial income and expenditures, see B.R. Mitchell, *British Historical Statistics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 575-89; Howard H. Peckham, *The Colonial Wars, 1689-1762* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, 1964).

<sup>117</sup> Nash, *The Urban Crucible*, 273. On colonial presses and the circulation of information, see McCusker, John J. McCusker, "The Demise of Distance: The Business Press and the Origins of the Information Revolution in the Early Modern Atlantic World," *The American Historical Review*, 110, no. 2, 1 Apr. 2005: 295-321.

colonial North America. First, British military victories increased in tandem with imperial expenditures in the colonies. Second, popular politics turned increasingly against elites with close connections to imperial government, like Hutchinson and Apthorp.

In his December 1761 letter, Hutchinson informed William Bollan that he would soon receive a letter from the General Court concerning a loan from William Shirley. Hutchinson summarized the contents of the incoming letter, stating that the Massachusetts government received £40,000 lawful money (~£30,000 sterling) through Shirley. The grant, Hutchinson conveyed, arrived first in New York by the request of Parliament. The Crown's representatives in New York, upon the arrival of the grant there, proposed they send it in whole to Boston. However, Charles Ward Apthorp, then residing permanently in New York, decided to discharge Massachusetts of its obligations to General Shirley and purchased the colony's remaining money and interest in the grant.<sup>118</sup> The decline of Boston merchants' participation, and the shift of financial responsibilities to Apthorp, was the final stage of the consolidation of wartime financial control among New York's financial elite.

In 1762, the Massachusetts Houses took a more combative stance against Amherst's requests. That March, Bernard sent Amherst the Assembly's proceedings concerning his intended requisition of troops, to which Amherst responded: "I cannot forbear Expressing my Disapprobation of the whole of their Conduct, since they have, not only come far short of His Majesty's Demands, but seem determined to make such stipulations, as can only serve to clog the service."<sup>119</sup> Bernard nonetheless convinced Amherst that he had done everything in his power to

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<sup>118</sup> Hutchinson, Letter to William Bollan, December 14, 1761, Tyler eds. *The Correspondence of Thomas Hutchinson, Vol I 1740-1766*, 156.

<sup>119</sup> Amherst, Letter to Francis Bernard, March 14, 1762, in Nicolson eds., *The Papers of Francis Bernard Vol. I, 1759-1763*, 186.



facilitate enlistment despite the will of the Assembly.<sup>120</sup> Charles Ward Apthorp's firm absorbed Massachusetts's war-time financial markets, bringing them to New York, after provincial politics made their success in Boston unviable.

The state emerged as a tool by which British subjects wielded coercive power against threats to their ability to maximize wealth and wellbeing. These threats could be external or internal to the British Empire united under a single sovereign like George II or George III. In periods of war, local interests ceded their right to exercise coercive force for the purpose of forming a united front against the enemy French and their Native allies. However, the internal tensions remained and British subjects in the colonies proved willing to use local state power to compete with each other and metropolitan authority in Whitehall. This competition emerged with the support of commercial activity, and, in turn, state power supported merchants and landowners who contributed.<sup>121</sup> Political thought in the eighteenth-century British Empire responded to concerns over the formation of competing factions and weighed them against the benefits of federated government. Many of the fears of eighteenth-century political thinkers came from the recognition that policymakers, administrators, and the military manipulated economic systems for political ends. Theorists and administrators recognized the threat of corruption and the adverse incentives of the use of public goods for the aggrandizement of private power.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Amherst, Letter to Francis Bernard, March 6, 1762, in Nicolson eds., *The Papers of Francis Bernard Vol. I, 1759-1763*, 186.

<sup>121</sup> See Miliband on coercion, co-development of capitalism and state coercion, and critique of Marx and Engels on the state. Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society*, 1-12; Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*. Anne M. Cohler, Basia Carolyn Miller, and Harold Samuel Stone, eds. (1748; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Adam Smith, *Lectures on Jurisprudence*. R.L. Meek, D.D. Raphael, and P.G. Stein eds. (1763; Carmel: Liberty Fund, 1978).

<sup>122</sup> This point contrasts with North Wallis Weingast characterization of the "natural state" in that argument that there was not an alternate institutional arrangement necessarily more conducive to consent. Consent required positive enforcement of local popular will against potential competitors within and outside British imperial territory. North and Weingast, *Violence and Social Orders*, 1-26.

In the colonial British northeast between 1745 and 1763, many small firms, towns, and military units supported an extensive fiscal-military state. Corporate interests did not necessarily limit this imperial coercive capacity, but often supported it.<sup>123</sup> The problem from the metropolitan perspective was that peripheral social units acting on the empire's behalf also could pursue agendas in conflict with the long-term aims of the crown and Parliament. Private, corporatized commercial behavior particularly did not confine itself to the political boundaries delineated by formal concepts of sovereignty. Colonists like the Apthorps and Hancocks adapted to new commercial patterns and networked in anticipation of future conflict. The business and political strategies like those of the Apthorps allowed for the development of trading patterns necessary for imperial expansion.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> The concept of the continuation of some small autonomous units under capitalist state coercion can be found in Miliband's description of small "enterprises" in modern corporate capitalist economies. Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society*, 11-12.

<sup>124</sup> The autonomy of peripheral units beyond the authority, or legal authority, of the metropole is important here. The idea of state failure to control, and failure to control, in capitalist systems can be found in Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society*, 13. The colonial case most directly relevant to extra-legal activity would be illicit wartime trade, see Truxes, *Defying Empire*, 2008.

## Chapter Four

### **“Our Own and Our Country’s Ruin”: Public Credit, War Markets, and Political Transition in the Colonial American Northeast, 1758-1768**

There was little separation between the private and public spheres of economic activity in the eighteenth-century American Northeast. Because of limitations of direct public oversight, small administrative bureaucracies, and slow interregional communication, delegation of public financial roles to individuals and firms was necessary for any concerted action of the state. Private credit transactions arose from the development of obligations recorded in account books and circulating paper notes redeemable from an initial issuer facilitated the exchanges that made military action possible. From the perspective of the early modern imperial state, the central problem with reliance on such private transactions was that delegation allowed for differentiation. Rather than adherence to a universal imperial plan, groups and individuals who organized the financing of military campaigns used their fiscal influence to pursue political goals in conflict with those of central authorities in London. Metropolitan policymakers found this shared influence particularly onerous in times of war. Disagreement between parties limited the warmaking capacity by introducing competing claims for resources demanded by the military. British military officers and administrators recognized this as a problem in the North American theater of the Seven Years’ War. The British imperial state’s sovereign authority in its colonies depended on its ability to effectively finance its military there. Coordinating a fiscal state across the Atlantic, however, proved difficult in the eighteenth century because of colonial fiscal autonomy.

Imperial control required the cooperation of colonists, firms, and local governments in public finance. However, the interests of colonial subjects did not align with those of politicians, merchants, and military officers in the imperial metropole. This was particularly true because much of the manpower and resources necessary for the war originated from within the colonies. Military success in colonial war between 1754 and 1763 required policy experimentation to incentivize provincial governments, merchants, and the general population to participate in the imperial project without deviating from the intended goals of metropolitan planners and military regulars. In 1758, policymakers unified colonial firms behind a successful war strategy that led to victory. However, the costs to secure this victory were deferred until the war was over. In the 1760s, colonists confronted economic depression and cascading bankruptcies. Such economic disruption occurred as the imperial state withdrew its support for the public-private extension of credit and debt. This caused social instability in towns like Boston during the early stages of the protests that led to the American Revolution.

In 1758, policymakers found the solution to securing colonial participation in the war effort not in force, but in self-promotion. Rather than coercing colonial assemblies and individuals into compliance with military demands for men, money, and resources, the crown promised that it would fund the expenses of war but overrepresented the fiscal capacity of the British state to accomplish this. This chapter examines how the Boston merchant community responded to the offer of imperial debt repayment plans and reacted to the reality that the crown and Parliament could not, in the end, meet the full obligations merchants held against the imperial state. The result of such failure was a chain of catastrophic bankruptcies that provoked criticism of, and mobilization against, imperial oversight in the 1760s and early 1770s.

After 1758, Parliament and military officers like General Jeffrey Amherst developed a new fiscal method for incentivizing colonial compliance with centralized decisions. This method maximized short-term military efficiency by harnessing colonial merchant debt to serve the war effort. Under the post-1758 system, English public contractors selected well-networked colonial merchants and promised them direct payments in hard bullion specie shipped from England at a future time in exchange for issuing credit to those providing goods and services.<sup>1</sup> Previous colonial wars did not rely on direct shipments of bullion from England to merchant war financiers. Instead, wartime expenses before 1758 relied on a series of local intermediaries that then assigned provisioning and financial roles to local colonial merchants. For example, generals and statesmen like Edward Braddock, William Shirley, and John Campbell, 4<sup>th</sup> Earl of Loudon had limited purses of hard money during the early stages of the French and Indian War. They relied instead on currency and resources requisitioned from town and provincial assemblies. These wartime leaders also relied on local merchant networks to provide liquidity using personal book credit which they could also circulate throughout the colonies in the form of paper notes.<sup>2</sup> Colonial assemblies and local merchants often balked at these demands. Amherst lamented this recalcitrance and sought to eliminate these unreliable middlemen in the process of military finance and requisition.

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<sup>1</sup> “Letter concerning Mr. [[Apthorp]]'s inability to procure more money for Major General Amherst,” Correspondence, The National Archives, Kew, CO 5/55 Part 2, June 4, 1759; Abraham Mortier, “Extract of a letter from Abraham Mortier to John Appy concerning Mr [[Apthorp]]'s response to requests for loans,” Correspondence, The National Archives, Kew, CO 5/55 Part 2, June 4, 1759 - June 7, 1759; “Letter concerning preparations for the military campaign and the state of certain provinces, with a list of the various papers enclosed, including correspondence, details of sums raised in aid of the colonies, and a return of the troops serving in North America,” Correspondence, The National Archives, Kew, CO 5/54, December 16, 1758 - February 28, 1759.

<sup>2</sup> Fred Anderson, *Crucible of War: The Seven Years' War and the Fate of Empire in British North America, 1754-1766* (New York: Vintage, 2000), 91-108.

The 1758 contracting system implemented under Amherst incentivized select merchants to take on larger amounts of debt on their firms' private accounts. Merchants had long used debt as a tool in commerce and specifically in war finance.<sup>3</sup> However, the extent of merchants' willingness to use their debt to fund war expenditures stopped at the point at which the provincial fiscal system could adequately reimburse them. The shift which occurred in 1758 under Amherst's command followed Prime Minister William Pitt's decision to leverage Britain's public debt to inject larger amounts of credit into North America's military-fiscal system. In 1758, Parliament appointed London merchants with strong colonial connections like John Colebrooke, Arnold Nesbitt, and Barlowe Trecothick to dispense commissions for colonial merchants to participate in this new credit system.<sup>4</sup> Colonial merchants issued paper notes backed by their own credit. These merchants tapped into their social and commercial networks to expand the credit on which they could draw. They dispatched agents in major port towns like Boston and New York to solicit subscribers willing to contribute funds. Wealthy colonists contributed short-term monetary payments in return for repayment of the principal with interest once later reimbursements arrived from England to cover all liabilities on the merchants' accounts.<sup>5</sup> The result was a streamlined relationship between metropolitan policymakers and colonial credit markets. This circulating merchant credit provided liquidity for quick financing of military needs on an unprecedented scale.

To pay the extraordinary costs of Britain's military expenses in North America, the metropolitan state indebted itself to colonial merchants and those merchants in turn indebted

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<sup>3</sup> Cathy Matson, *Merchants & Empire: Trading in Colonial New York* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 44-48, 58, 64-68, 106, 123-129, 220, 265-276.

<sup>4</sup> "Letters between Major-General Amherst and the firm of DeLancey and Watts about victualling troops in America," Correspondence, The National Archives, Kew, CO 5/57 Part 3, February 27, 1760 - February 29, 1760.

<sup>5</sup> Charles Ward Apthorp, *Accounts (1755-1768)*, Charles Ward Apthorp Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Box 1, Folder 32.

themselves to other colonists. This relationship centralized administration within imperial state authority by removing checks on wartime debt finance at the provincial level that depended on local merchants, towns, and provincial assemblies. However, this credit system nonetheless remained dependent on dispersed local financial knowledge and a complex, bottom-up, colonial credit system. This system financed Britain's military victories in the final years of the war, but such successes came at the cost of unintended financial instability when the state found that it could not pay what it had promised.

The proliferation of bills of credit in the eighteenth-century colonial economy aided in the process of extending merchant debt during this surge in imperial war expenditures in the period 1758 to 1762.<sup>6</sup> War finance through the new contract system maximized the funds that the military raised. It also minimized the time it took to make payments because merchants in colonial port towns quickly allocated resources to the major sites of conflict in Canada, the maritime Northeast, and the Ohio River Valley.<sup>7</sup> As enterprising traders sought immediate profits in the market boom for wartime provisioning and finance instruments, this speculative activity drew scarce resources and labor away from regular colonial economic activities. When British repayments fell short, the unpaid debts of the war proved larger than the productive capacity of the region, generating a credit crisis that staggered the post-war economy.

Historians have described the economic downturn that arose from the transition from war to peace after 1760. Fred Anderson has shown that colonial merchants struggled with large inventories after British military spending tapered off at the end of the war. He has shown how

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<sup>6</sup> Bruce H. Mann, *Neighbors & Strangers: Law and Community in Early Connecticut* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 11-46.

<sup>7</sup> On mobilization of provincial soldiers during the Seven Years' War, especially after 1758, see Fred Anderson, *A People's Army: Massachusetts Soldiers and Society in the Seven Years' War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 26-62.

the reduction of colonists' spending that occurred because of the postwar downturn. Several large "troubled firms," he has observed, absorbed a significant portion of credit during the war, and consequently caused substantial crises when they fell.<sup>8</sup> These instances that Anderson noted were not, however, isolated incidents, but rather a direct consequence of the restructuring of colonial credit relationships. Britain's structural changes in wartime financing after 1758—not the everyday contingency of participating in transatlantic trade—caused these effects.

Because of the absence of complete surviving accounts, it is impossible to conduct a full quantitative analysis of this restructuring. Nonetheless, the post-1758 restructuring and its effects can be gauged by examining the records kept by a few key merchants involved in war financing, including Charles Ward Apthorp in New York. Apthorp served as a major financier and promised, and sporadically delivered, bullion reimbursements to cover obligations to his creditors who contributed money, goods, and services to the war effort. The diaries, accounts, letterbooks, and court transcripts of merchants like Apthorp indicate large outstanding obligations unfulfilled by the British state by the mid-1760s. Because Britain failed to fully reimburse colonial financiers, these debts passed to the merchants' creditors, and those creditors' creditors across colonial society. These contracted merchants like Apthorp held obligations exceeding their net worth, and these liabilities caused the credit collapse responsible for the recession historians have documented at the end of the French and Indian War. The chain of bankruptcies in colonial port towns which began as the war ended suggest the connections between these specific war financiers and the economic downturn that plunged the colonial Northeast into financial crisis. A chain of defaults from metropole to individual British-American subjects followed the structure of credit relationships that British policies and large

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<sup>8</sup> Anderson, *The Crucible of War*, 588-9.



merchants created to finance the war. While true that complicated patchworks of credits and debits existed across colonial society, very large debts sufficient to cause financial panics could be held only by large firms. Failure to fulfill bullion obligations to contracted financiers rippled downward through creditors after a bankruptcy.

Colonial merchants developed extensive transatlantic networks and specialized knowledge through years of commercial activity<sup>9</sup>, but none held complete knowledge of the decentralized system they had constructed over the course of multiple generations. Restructuring financial relationship around a central state mandate caused major ruptures in the scale and scope of merchant activity. Several notable merchant families, once capable and esteemed, found themselves verging on bankruptcy when they failed to account for all debt accumulated by agents of their firms. Many of these same merchant houses, like the Apthorps of Boston and New York, had successfully served as war financiers and provisioners during the War of Austrian Succession and avoided the large unpaid obligations and litigation that the firm would face after 1762.<sup>10</sup>

The new system introduced in 1758 fundamentally changed the structure of war finance in North America by altering who firms, paymasters, and policymakers were accountable to.

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<sup>9</sup> Jonathan Barth, *The Currency of Empire: Money and Power in Seventeenth-Century English America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2021), 249-289; David Hancock, *Citizens of the World: London Merchants and the Integration of the British Atlantic Community, 1735-1785* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 85-278; Matson, *Merchants & Empire*, 199, 121-214; Frederick B. Tolles, *Meeting House and Counting House: The Quaker Merchants of Colonial Philadelphia, 1682-1763* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1948); Nuala Zahedieh, *The Capital and the Colonies: London and the Atlantic Economy 1660-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>10</sup> Charles Ward Apthorp, "Apthorp & Son (military, gold and silver shipments, postage), 1755-1768," Charles Ward Apthorp Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Box 1, Folder 32; William Powell, "Letter from William Powell (Louisbourg) to Thomas Hancock requesting supplies and an update on his present account," 13 Apr. 1748, Hancock Family Paper II, Massachusetts Historical Society, Box 1, Folder 1; Charles Lawrence, "Letter from Gov. Charles Lawrence (Halifax) to Apthorp & Son and Thomas Hancock regarding bills of exchange for balance of account from Gen. Shirley and instructions not to pay for various claims," 17 Feb. 1750, Hancock Family Paper II, Massachusetts Historical Society, Box 1, Folder 1.

Military officials preferred to interact with a small number of firms, and they extended contracts to those firms most willing to take on debt to maximize the spending capacity of British generals and paymasters. This led to a regional monopolization of the Northeastern war finance market. Among the most notable of these leading merchant financiers was Charles Ward Apthorp, who presided over an extensive transatlantic financial network.<sup>11</sup>

Apthorp's agents, including William Bayard in New York and Nathaniel Wheelwright in Boston, found their debts overextended by the end of the war. Merchant bankruptcies produced economic catastrophe in port towns where social stability relied on the mutual obligations of credit. This credit extended foremost from prominent merchants whose obligations radiated through local commercial communities and involved artisans and urban laborers who they paid with promissory notes and book credit. Experienced merchants like Boston's John Rowe expressed great concern about the bankruptcies and a shift towards austerity in British fiscal policy that accompanied the end of the war.

Merchants turned against each other to avoid bankruptcy, destabilizing the prewar amicability of towns like Boston. These commercial grievances became points of political protest, as traders joined together with other critics of Britain's post-ministry to voice their opposition to hard money taxes, fees on litigation and paper bills mandated under the Stamp Act, provisions under the Currency Act that prevented the printing of colonial currency, and other administrative reforms. The British patriotic enthusiasm that had reached its fruition in the latter years of the Seven Years' War shifted suddenly to discontent and skepticism of Parliament and royal officials in America. On-the-ground witnesses to the postwar depression, like John Rowe,

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<sup>11</sup> Charles Ward Apthorp, Apthorp v. Bayard Transcript, Charles Ward Apthorp Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Box 4, Folder 30.

knew that the social turmoil in Boston after 1762 arose from the failure of the empire to maintain its political and financial credibility. Public finance between 1758 and 1762 had won the war, but in doing so, it had aggravated popular resentment against the empire.

Historians of the British imperial state, most notably John Brewer, have pointed to the long eighteenth century as a period of strengthening and consolidation of state power through the development of fiscal linkages. To Brewer, imperial institutions like the Treasury Board restructured the English fiscal system into a unified whole accountable to central authority. Brewer attributes this centralization to a uniform administration of money under one political system with an “absence of institutionalized regionalism” in which parliamentary government promoted a universal tacit consent to taxation. Furthermore, Brewer argues that the English fiscal system did not face the same burdens associated with prolonged conflict nor debt in contrast to continental Europe. These conditions, in Brewer’s formulation, produced a fiscal-military state that “dwarfed any civilian enterprise” as an institution.<sup>12</sup> Brewer’s depiction of Britain after 1688 describes an increasingly effective state that developed many bureaucratic characteristics of modern fiscal systems. He argues that the empire successfully used fiscal centralization to fund military expenses.<sup>13</sup> Brewer’s conceptualization applies to the British Isles but, in America, British officials relied on colonial merchants and provincial governments for colonial war finance.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State, 1688-1783* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 21-23, 34, 69, 129.

<sup>13</sup> Brewer, *The Sinews of Power*, 34, 69, 129.

<sup>14</sup> The ratio of British public expenditure to public revenue increased on average between 1690 and 1775. Even though the rate at which expenditure increased per year decreased over the period, the average rate at which expenditure increased relative to revenue was about 2% a year over the whole period. If the taxation capacity of the British fiscal state developed over the period, it was outpaced by the empire’s expenses. For data on this period, see B.R. Mitchell, *British Historical Statistics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 575-80.

Writing on the evolution of the British fiscal system in the eighteenth century, P. G. M. Dickson emphasized the significance of public securities that allowed the state to fund itself through debt. To Dickson, this evolution of the imperial state's capacity to take on public debt through more sophisticated financial tools arose largely because of its inability to generate sufficient revenue through taxation. In Dickson's conception, debt freed the state from the fiscal constraints of spending according to the amount of tax revenue and, consequently, debt financing expanded the financial resources on which Britain drew to expand and defend the empire.<sup>15</sup>

Brewer's calculations and descriptions of the English fiscal state structure represent it as a professional, effective, and universal system that linked British sovereign territory into a homogenous unit. This model of public finance focuses primarily on the relation of public debt to taxation as public securities like tallies and bonds issued by state representatives in proportion to tax revenue. Other historians have noted payments made to private individuals, or short-term debt that did not require securities with fixed maturities.<sup>16</sup> However, these operating definitions of public debt ignore the use of private debt for public purposes that occurred outside the view of the state. Thus, Brewer's interpretation focuses on taxing and spending as it related to metropolitan Britain, but does not take into account the public-private partnerships that made war financing possible in North America. After 1763, court records show that merchants in colonies did not know of the extent of the public obligations within their own networks. It is therefore unreasonable to conclude that the policymakers who these merchants reported to would have a

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<sup>15</sup> P. G. M. Dickson, *The Financial Revolution in England: A Study in the Development of Public Credit, 1688-1756* (London: Routledge, 1967). On the development of British public finance in the eighteenth century, see Julian Hoppit, *The Dreadful Monster and its Poor Relations: Taxing, Spending and the United Kingdom, 1707-2021* (New York: Penguin, 2021), 1-34; Julian Hoppit, *Britain's Political Economies: Parliament and Economic Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), xiv, 5, 10, 14-5, 22-5.

<sup>16</sup> On expenses paid directly to public creditors aside from securities in early America, see E.J. Ferguson, *Power of the Purse: A History of American Public Finance, 1776-1790* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1961), 1-24.

better idea of the extent of these obligations. Much of the credit circulating to fund the North American theater of the Seven Years' War circulated outside the rigorous scrutiny of the British imperial state.

In the case of North American war finance, cooperative, regionalized, public-private deficit finance proved dominant. Contracting policies that coopted private finance for public spending facilitated imperial expansion and hegemony. Therefore, colonial private debt must factor into any characterization of the British fiscal system. Merchants at the forefront of North American war finance between 1758 and 1768 expressed that revenue did not meet the costs of conflict.<sup>17</sup> They argued correctly that as peripheral debtors they assumed disproportionate costs.

The pattern of war finance after 1758 occurred in two phases. The first phase from 1758 to 1762 followed a shift of contracting methods which caused colonial merchant firms to take on substantial private debts to serve as contractors for the British military. During this phase, colonists felt generally positive about the state of the colonial economy, bolstered in part by patriotic fervor following British military successes and the positive effects of increased spending throughout the militarized economy. However, a few merchants, though optimistic about the outcomes of the war at that time, nonetheless expressed concerns about their fellow merchants' liabilities. These concerns foreshadowed a transition to the second phase after 1762, during which the end of the war suddenly eliminated demand for military services which had consumed so much colonial resources and labor over the previous four years. Merchants had received only partial payment for all outstanding obligations by the time of the 1763 peace.

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<sup>17</sup> Subsequent cases of such opinion subsequently derive from Anne Rowe Cunningham ed., *Letters and Diary of John Rowe: Boston Merchant, 1759-1762, 1764-1779* (Boston, Edward Lillie, 1903). Similar sentiments can be found in David Andrew Edwards, "Grenville's Silver Hammer: The Problem of Money in the Stamp Act Crisis," *Journal of American History*, 104, no.1 (Jan. 2017): 337.

In the second phase, metropolitan policy placed further strain on colonial debtors by placing new taxes on the colonies that, while relatively small in nominal terms, pulled limited stable money from colonial hands. With limited access to hard currency, and disruptions to traditional prewar commercial markets, merchants had limited capacity to remit on the substantial debts developed in the first phase. From the perspective of the postwar colonial debtor, the fiscal state's capacity to provide revenues for its expenses had definitively failed. The promises of state-focused monetary regimes promoted a more extensive use of credit-backed currencies backed by public mandate over the less dynamic, but more stable, bullion alternatives. Such promises promoted speculative financial leverage and hindered the repayment of debts in the postwar financial crisis.<sup>18</sup> A strong, stable, trustworthy, eighteenth-century fiscal state with sufficient ability to fund expenditures did not extend to the colonies, nor did membership within this fiscal structure provide a net benefit to colonial participants.

Many historians of the colonial economy in the mid-eighteenth century describe the Seven Years' War as a period of British state expenditure that transferred capital and wealth to the colonies through transatlantic supply chains. In this interpretation, colonists benefited from British governance. This interpretation of transatlantic flows of payment and capital emphasizes the relatively small size of the annual deficit in the colonies' current account, which colonists could theoretically fund with shipments of available specie.<sup>19</sup> According to this interpretation, an

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<sup>18</sup> Christine Desan, *Making Money: Coin, Currency, and the Coming of Capitalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 1-22, 360-403.

<sup>19</sup> Multiple historians have argued for the fundamental lack of bullion-based currencies in colonial America. I argue that while this characterization is largely accurate, scarcity did not imply that the limited bullion reserves within the colonies did not play a critical role in supporting circulating credit currencies via remittances. Such remittances would have been very important in port towns where larger bullion reserves were more common. On arguments for limited supplies of bullion money see Edwards, "Grenville's Silver Hammer," 337-40; Farley Grubb, "The Circulating Medium of Exchange in Colonial Pennsylvania, 1729-1775: New Estimates of Monetary Composition, Performance, and Economic Growth," *Explorations in Economic History*, 41 (Oct. 2004): 329-60; Robert E. Wright, *The Origins of Commercial Banking in America, 1750-1800* (New York, 2001), 19-47.

argument for chronic currency shortages in the colonies caused by imperial trade deficits, which necessitated the shipment of money to the metropole, makes little sense. This is partially because of the prevalence of available Iberian currencies on colonial accounts. However, this interpretation ignores the high demand for strong currency in the colonial economy. Colonists needed to fund domestic debts that outsized the availability of currencies other than inflationary colonial paper emissions, making any exportation of money very onerous. The relevant consideration is therefore not the absolute nominal size of the transatlantic deficit relative to specie, but instead the competition between colonial and imperial debtors for a limited quantity of that specie.<sup>20</sup>

Colonists needed money to fund debt. Because colonists relied on stable credit relations for common transactions, the effective burden of postwar fiscal reforms proved both tangible and substantial. Colonists, especially those engaged in port town commerce expressed this exact concern between 1762 and 1768. Their critiques of British fiscal policy joined a political argument against unconstitutional taxes, but it was rooted in a harsh material reality. Strong ideological stances against British taxation policies emerged only after the fact and reflected the economic interests of Northeastern colonists who suffered because of the financial crisis.<sup>21</sup>

Tracking transatlantic flows of goods and payments is an incomplete model of colonial relations with the imperial core during the war in the Northeast. This interpretation fails to

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<sup>20</sup> Brewer, *The Sinews of Power*, 177; John J. McCusker and Russell R. Menard, *The Economy of British America, 1607-1789* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 84, 351-58.

<sup>21</sup> On an interpretation arguing for America as a “low tax zone” with no economic motivation for opposition to British taxes and trade restrictions, see Justin Du Rivage, *Revolution Against Empire: Taxes, Politics, and the Origins of American Independence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 12-3. Tom Cutterham also posits an interpretation that downplays the financial burden of imperial taxation as an impetus for Revolution. Additionally, contrary to the inter-class factions that I describe in this chapter, Cutterham indicates a separation of interests between “local capitalists” and the “relatively well-off American labouring class.” All members of colonial society engaged in trade, I argue, depended on the stability of merchant credit. Tom Cutterham, “Class, State, and Revolution in the History of American Capitalism” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 33, no. 1 (March 2020): 26-38.

account for the importance of the financial burdens and unrealized gains of colonists incurred prior to 1763. The strengths of empire relied on a “soft power” approach of coopting local economies by incentivizing influential individuals to act according to central goals. However, imperial states lacked the “hard power” to deliver on their promises to these individuals. After 1762, the fundamental divergence between colonial and imperial interests, which had fractured during the war, ultimately proved obvious to colonists who did not receive the benefits of imperial membership that they expected.

Midway through the Seven Years’ War, a reorganization of North American merchant activity occurred in response to a new imperial fiscal policy. Following four years of unsuccessful, and even disastrous, military performances against the French and their Native American allies in the period 1754-1758, William Pitt’s ministry – in power from 1756 – sought to reform the fiscal state to better serve military ends in Europe as well as America. Parliament, the Royal Treasury, and the Board of Trade sought colonial merchants as allies. Their new fiscal policies depended on merchants and their financial influence to direct colonial resources, labor, and capital towards the war effort.<sup>22</sup>

The policy shift of the Pitt administration initially enjoyed popular support in the American colonies. Almost every colony assembly immediately voted to raise more troops in response to the Pitt ministry’s promises that London would pay the costs of the war. Aggressive engagement against French positions drew on this dramatic expansion of financial resources made possible by these policies, turning dismal war news into reports of victories and a resurgent optimism about Britain’s prospects in the conflict. Pitt recognized that, given the sizeable

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<sup>22</sup> Apthorp, Apthorp v. Bayard Transcript.



influence of colonial participation in provisioning and providing troops, especially in Canada,<sup>23</sup> incentivizing colonists to support imperial military goals would determine the outcome for the American theatre of the war.

Colonists needed no external motivation to fight the French and their Native allies. They had long attempted to wrest control of territory from French colonists in contested regions. However, as previously noted, fiscal constraints tempered colonists' aggressive goals. The constraints of local financial and resource demands competed with their drive toward territorial expansion. The policies of the Pitt administration eliminated the constraints of provincial budgets, giving the colonists an opportunity to contribute to a massive British effort to end French colonization in North America.

Merchants had long made use of bills of credit which, during the Seven Years' War, worked much like modern war bonds, and colonists could transfer them between parties, turning these debt instruments into a medium of exchange that facilitated transactions. In aggregate, these bills stimulated commerce in the short term by effectively increasing the amount of available currency in the colonies as the bills changed hands from person to person.<sup>24</sup> The post-1758 method of war finance differed from past practices in previous wars in the extent to which it streamlined and centralized control of funds between military officers, paymasters, and colonial merchants. Through merchant credit, they bypassed the need to directly tax colonists and, therefore, to confer with meddlesome provincial governments to secure funds that could back paper issues.

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<sup>23</sup> On the role of British-American colonists in Canadian wars in the eighteenth century see Apthorp, Apthorp v. Bayard Transcript; William T. Baxter, *The House of Hancock: Business in Boston, 1724-1775* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1945), 78-107; Anderson, *Crucible of War*, 35-6, 68-9, 88, 111-14, 137, 190, 200, 207-8, 225, 250-9.

<sup>24</sup> McCusker and Menard, *The Economy of British America*, 354; McCusker, *Money & Exchange in Europe & America, 1600-1775* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978), 3-26.

Prior to 1758, military officers would go to colonial legislatures, like the Massachusetts General Court, or to colonial governors, to request a tax, or levy, to pay to an appointed merchant for the purpose of provisioning supplies and paying wages to those who enlisted. From the perspective of the military officers and paymasters, however, this system limited their ability to wage war because it provided a limit on their requisitions. Elected representatives sometimes refused to grant additional funds if the towns which they represented judged the burden too high, which they often did. This older requisition system survived, in part, until the end of the Seven Years' War alongside the new credit-based system that dominated increasingly after 1758. However, antagonism between provincial assemblies and military officers, especially between the Massachusetts General Court and General Jefferey Amherst, meant that those leading the British forces in North America would favor the new system.<sup>25</sup> The elimination of provincial checks on spending, once merchants replaced direct requisitions with privately financed debt instruments, yielded staggering new spending on the war, which helped the British achieve a series of military victories against the French, beginning with the successful siege of Quebec in 1759.

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<sup>25</sup> Amherst consistently corresponded with the colonial governor Francis Barnard between 1760 and 1762 requesting the requisition of resources via provincial government levies. While determined to meet Amherst's demands, at least as far as his correspondence reveals, Barnard proved unable to exercise the political power to convince the Massachusetts General Court to put any further strain on the limited resources and manpower of the colonial population. In the correspondence between Barnard and Amherst, Amherst's view of this denial as colonial insolence in the face of military necessity is evident. See Jefferey Amherst, Letter to Francis Bernard, March 14, 1762. in Nicolson eds. *The Papers of Francis Bernard Vol. I, 1759-1763*, 186; Amherst, Letter to Francis Bernard, March 6, 1762. in Nicolson eds. *The Papers of Francis Bernard Vol. I, 1759-1763*, 186; Francis Bernard, Letter to Jefferey Amherst, April 18, 1761. in Nicolson eds. *The Papers of Francis Bernard Vol. I, 1759-1763*, 103; Jefferey Amherst, Letter to Francis Bernard, April 26, 1761. in Nicolson eds. *The Papers of Francis Bernard Vol. I, 1759-1763*, 107; Francis Bernard, Letter to Jefferey Amherst, July 5, 1761. in Nicolson eds. *The Papers of Francis Bernard Vol. I, 1759-1763*. 121; Francis Bernard, Letter to Jefferey Amherst, July 11, 1761. in Nicolson eds. *The Papers of Francis Bernard Vol. I, 1759-1763*, 123-124; Francis Bernard, Letter to Jefferey Amherst, July 12, 1761. in Nicolson eds. *The Papers of Francis Bernard Vol. I, 1759-1763*. 125; Francis Bernard, Letter to Jefferey Amherst, November 28, 1761. in Nicolson eds. *The Papers of Francis Bernard Vol. I, 1759-1763*, 162.

Colonist John Rowe expressed concern even as Britain experienced wartime successes. In September 1759, as British defense spending increased dramatically in proportion to public revenues, Rowe worried about how he might mitigate potential losses in high-risk war markets.<sup>26</sup> He suffered the loss of a ship in which he had a stake. This loss was compounded by troubling financial news in the larger merchant community, and Rowe noted the first signs of insolvency among his counterparts. Rowe's concerns about lost ships and other extreme costs of wartime commerce, along with the sizeable debts of his wealthy neighbors, all emerged in the context of shifts of scale and scope in the mercantile networks of the colonial Northeast in response to wartime demands. The demand for goods and services of militias and regulars fighting the French in Canada and the Ohio River Valley created new opportunities for merchants. However, opportunity did not extend equally to every merchant. They vied for the favor of imperial contractors and paymasters to grant them a share of this defense spending. This was a zero-sum competition for share of a market in which policymakers excluded all but those most responsive to the goals of the war.

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<sup>26</sup> The period from 1758 to 1762 was a significant statistical break from earlier years in terms of both net public expenditure, expenditure on defense (including army, navy, and ordnance), and the proportion of public spending represented by defense. The 1758 period included significantly more defense spending, especially on public debt, than the 1755 to 1757 years of the first half of the Seven Years' War. For the 1758 through 1760 years, the total expenditure on defense was ~£33,940,000, while the total for the 1755 through 1757 years was ~£16,251,000, a ~208.8% increase in net spending. Measured in terms of purchasing power given the average net inflation between the two periods, the increase was ~196.1% measured against the base period 1700-1702. The net defense spending for the 1758-60 period outweighed not only defense spending for the 1755-57 period, but public spending in that period altogether. The yearly increase in the proportion of spending represented by defense was: 1755- 47.6%; 1756- 57.7%; 1757- 65.3%; 1758- 68.4%; 1759- 74.4%; 1760- 74.9%. The proportion of total spending relative to revenue also increased in this period even if one does not include private debt incurred through the circulation of unredeemed private notes and not therefore included in the obligations recorded on public accounts. The percentage of official public revenue relative to debt on public accounts for these same years was: 1755- 97.5%; 1756- 73.1%; 1757-71.1%; 1758- 60.2%; 1759- 53.0%; 1760- 51.1%. The ratio of public revenue to public debt during this period, not counting additional colonial private debt by firms like Apthorp & Co., decreased dramatically during this period indicating that the fiscal capacity to tax did not match the demands of war expenditure over this period by any measure, largely due to the spending increases under the policies introduced by Pitt and the post-1758 Parliament. Calculations derived from data provided in: Mitchell, *British Historical Statistics*, 576-9; John J. McCusker, *How Much Is That In Real Money?: A Historical Commodity Price Index for Use as a Deflator of Money Values in the Economy of the United States* (Worcester, MA: American Antiquarian Society, 2001), 98-9.

Rowe planned to provide a shipment of fish to the suppliers at the recently captured fort at Louisburg on Cape Breton Island.<sup>27</sup> To do so, he needed information on potential inroads into the contractor networks supplying the fort. He wrote to his brother at Louisburg requesting that he communicate to the paymasters and officers there that he would be willing and able to fulfill any demands for supplies.<sup>28</sup> The rush to participate in the British war financing system, as it emerged between 1758 and 1762, emboldened speculators and encouraged dominant merchants to seek monopolistic positions over wartime commerce. New York City merchants connected to the De Lancey political faction took advantage of speculative opportunities by expanding their firms' market share of the lucrative war markets via aggressive extensions of debt to maximize the amount of bills they could pay directly into the war effort. This was a continuation of New York City merchants' attempts to supplant competitors in Albany and Boston that had been dominant financial intermediaries when colonial general William Shirley had been in command in the earlier stages of the war.

New York merchants extended private credit to provide immediate stimulus to commerce in support of the war effort.<sup>29</sup> Debt and liquidity became political tools by which competing merchant networks could gain the upper hand in contests for the right to provision the King's forces. London contractors awarded these firms with large commissions and paid them, partially, in installments with direct shipments of hard currency remittances from the Royal Treasury.<sup>30</sup> The colonial subcontractors used these remittances to pay off debts to those from whom they

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<sup>27</sup> On the capture of Louisburg in the Summer of 1758, see: Anderson, *The Crucible of War*, 250-256.

<sup>28</sup> John Rowe, Letter to Jacob Rowe, September 20, 1759. In Cunningham ed. *Letters and Diary of John Rowe*, 335.

<sup>29</sup> "Letter confirming that an application has been made to Lieutenant Governor De Lancey for a loan of £150,000." Correspondence, The National Archives, Kew, CO 5/55 Part 2, June 8, 1759; Matson, *Merchants & Empire*, 145-49, 156-57, 168-69, 201, 213-220, 246, 276, 291, 307; Michael Kammen, *Colonial New York: A History* (1975; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 280, 344-46, 359-60, 363-64.

<sup>30</sup> Apthorp, Apthorp v. Bayard Transcript.

requested bills of credit. These merchants also paid their own commissions and the interest on whatever bills of credit they issued themselves for military payments.

In the spring of 1760, John Rowe wrote to his brother Jacob. John expressed concern about his brother's failure to inform him of outstanding debts held by a Mr. Sherburne and Josiah Rhodes against his firm. He expressed sympathy on his brother's lack of communication, writing "I suppose you forgot it," along with plans to find means to cover the obligation along with the two other bearers on the outstanding bill, Captain Cushion and Captain Forbes.<sup>31</sup> Just prior to this event, a fire broke in Boston that almost destroyed a significant amount of his stock. The potential ramifications of such destruction to property could prove catastrophic for any one merchant in an economy increasingly dominated by risky debt. With slightly less luck, the more complete destruction of his stock along with large debts could force a merchant like Rowe, and everyone who depended on his financial stability, into ruin. Loss of substantial physical assets to accidents, a real risk in the colonial economy, could prevent their ability to fund the debt they had incurred. British merchants created sophisticated methods of insuring transatlantic cargos, such as accumulating relief funds through marine societies or by negotiating with other merchants for insurance in coffee houses and exchanges. However, smaller coastal ventures dominant in the New England economy, as well as property damage, often fell solely on individual venturer.<sup>32</sup> High risk paired with the challenge of securing remittances from contractors created conditions for large bankruptcies. In short time, this was precisely the position in which some notable debtholders in Boston and New York found themselves.

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<sup>31</sup> John Rowe to Jacob Rowe, April 21, 1760, in Cunningham ed. *Letters and Diary of John Rowe*, 347.

<sup>32</sup> Patrick Crowhurst, *The Defence of British Trade, 1689-1815* (Folkestone, UK: Dawson, 1977), 81-103.

The new public credit system undergirding war finance incentivized leveraged speculation. Wealthy colonists gave bills of credit to subcontractors in return for repayment, plus interest, guaranteed by Britain.<sup>33</sup> Those who issued bills to the subcontracted firms owed debts to employees, or a grocer, or cobbler, who themselves owed debts to a lawyer, or cooper, or farmer.<sup>34</sup> The result of these chains of obligation produced webs of credit relations that came to depend on merchants' ability to repay their obligations to creditors with remittances from the British government. In the short term, this stimulated the war effort and encouraged colonial production as bills backed by mercantile debt flooded the colonial economy.<sup>35</sup> In places like Boston and New York, wherein wartime commercial activity and exchange occurred at the greatest pace, the effects of this new credit currency could find its way into anyone's hands, especially as local artisans and laborers shifted their work in support of wartime demand and took payments from local merchants in return.

In 1760, New England and the Middle Colonies had a combined population of around 877,500, each of whom had some credit relations with others, especially given the rarity of

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<sup>33</sup> Joseph Ernst, *Money and Politics in America, 1755-1775: A Study in the Currency Act of 1764 and the Political Economy of Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1973), viii.

<sup>34</sup> For an example of a range of individuals to whom merchants paid with credit, see Thomas Hancock, "Receipt Book, 1 Aug. 1744–22 May 1747," 1744-1747, Hancock Family Papers II, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA.

<sup>35</sup> The private origin of such bill issuances obscures exactly how much paper backed by merchant debt went into circulation. Minimum figures appear high based on conservative estimates inferred from instances in which financiers defaulted on these bills and sued members of their own firms to minimize responsibilities. A complete record survives for at least one of these cases, that of Charles Ward Apthorp against his New York agent William Bayard because Apthorp or a clerk recorded a significant part of the trial before the New York Supreme Court in 1767-8 for personal records. In this instance, the amount of unpaid bills, let alone circulating bills on which Apthorp or Bayard remitted payments, totaled a minimum of £249,204 originating from the accounts of Bayard alone. If other agents held debts in the form of circulating paper that were even remotely comparable, the figures for credit money introduced into the wartime economy by these war financiers would be very high by the standards of the colonial economy. For reference, Bayard's outstanding bills put ~£1.35 into circulation for every person in the colony of New York, an amount that otherwise exceeded the total sterling value of exports from Great Britain to any provincial region in the continental colonies as measured by annual average constant value per capita. See Apthorp, Apthorp v. Bayard transcript; McCusker and Menard, *The Economy of British America*, 280.

sterling and the long-term unreliability of colonial paper alternatives.<sup>36</sup> In rural communities, where coinage proved especially rare, all liquidity and exchange depended on the proliferation of credit relationships—denominated in private account books—even though their methods were less formal than the dual-entry accounts of coastal merchants and other professionals.<sup>37</sup> However, even the most remote towns had financial connections with creditors in commercial centers like Boston. The colonial credit structure was a complex web of debits and credits that embraced virtually the whole colonial population.

By comparing merchant activity during the war with the structure of the colonial economy as a whole, we can appreciate the scale of the relationship between total private credit and war spending in colonial North America. In times of peace, merchants, artisans, and laborers in towns like Boston made frequent, often daily exchanges, either with book credit or with alienable credit instruments. They also made remissions in goods or services, or less frequently in Iberian hard currencies like Spanish milled dollars and Portuguese joannes. Merchants marketed commodity surpluses produced by farmers, fishermen, and artisans who packaged and processed these raw goods for distribution. They stood at the top of a credit hierarchy that financed the movement of commodities to the marketplace. For example, Boston merchants like John Hancock and Hugh Kennedy had credits and debits held against the Boston cooper and Son of Liberty Joshua Pico as well as the lawyer, and later political leader, John Adams. They also held debts and credits against farmers in the Massachusetts hinterland.<sup>38</sup> The failure of a merchant to remit on one debt might cause a failure to remit on many. This position at the top of

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<sup>36</sup> McCusker and Menard, *The Economy of British America*, 136.

<sup>37</sup> Daniel Vickers, "Errors Expected: The Culture of Credit in Rural New England, 1750-1800," *Economic History Review* 63 (2010): 1032-1057.

<sup>38</sup> On Iberian specie and credit relationships between the aforementioned Bostonians, see Joshua Pico. "Account Book. 1764-1765." Joshua Pico Business Records, Baker Library, Harvard Business School.

hierarchies gave merchants the ability to draw on the private credit of the whole economy but also made the ramifications much worse if they found themselves overextended. Merchants' revenues had to be sufficient to cover large liabilities. If they were not, one bankruptcy triggered another, with the potential to cascade into a colony-wide social and financial crisis.

Colonial merchant-financiers during the Seven Years' War drew on webs of colonial creditors. To someone like Amherst, it made little sense to contract multiple firms, one of which pursued the most aggressive extension of debt and others that operated more conservatively. By eliminating the more financially conservative firms and dealing only with the one most willing to hold debt against creditors who offered bills, a general or paymaster could maximize revenue quickly. This preference had the effect of creating de facto monopolies by 1762, like the Boston- and New York-based Charles Ward Apthorp & Co. and the New York merchant John Watts. This New York mercantile interest group presided over a hierarchy of borrowers stretching from Louisburg to Pennsylvania soon after 1758.<sup>39</sup> This new top-down structure emerged largely because these powerful New York merchant houses would be the first to receive any bullion shipments from the government in London, which made all agents under them dependent on the credit of these few contracted firms. Merchants found themselves pulled into the military markets in which the new credit bills circulated because the military's demand for goods and soldiers siphoned resources and labor from other markets. Increasingly, merchants in Boston and New York negotiated with paymasters and generals at the British command center at Halifax. John Rowe shifted the activity of his Boston firm toward commerce directed toward Halifax and

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<sup>39</sup> Amherst effectively cut all non-New York-based firms from the market for financial contracts by the summer of 1762, leaving a small group of contractors with a large market share. See Francis Bernard, To Jefferey Amherst, August 29, 1762, in Nicholson ed., *The Papers of Francis Bernard Vol. I*, 257-58.



Quebec in the 1760s, when the availability of bills of credit and liberal fiscal policy of the Pitt administration had reached their zenith.<sup>40</sup>

By 1760, merchants expressed increased concerns about their peers' debts. This proved especially true in Boston, as evident in commercial correspondence. In May 1760, John Rowe wrote to his brother-in-law Francis Robbins arranging the division of shares from returns for supplying the Commissary General in Quebec. He added he had heard that multiple colonists, including one George Conde, had failed to remit payments for his debts to Robbins. Rowe discussed means by which he would contact potential executors and beneficiaries of the scattered debtors to secure a remittance for Robbins. After May 1760, this theme of securing remittances from debtors would recur regularly in Rowe's correspondence as people failed to pay and creditors sought advice and mediation from him.<sup>41</sup>

In earlier wars, and during peacetime commerce, spending in anticipation of revenue did not depend on faith in single large bullion shipments from England. Instead, it relied on proven channels of coastal and transatlantic commerce or local acquisitions of resources and taxes most often extracted at the level of town assemblies.<sup>42</sup> This decentralized system kept insulated the economy against individual failures. However, after 1758, when creditors depended on single large state remittances totaling hundreds of thousands of pounds sterling from the British state, the scale of these dependence on external repayment threatened to pull the whole economy into crisis if those payments stopped. Shortages of British bullion payments hit major commercial

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<sup>40</sup> John Rowe and James Forbes, Letter to Captain Cushing, April 24, 1760, in Cunningham, ed., *Letters and Diary of John Rowe*, 350-351.

<sup>41</sup> See Cunningham, ed. *Letters and Diary of John Rowe*, 350-60.

<sup>42</sup> J. H. Bastide, "Letter to Thomas Hancock regarding the arrival of ships, letters, and supplies; his request for supplies; John Hancock's trip to London; and the current situation at Louisbourg and future destinations, 20 June 1760," Hancock Family Papers II, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA.

centers like New York City and Boston first.<sup>43</sup> John Rowe's writings show a marked increase in the rate and size of bankruptcies after 1760, indicating that the end of the war initiated a credit crisis that went beyond the regular financial swings of the eighteenth-century economy. Debtors sometimes sought temporary refuge at Halifax to avoid their creditors in Boston. This practice of evasion relied on Nova Scotia's 1750 Debtors' Act, which prevented residents from being sued for debts contracted elsewhere before their arrival.<sup>44</sup> In 1760, Rowe contacted correspondents in Halifax to locate a "Mr. Upcolis.". Rowe represented several concerned merchants who wished Upcolis to return to Boston to settle his accounts.<sup>45</sup> The ability of merchants to collect overdue payments broke down over a distance and between different colonial governments. Inefficient local courts and political corruption in Halifax further prevented recouping investments.<sup>46</sup>

The military supply to Canada subsided following definitive victories against the French between 1760 and 1763. In 1760, just as the war had shifted clearly in favor of the British, the Duke of Newcastle submitted the largest budget of the conflict of approximately fourteen million pounds, half of which required borrowing. However, soon after this spending pinnacle, Parliament reduced the size of Parliamentary grants to the military government in Canada, a process that would reduce Nova Scotia's provincial budget to a tenth of its wartime levels within three years.<sup>47</sup> Access to public revenue began to fade. During this period, Rowe's correspondence shows increased frequency and alarm over defaults among colonial merchants.

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<sup>43</sup> Strong interdependencies connected port towns and hinterlands and by many metrics counted for the majority of regular commercial activity of towns like Boston in the decade prior to the American Revolution. 34% of all inbound tonnage shipped to Boston came from within Massachusetts in 1773 and 29% of all outbound tonnage leaving Boston went to towns within Massachusetts during that year. The equivalent numbers for tonnage to Great Britain were 11% and 9% respectively. See: "An Account of the Number of Vessels and their Tonnage Port of Boston from Jan 1773 to Jan 5 1774," MHS Miscellaneous Bound, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA.

<sup>44</sup> John Bartlet Brebner, *The Neutral Yankees of Nova Scotia* (Toronto: Carleton Library, 1969), 61.

<sup>45</sup> John Rowe, Letter to John Hawker Esq, May 5, 1760, in Cunningham, ed. *Letters and Diary of John Rowe*, 352.

<sup>46</sup> Brebner, *The Neutral Yankees of Nova Scotia*, 27-9, 62-63, 71, 131, 192.

<sup>47</sup> Brebner, *The Neutral Yankees of Nova Scotia*, 3.

In the summer of 1760, Rowe heard of the Quebec paymasters protesting the bills of Captain Arthur Brown, which caused Rowe some confusion. He wondered: “How he could be so Imprudent to draw bills & have no Effects” to cover the obligations. The extent of debts yet unpaid in the colonial economy, especially relative to remittable assets, had not yet become apparent to Rowe. The communication of information concerning debt occurred only as quickly as interested parties could compile all the information in their accounts and then write to each other on a case-by-case basis. In the fall of 1760, for example, John Rowe had no figures on the debts that his brother Jacob held for their firm’s business in Halifax. John awaited the surrender of Canada, at which point he expected a full memorandum on his brother’s debts held for the activities of Rowe’s firm there over the previous years. By the end of 1760, much valuable information that might have alerted a merchant to any impending credit crisis remained largely uncommunicated.

Signs of friction started to appear among Boston merchants in 1760. Thomas Hancock refused to accept bills of credit that John Rowe had received from his brother, likely because Hancock doubted the solvency of their issuer. John instructed Jacob Rowe to seek payment from the person from who he had received the bill since he could not find a market for it in Boston.<sup>48</sup> In January 1761, John Rowe experienced the first clear indicator of an impending credit collapse when a bankrupt merchant named Joseph Green, whom Rowe and colleague Samuel Wentworth had paid for use of his ship *Squirrel*, fled Boston after having appointed Rowe and Wentworth assignees to “Receive & Dispose of his Effects for the Sole Benefit of his Creditors.”<sup>49</sup> Rowe, along with Wentworth, faced a legal obligation to mediate between an absent debtor and local

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<sup>48</sup> John Rowe, Letter to Jacob Rowe, September 22, 1760, in Cunningham, ed., *Letters and Diary of John Rowe*, 374.

<sup>49</sup> John Rowe, Letter to His Excellency Major General Amherst, Boston, January 6, 1761, in Cunningham, ed., *Letters and Diary of John Rowe*, 357-58.

creditors unable to recoup the full value of their loans. Given that Rowe himself held substantial debts against Green, this position put substantial financial pressure on him. In March, he wrote to his brother that “Joseph Green is gone off & Considerable in Debt to me.”<sup>50</sup>

By December 1761, unpaid debts within the merchant communities of Boston and New York triggered litigation. Merchants typically mediated disputes with debtors outside of the courts, and the rise of debt suits after 1761 suggests the severity of the emerging credit crisis. To seek repayment from one debtor, Rowe turned to prominent Boston lawyer (and political radical) James Otis, who began collecting unpaid notes of hand from Rowe as evidence to be used in a pending lawsuit. To those belonging to Rowe, Otis added notes entrusted to Rowe enumerating additional unpaid debt by this debtor from correspondents in New York.<sup>51</sup> Later that month, Rowe communicated to Otis some concern about a second outstanding debt owed by the merchant Perez Tillson.<sup>52</sup> By the spring of 1762, following a spate of defaults among fellow merchants, Rowe’s opinion on wartime credit markets had soured. He wrote to his brother Jacob in March: “As you purpose to go into Business with what you have Acquir’d, Let me give you this Advice, give as Little Credit as Possible.”<sup>53</sup>

Britain sent some bullion reimbursements to colonial assemblies and a small number of merchant contractors like Charles Ward Apthorp, but not enough to reimburse all creditors. Between 1758 and 1760, Apthorp’s firm received seven shipments of bullion to remit on the bills of credit he issued to at least 43 subscribers including the public account of the Province of New

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<sup>50</sup> John Rowe, Letter to Jacob Rowe, March 1, 1761, in Cunningham, ed., *Letters and Diary of John Rowe*, 387.

<sup>51</sup> John Rowe, Letter to Mr. David Vanhorne at New York, December 7, 1761, in Cunningham ed., *Letters and Diary of John Rowe*, 411-2.

<sup>52</sup> John Rowe, Letter to James Otis Esq., December 26, 1761, in Cunningham ed., *Letters and Diary of John Rowe*, 413.

<sup>53</sup> John Rowe, Letter to Jacob Rowe, March 29, 1762, in Cunningham ed. *Letters and Diary of John Rowe*, 415.

York. The seven shipments arrived in Men of War under the commission of the Royal Navy including the *Winchester* and *Lizard*. The bullion shipments were in mixed forms of bullion money including Spanish milled dollars, British silver guineas, and Portuguese gold by tale. Apthorp valued the sum of the shipment to be at least £568,225 sterling. This was a significant sum of funds under the firm's management, representing approximately 2.78% of all British defense expenditures in 1758 and 1759 including payments to Continental Europe, the West Indies, Asia, and coastal Africa.<sup>54</sup> Such direct shipments of sizeable bullion funds were unprecedented in the colonial period, indicating substantial power to allocate funds in the hands of a single private firm.

By 1760, Apthorp appears to have repaid obligations on the paper issued on behalf of himself and his agents Nathaniel Wheelwright and William Bayard in Boston and New York respectively, but regular repayments stopped thereafter. Unpaid debts of over £200,000 sterling remained on the books of the Apthorp firm and its agents, a figure that shows how much additional bullion from Britain Apthorp would need to retire these debts.<sup>55</sup> After 1760, bullion shipments to Apthorp trailed off. But payments for provisions to multiple provincial merchants, ship captains, and paymasters continued thereafter on the credit of the Apthorp firm, increasing its obligations. Apthorp and his agents did not have the funds to fulfill the obligations of their bills as they did in the first two years of the contract.<sup>56</sup> In the final three years of the war, the Apthorps continued business under the false assumption they would receive additional bullion shipments to balance their ledgers.

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<sup>54</sup> The percentage of bullion remittances to Apthorp's account relative to total British defense spending is calculated from data in Mitchell, *British Historical Statistics*, 579.

<sup>55</sup> Apthorp, Accounts (1755-1768). Charles Ward Apthorp Papers. Massachusetts Historical Society. Box 1, Folder 32.

<sup>56</sup> Apthorp, Accounts. Charles Ward Apthorp Papers. Massachusetts Historical Society. Box OS.

Remaining bills circulating as currency lost value when their issuers had nothing substantive to give when the holders of the bills sought their redemption in hard currency. Because the holders of these bills eagerly put them to use as a circulating currency, these shaky financial instruments now affected the thousands of individuals throughout the Northeast who held them. The debtor problem that Rowe had already observed beginning around 1760 started to spiral out of control in colonial port towns between 1763 and 1768 as creditors sued debtors, and debtors sued each other in disputes over responsibility for bad notes.<sup>57</sup>

A new credit currency system emerged under the centralizing authority of generals, paymasters, and Parliament. These authorities made this effort at centralization under the argument of military necessity. Although this currency system, and the military procurement system it arose from, relied on financial activity channeled through merchant houses, it was nonetheless more centralized than public finance methods organized through provincial government. The centralization of finance in this case meant not simply one governing unit exercising full control in the “command economy” sense, but rather a unification of otherwise competing interests into a single interest group dependent on direct remittances backed by metropolitan state credit. Such centralization allowed for the postwar collapse because many port town merchants sought to integrate themselves into this interest group because of the perceived benefits of a close financial relationship with the metropole. As evident in the postwar writings of John Rowe and others, the postwar contraction of credit would prove disastrous for those living within towns like Boston and would explain the emergence of radical new political movements that emerged among the commercial communities there. Pinched between the desire

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<sup>57</sup> Robert Auchmuty and Henry Laughton, Letter to Robert Treat Paine, January 18, 1765. Riley and Edwards eds., *The Papers of Robert Treat Paine. Volume II: 1757-1774*, 319.

to maintain commercial stability between colonists, merchants, and England on one hand and the growing strain on Boston's economy under the new imperial policy on the other, John Rowe would seek communal resolution in vain before realizing the futility of applying old communal measures to this new imperial problem.

At the end of the Seven Years' War in 1763, Parliament, facing the reality of paying for unfunded national wartime expenditures, underwent an about-face in imperial economic policy which included revoking mercantile contracts and halting Parliamentary grants. The era of easy credit promoted by the policies of the Pitt administration ended as George Grenville became the prime minister and chancellor of the exchequer. The metropole's fiscal culture shifted away from the policies they had pursued during the war and instead sought to recoup expenditures and secure existing territory by exercising greater control of taxation and commerce within the empire.<sup>58</sup> Following a recommendation from the London merchant Moses Frank, Parliament terminated the contract with the firm of George Colbrooke and Arnold Nesbitt which had given them the right to finance and provision British combatants through their connections including Apthorp in North America.<sup>59</sup> In the austere political climate that swept metropolitan of English politics after 1763, merchants began to make accusations of corruption against metropolitan contractors responsible for taking out debts against the Treasury to pay North American merchants.<sup>60</sup>

After 1763, merchants considered the limited availability of bullion money, paired with policy directing its flow from the colonies, as the cause of their peers' financial failures. The

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<sup>58</sup> Edwards, "Grenville's Silver Hammer," 343-4.

<sup>59</sup> Virginia D. Harrington, *The New York Merchant on the Eve of the Revolution* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1964), 293.

<sup>60</sup> Aaron Graham, "Corruption and Contractors in the Atlantic World, 1754–1763," *English Historical Review*. 133, 564 (October 2018).

Currency Acts of 1751 and 1764 both limited access to currency that might allow debtors to make remittances within the colonies or to pay taxes. The Currency Act of 1764 along with the Stamp Act of 1765 explicitly mandated the payment for public obligations in hard currency rather than in any new issuance of paper money. This stipulation aggravated the remittance problem among merchants in the postwar credit crunch. Demand among the merchants for remittable funds meant that the price of these bullion currencies was high even before new administrative reforms further restricted and siphoned the limited supply. Colonial creditors, like the administrators looking to pay down the postwar public debt, preferred bullion money to cheaper inflationary private credit instruments and colonial paper issues which did not hold their value. Consequently, metropolitan public debt competed with colonial private debt for the same limited supply of money. This naturally produced antagonisms between the two interest groups and contributed to political opposition to the 1764 Currency Act by merchants and the webs of colonial creditors dependent on their complete and timely remittances.

Even if the common colonist did not know the precise origin of the economic decline, they would experience the results. Colonists started to intuit that their material interests no longer aligned with the metropole. Many merchants in port towns like Boston explicitly indicated the animosities that monetary shortages caused. It is at this point that much of the new rhetoric of resistance would begin to take hold in colonial port towns' revolutionary circles. In 1765 and 1766, events like the Stamp Act Crisis emerged in the immediate wake of this credit turbulence. Mobs in Boston targeted administrators like Francis Bernard, Thomas Hutchinson, and Andrew Oliver who London tasked with enforcing the taxes and who had remained unwavering advocates of hard money policies since the 1740s. The shift to austere fiscal policies stripped debtors of remittable funds by both taxing available specie and preventing provincial



governments from printing paper money that would benefit colonial debtors. Only months after major merchant bankruptcies, anti-Stamp Act mobs attacked and vandalized Hutchinson's house and hung his brother-in-law, the stamp master Andrew Oliver in effigy. Hutchinson's and Oliver's promotion of fiscal austerity, revenue collection, and enforcement of the autonomy of admiralty courts to enforce debt litigation, all prevented an easy recovery from the postwar slump. Colonists saw Hutchinson, Oliver, and Francis Bernard as promoters of a minority interest in financial and commercial disputes.<sup>61</sup>

Given that the Currency Act of 1764 limited payment to increasingly scarce bullion-backed money rather than provincial paper or private credit, representatives of postwar imperial taxation formed an interest group in direct opposition to those suffering most from the failure of bankrupt merchants to acquire remittable funds.<sup>62</sup> Even if the fiscal burden proved relatively small in nominal terms, the pressing need to remit on debts meant that, to colonists in the postwar period, the real price of hard money was very high. Consequently, port town colonists rejected any new taxation policy, and saw the public representatives of fiscal and commercial restraint as enemies to provincial interests. During this period, the focus of urban mobs and pamphleteers on the vested interest of administrative elites with the ear of the king and Parliament makes sense given that direct connections to London appeared to reward a small minority of internetworked administrators and merchants like Thomas Hutchinson and Charles Ward Apthorp to the detriment of a debtor majority.

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<sup>61</sup> Bernard Bailyn, *The Ordeal of Thomas Hutchinson* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1974), 49, 62-8, 72-4, 96-9, 120-5, 129, 132-8, 145-6, 157, 183, 191; Edmund S. Morgan and Helen M. Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis: Prologue to Revolution* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1953), 17, 123-9, 136-44, 190, 208-19.

<sup>62</sup> The Currency Act of 1764 (4 Geo. III c. 34). Available at: "Great Britain: Parliament - The Currency Act; April 19, 1764," *The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History, and Diplomacy*. Yale Law School, Lillian Goldman Library; Ernst, *Money and Politics in America*, 90-1.

In the postwar period, some colonial merchants like Charles Ward Apthorp lobbied London merchant-statesmen and began to use civil litigation to shield their assets against creditors.<sup>63</sup> Additionally, they could use civil litigation to advance even further within the ranks of the colonial mercantile world by purchasing the devalued assets of bankrupt debtors. The English merchant Moses Frank's father worked as a merchant in New York, and his son's petitions to Parliament served only to strengthen the influence of merchants like Apthorp whose interest lied most in concentrating financial power in the elite networks of that city. Consequently, Apthorp, John Watts, and other New York merchants who had worked to monopolize war finance over the previous decade, benefited greatly when Colbrooke's and Nesbitt's contract transferred to Samuel Fluyder and Adam Drummond, who retained Moses Frank as an agent. Frank then selected John Watts as his agent in New York, thus finalizing the streamlined relationship between London and the New York mercantile network of Watts, Apthorp, and their allies.<sup>64</sup> The ultimate losers of these events proved to be the excluded merchants in Boston and elsewhere who lacked such connections.

As part of the effort to reign in the fiscal excesses of the previous four years, Parliament approved administrative reforms between 1763 and 1774. English creditors also tightened their lending which gave struggling colonial debtors few options to return to solvency through new commercial ventures.<sup>65</sup> Further reducing opportunities, the Sugar Act of 1764 placed increased costs on trade to West Indian markets. While the act did reduce duties paid on British sugar, it

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<sup>63</sup> On Charles Ward Apthorp's political connections in London and New York after the Seven Years' War, see "Instructions for William Tryon upon his appointment as Governor of New York," Correspondence, The National Archives, Kew, CO 5/1131, January 30, 1771.

<sup>64</sup> Harrington, *The New York Merchant on the Eve of the Revolution*, 293.

<sup>65</sup> A description of the administrative policies that both tightened spending and increased revenue in the postwar period, especially because of the Newcastle and Grenville administrations' shift to austerity after William Pitt's lax wartime lending policies, can be found in Anderson, *Crucible of War*, 481, 562-64; McCusker and Menard, *The Economy of British America*, 65.

also promoted enforcement of strict commercial regulations that limited colonial access to foreign traders in the West Indies.<sup>66</sup> This limited potential revenue into the mainland colonies, especially into New England where merchants depended on such trade for funds to repay their outstanding balances to artisans, laborers, agents, and other merchants for goods, services, and loans already rendered. Reforms targeting the West Indian rum trade also limited access to the Iberian bullion coinage that had traditionally served as remittable funds in the Boston economy.<sup>67</sup>

The failure to pay obligations produced three provincial factions. The first included unpaid artisans, urban laborers, and those merchants and other elite creditors who had lent their services or bills of credit to war financiers. The second faction included the minor financiers who owed money they could not pay to the first group like William Bayard, John Hancock, and Nathaniel Wheelwright. While clear animosities and tensions emerged between these factions, they both held common resentment against the third faction of high financiers like Apthorp, the Delanceys, and the New York Watts family, as well as the entrenched political elite like Francis Barnard and Thomas Hutchinson. Royal appointees in the colonies refused to waver from the hard money policies that had controlled for the runaway inflation of colonial paper currency relative to sterling until reforms in 1751.<sup>68</sup> The period from 1763 to 1768 included an articulation

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<sup>66</sup> Great Britain. An Act for Granting Certain Duties In the British Colonies and Plantations In America: For Continuing, Amending and Making Perpetual, an Act Passed In the Sixth Year of the Reign of His Late Majesty King George the Second, entitled, An Act for Encouraging the Trade of His Majesty's Sugar Colonies In America. (New York, 1764).

<sup>67</sup> The postwar plight of the urban laborer and artisans in the postwar slump, including its connection to political radicalization can be found in Gary B. Nash. *The Urban Crucible: The Northern Seaports and the Origins of the American Revolution* (1979; Cambridge: Harvard University, 1986), 257, 271.

<sup>68</sup> The Currency Act of 1751 (24 Geo. II c. 53). Available at: Great Britain. *Statutes at Large (43v.): From Magna Carta to 1800* (London: 1765), 306; Between 1700 and 1715, the £ sterling exchange value increased 12.22% relative to New York currency. Over a similar period in Massachusetts the sterling lost half its exchange value relative to the silver £ sterling. Transactions made on credit could reduce the profit from interest payments wiped out by these devaluations or could face outright losses on loans without finding means to adjust for inflation. This created additional transaction costs for anyone trading between metropolitan and colonial monetary systems. John J. McCusker, *Money and Exchange in Europe and America, 1600-1775: A Handbook* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1978), 146-50, 162-3. The eighteenth-century tendency of British imperial financial demands to increase money supply to service debtor-subjects is evident in the general price trends of this period. The nominal

of the interests of these factions through disputes over bankruptcies and urban financial collapse. Such conflict caused disaffected colonists to admit the futility of provincial dispute resolution. They chose instead to turn in united opposition against London and those they perceived as the privileged financial and political representatives in the colonies.

By the fall of 1764, John Rowe had found himself embroiled in multiple contentious arbitrations between Massachusetts merchants. Disputes between insolvent merchants often necessitated the participation of third parties with both expertise and the ability to maintain a degree of detached neutrality. On October 23, for example, Rowe spent the evening with three other merchants arbitrating the debts that Clement Jackson owed to underwriters. On November 2, after dining with John Hancock, Governor Francis Bernard, and three others, Rowe joined merchants Nicholas Boylston and Thomas Gray to spend the evening “at an Arbitration between Mr. Arnold Wells and young Mr. Austin of Charlestown.”<sup>69</sup> The following evening, Rowe went to Boston’s coffee house to again, along with Thomas Gray and Mitabiah Bourne, to arbitrate a dispute between merchants John Russell and John Avery.

December 1764 brought continued efforts among Boston’s merchant community at internal dispute resolution as well as concerted attempts at legal action to prevent the outflow of valuable silver sterling through the new imperial taxes and customs system. On December 3, Rowe met with a committee of eleven other merchants, where they voted that one of them, Thomas Ivers, bring an action at court against the Customs Collector for demanding the duty of

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price of currency, and returns to capital, both outpaced purchasing power after mid-century. Between 1763 and 1800, prices of goods, services, and credit increased substantially. The Consumer Price Index increased from 109 in 1760 to 208 in 1800. Meanwhile real wages decreased globally (from ~60 to ~35 in England for example (base period: 1451-75=100)). This meant substantial decreases in purchasing power corresponding with the political disruptions of the post Seven Years’ War period. David Hackett Fischer, *The Great Wave: Price Revolutions and the Rhythm of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 130, 133.

<sup>69</sup> Rowe, “Diary,” October 23, 1764, in Cunningham ed., *Letters and Diary of John Rowe*, 66; Rowe, “Diary,” November 22, 1764, in Cunningham ed., *Letters and Diary of John Rowe*, 69.

five shillings sterling per hundred on sugar cleared from his office. Significantly, a jury trial early the following month found in favor of Ivers. Rowe wrote that locals “generally thought it a good verdict.”<sup>70</sup> This jury verdict indicates that Boston’s general population opposed the taxes on merchants’ revenue. The remittance problem was a public issue no longer isolated to a small number of merchants.

For Rowe and other merchants of the colonial northeast, the worst of the postwar financial fallout and conflict had yet to come. On December 27, 1764, Rowe dined with almost forty wealthy Bostonians at a celebration of the Brethren of St. John’s Lodge, unaware to them all that one of their number, the wartime provisioner Nathaniel Wheelwright, was teetering on the edge of the most severe bankruptcy in Boston’s history to date. Merchants like Rowe and the members of the lodge had existed in close-knit social networks where interdependent communication and arbitration often solved disputes. However, the scale and irreconcilability of obligations threatened to rupture traditional unity by 1765. Wheelwright’s bankruptcy would send an entire network of northeastern creditors into panic. On December 30, 1764, the most predominant colonial architect of the wartime market for notes of credit, Charles Ward Apthorp, arrived in Boston after an almost decade long residence in Amherst’s financial stronghold at New York.<sup>71</sup> Apthorp, originally a native of Boston when working for his father, moved to New York where family alliances with the Delancey political faction and the wealthy McEvers family of merchants allowed him close contact with Amherst and other metropolitan connections.<sup>72</sup> Apthorps wartime experience contrasted with the Boston merchants without these direct

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<sup>70</sup> Rowe, “Diary,” October 23, 1764, in Cunningham ed. *Letters and Diary of John Rowe*, 66; John Rowe, “Diary,” January 11, 1765, in Cunningham ed., *Letters and Diary of John Rowe*, 73.

<sup>71</sup> Rowe, “Diary,” December 27-30, 1764, in Cunningham ed. *Letters and Diary of John Rowe*, 66; John Rowe, “Diary,” November 22, 1764, in Cunningham ed. *Letters and Diary of John Rowe*, 72.

<sup>72</sup> Apthorp, Apthorp v. Bayard Transcript.

contacts. Apthorp was in the early stages of a dispute with his New York agent, and brother-in-law, William Bayard, concerning outstanding balances of £249,204 sterling, more than double the net worth of any merchant in continental North America and surpassing the outstanding debts on Wheelwright's accounts by about £79,000.<sup>73</sup> However, Apthorp's public reputation was unstained by accusations of insolvency at that time. Consequently, he stood in a good position to target the market for devalued assets of bankrupt Massachusetts merchants in the following months.

In January 1765, Boston lawyer Robert Treat Paine received letters from lawyers Robert Auchmuty and Henry Laughton instructing him to execute an action in court against Thomas Cobb of Attleborough as a trustee to Nathaniel Wheelright. Wheelright had outstanding debts throughout the colonies, and such litigation indicates the social extent of the merchant defaults. Auchmuty and Laughton wrote frantically to Paine: "...it will be serving a number of orphans who are greatly concern'd [sic]. Have but a moments [sic] time can only add that the Town is in the utmost confusion. This note is but little more than half the Debt."<sup>74</sup> Through appeals such as this, colonial communities sought to pressure payment from indebted merchants. Auchmuty and Laughton's concern for the finances of the community of Attleborough indicate that payments to noteholders were necessary for the general welfare of a wider community beyond simply port town commercial communities. Large defaults and bankruptcies had widespread social implications.

Merchants like Wheelright had only the recourse of selling off their remaining assets to those who remained wealthy enough to purchase them. This likely meant selling at low prices

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<sup>73</sup> Fred Anderson, *The Crucible of War*, 668-669.

<sup>74</sup> Robert Auchmuty and Henry Laughton, Letter to Robert Treat Paine, January 18, 1765, in Riley and Edwards eds. *The Papers of Robert Treat Paine. Volume II: 1757-1774*, 319.

given their urgency. For bankrupt merchants, liquidating assets remained the only option to give them any chance at avoiding complete social ostracization, or possibly imprisonment. The selloffs of merchant-debtors, especially in and near Boston, benefitted those merchants like Charles Ward Apthorp, who retained their wealth through appeals to influential officials in New York and London. On January 15, Rowe recorded: “The Trade has been much alarmed this day. Mr. Wheelwright stopt [sic] payment & kept in his room. A great number of people will suffer by him.”<sup>75</sup> On January 19, Rowe would learn of the bankruptcies of John Scollay, John Dennie, and Peter Bourne, noting that he was “like to be a large sufferer by Scollay.”<sup>76</sup> That Sunday, January 20, Rowe and Boston descended into dread as they scrambled to find solutions to the defaults. That same day, John Rowe recorded that the bankruptcies of Wheelwright and Scollay had the town “greatly distressed,” and that he had been called upon by the Sherriff to help address the situation. Rowe described his mindset saying: “Did not go to church, my mind too much disturbed.”<sup>77</sup> The following day, the General Court met to address the repeated bankruptcies and to address the town’s consternation with an Act for the Relief of Insolvent Debtors, which Rowe wrote “would be very seasonable at this time.”<sup>78</sup> Bankruptcy cases continued to appear regularly before the General Court into March. Rowe continued to participate in arbitrations, including the case of Captain John Phillips on March 19, but the resolutions to bankruptcies had clearly shifted from the merchant community into the purview of courts.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Rowe, “Diary,” January 15, 1765, in Cunningham ed., *Letters and Diary of John Rowe*, 66; John Rowe, “Diary,” November 22, 1764, in Cunningham ed. *Letters and Diary of John Rowe*, 74.

<sup>76</sup> Rowe, “Diary,” January 19, 1765, in Cunningham ed., *Letters and Diary of John Rowe*, 66; John Rowe, “Diary,” November 22, 1764. In Cunningham ed. *Letters and Diary of John Rowe*, 74.

<sup>77</sup> Rowe, “Diary,” January 20, 1765, in Cunningham ed., *Letters and Diary of John Rowe*, 66; John Rowe, “Diary,” November 22, 1764, in Cunningham ed. *Letters and Diary of John Rowe*, 69.

<sup>78</sup> Rowe, “Diary,” January 21, 1765, in Cunningham ed., *Letters and Diary of John Rowe*, 75.

<sup>79</sup> Rowe, “Diary,” January 21-March 19, 1765, in Cunningham ed., *Letters and Diary of John Rowe*, 75-7.

The number and scale of the bankruptcies had overwhelmed the traditional tendencies toward interpersonal resolution among merchants. In a last attempt to find remittable revenue, Nathaniel Wheelright appointed Thomas Cobb as his legal trustee who sought to fund Wheelright's obligations by first selling off mortgages, which Wheelright held on several properties, to Apthorp, who was Wheelright's brother-in-law. This sale proved insufficient to raise enough funds. Some of Wheelright's allies' petition to the Massachusetts General Court to grant him a six-month reprieve, which they rejected. Creditors including Haughton and Auchmuty continued to bring suits against Wheelright. Wheelright fled Boston in the spring of 1765.<sup>80</sup> On March 25, Rowe met with the other Wheelwright creditors, including Charles Ward Apthorp, to discuss whatever limited options remained after Wheelwright had fled the colony.<sup>81</sup> A few months later, on June 9, 1765, Rowe met with Scollay's creditors at the Boston coffee house, where they decided that Rowe, William Phillips, and John Erving would serve as trustees to divide Scollay's assets.<sup>82</sup>

Thomas Cobb, Wheelright's trustee, also held outstanding debts in Boston, especially to the Merchant Thomas Fitch. Cobb followed the same practice as he had when he served as trustee to Wheelright and began selling assets including a 100-acre property in Taunton, Massachusetts and a 200-acre property in Attleborough, both sold to Samuel Fitch. Cobb included both properties in a mortgage financed by Apthorp. Cobb, Apthorp, and Samuel Fitch signed the mortgage deed on March 30, 1765.<sup>83</sup> Wheelright's and Cobb's cases represent how the rush to sell assets to avoid defaults favored a class of protected merchants, like Apthorp, who

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<sup>80</sup> Samuel Fitch, Letter to Robert Treat Paine, March 28, 1765, in Riley and Edwards eds., *The Papers of Robert Treat Paine. Volume II: 1757-1774*, 327.

<sup>81</sup> Rowe, "Diary," March 24-28, 1765, in Cunningham ed., *Letters and Diary of John Rowe*, 78-9.

<sup>82</sup> Rowe, "Diary," July 9, 1765, in Cunningham ed., *Letters and Diary of John Rowe*, 85.

<sup>83</sup> Fitch, "Letter to Robert Treat Paine, March 28, 1765." Riley and Edwards eds., *The Papers of Robert Treat Paine. Volume II: 1757-1774*, 327.



could continue to fund purchases on credit through this period of contraction. Unlike Wheelwright and Cobb, Apthorp, rather than selling to pay debtors, entered a second speculative period of buying land and capital including thirty-six of the seventy land allotments which the town of Lancaster, Massachusetts issued between 1765 and 1770.<sup>84</sup> These purchases further augmented Apthorp's political sway in Massachusetts as he could dominate the town's proprietor meeting as an absentee landowner through agents in the town who operated on his behalf. Apthorp's appointment as the Crown's representative in New York in 1763 further solidified his postwar political influence.<sup>85</sup> Meanwhile, most other colonists, including Apthorp's merchant peers, continued to struggle.

On July 9, 1766, the *Boston Gazette* reported that Nathaniel Wheelwright had died in Guadeloupe.<sup>86</sup> The following day, July 10, one year after a mob had ransacked his house and destroyed most of his property, Thomas Hutchinson, then serving as Chief Justice in Boston, issued a warrant against the Taunton merchant Ratcliffe Hellon for debts owed across Massachusetts. These debts included substantial sums to Taunton residents Robert Treat Paine, John Adam, and George Williams. On July 30<sup>th</sup>, Apthorp's Boston agent William Molineux, informed him that he had obtained a bill of sale for a ship from Hellon. Apthorp purchased the vessel on credit with a price dependent on a valuation upon its arrival in New York. Hellon died that same month and his creditors Paine, Adam, and Williams served as trustees of his estate.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Harrington, *The New York Merchant on the Eve of the Revolution*, 24, 144.

<sup>85</sup> Great Britain. Council of the Secretary of State. Order given in council in 1763, regarding appointments and instructions. January 1763.

<sup>86</sup> *Boston Gazette*, June 9, 1766.

<sup>87</sup> Annie Haven Thwing, *Inhabitants and Estates of the Town of Boston, 1630-1800* [electronic resource], and *The Crooked and Narrow Streets of Boston, 1630-1822* (Boston: New England Historic Genealogical Society; Massachusetts Historical Society, 2001), 78-9; William Molineux, Letter to Robert Treat Paine, March 28, 1765, in Riley and Edwards eds. *The Papers of Robert Treat Paine. Volume II: 1757-1774*, 368-69.

In May 1766, Rowe spent significant time continuing to resolve and discuss the General Court's recent bankruptcy act with Robert Treat Paine and Robert Achmuty, and would spend the following weeks settling accounts with several merchants after what Rowe referred to as "many debates." In the coming days, official word would arrive of the repeal of the Stamp Act which Rowe described as "Glorious News."<sup>88</sup> At the end of the month, Boston elected James Otis speaker of the house, but Governor Bernard vetoed the election along with five others. The House of Representatives chose Samuel Adams as clerk by a one vote margin. Rowe described him as having "a great zeal for Liberty." The new, more radical political environment emerged from the turbulence of default and disaster that had upset the old order of earlier decades. On November 25, two days before Thanksgiving and John Rowe's fifty-second birthday, he spent the afternoon with the bankruptcy committee of the General Court along with James Otis, Samuel Adams, John Hancock, and others. Of the meeting, he wrote: "Am in hopes wee [sic] shall get Redress in our Trade." In the following months, Rowe would continue to meet with creditors as well as attend multiple trials litigating debts in Boston.

In February 1767, the Massachusetts House of Representatives met to devise a land bank scheme to create a new currency emission, in partial defiance of imperial policy, which would allow for the creation of some supply of currency that might be used to repay debts. This directly conflicted with the stipulations of Parliament on paper currency issues via the Currency Act which colonists increasingly found untenable. Colonists appealed to Parliament for relaxed interpretations of legal tender laws, but this resulted in no adjustment to the mandate against colony paper currency for paying Parliamentary taxes. Governor Bernard and Lieutenant-Governor Hutchinson, backed by the Board of Trade, guarded against any attempts by the

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<sup>88</sup> Rowe, "Diary," May 16, 1766, in Cunningham ed., *Letters and Diary of John Rowe*, 95.

colonial legislature to produce an alternative currency. They did this to protect real returns to creditors who might be hurt from having the value of their credit reduced by inflation.<sup>89</sup> At this point, however, many creditors considered repayment welcome in any form.

Given the lack of hard currency and the extraordinary debts of local bankrupts, fiscal conservatism would have had little immediate appeal even to creditors like Rowe. They had few options other than colonial paper. With the outflux of specie money, given that the stipulations of the 1751 Currency Act still restricted the use of colonial paper for paying public debts, the practical choices for remittable currencies by 1764 included paper emissions, like a chartered land bank, worthless private notes backed by the credit of merchants fighting bankruptcy, or nothing. The old hard money position that Bernard, Hutchinson, and the Board of Trade advocated for could not find political support in this environment.<sup>90</sup> The rapid shift from easy credit to austerity at the end of the Seven Years' War had made traditional forms of fiscal conservatism politically unviable, eroding the support that Bernard and Hutchinson might earlier have had in the merchant class. Rather, creditors turned entirely from both monetary policy and arbitration toward litigation to salvage whatever they could in more confrontational, winner-take-all, forums.

Apthorp engaged in a prolonged dispute with his New York agent and brother-in-law William Bayard over the £249,204 of obligations to holders of promissory notes used to finance war expenditures on credit during the war. The Apthorp-Bayard case illustrates how, in addition to the fracturing of mercantile connections, personal relationships disintegrated through the

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<sup>89</sup> Rowe, "Diary," February 10-27, 1767, in Cunningham ed. *Letters and Diary of John Rowe*, 123.

<sup>90</sup> On interest of local administrators in promoting a hard currency before the Seven Years' War see Jonathan Belcher, Letter to Thomas Hutchinson (Boston, May 11:1741)," in John W. Tyler and Elizabeth Dubulle eds., *The Correspondence of Thomas Hutchinson, Volume I: 1740-1766* (Boston: The Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 2014), 93-97.

postwar defaults as well. During the war, Apthorp and Bayard merged families through marriage to form a merchant kin network operating under Apthorp's firm, an alliance that would give both men net a worth, not yet counting their obligations, between £50,000 and £100,000 sterling by the end of the war. Only four merchants in New York had a net worth in this range: Apthorp, Bayard, John Cruger, and Apthorp's close colleague John Watts.<sup>91</sup>

Social fissures produced by default continued to cause turmoil in Massachusetts society. After a brief period of optimism following the repeal of the Stamp Act, Boston merchants realized that no functional currencies remained in the colonies to remit on debts. Parliament continued to enforce duties that further pulled remittable hard money revenues away from the debtors who needed it. In December 1767, Rowe lamented the "Duties on Glass, Painter's Colour's & c. An Imposition on America in my Opinion as Dangerous as the Stamp Act."<sup>92</sup> These new duties, known as the Townshend Acts, provoked new protests against Parliamentary taxation powers over the colonies.<sup>93</sup> On March 1, 1768, Rowe and a committee of merchants met in Boston to discuss this problem and, specifically, how the abundance of debt and scarcity of good currency, endangered the political stability of the colony and empire. Rowe wrote:

In consideration of the Great Scarcity of money which for several years has been so Sensibly felt among us & now must be Rendered much Greater not only by the immense Sums absorbed in the Collection of the Duties lately Imposed but by the great checks given thereby to Branches of Trades which yielded us the most of our money & means of Remittance.<sup>94</sup>

Rowe expressed a concern prevalent among the Boston mercantile community, that British imperial policy produced observably harmful effects on colonial commerce and monetary

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<sup>91</sup> Nash, *Urban Crucible*, 257.

<sup>92</sup> Rowe, "Diary," November 20, 1767, in Cunningham ed., *Letters and Diary of John Rowe*, 146.

<sup>93</sup> Rowe, "Diary," February 9, 1768, in Cunningham ed., *Letters and Diary of John Rowe*, 150.

<sup>94</sup> Rowe, "Diary," February 9, 1768, in Cunningham ed., *Letters and Diary of John Rowe*, 150.

stability. Rowe observed the expansionary war and credit markets of the 1758-1762 period, mirroring the general optimism. However, after 1762, and especially by 1767, he recognized a systematic remittance problem emerging from the transition from wartime and peacetime markets. To Rowe, the prevalence of colonial debt, paired with the costs of public revenue on colonists, threatened the health of the fiscal substructure at the base of the British imperial state.

He wrote:

In consideration also of the great Debt now standing against us, which if we go on Increasing by the excessive Import we have been accustomed to while our Scources [sic] of Remittance are drying up, must terminate not only in Our Own & Our Country's Ruin but that of many of our Creditors on the other side of the Water<sup>95</sup>

The demands of the state had disturbed a stable traditional relationship between provincial and imperial finance. Debt-financing through private credit during the Seven Years' War, rather than solidifying imperial holds on the economy, created the conditions for the final collapse of imperial credit. This collapse severed many of the fiscal and political linkages that unified the North American colonies with the British metropolitan state.

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<sup>95</sup> Rowe, "Diary," March 1, 1768, in Cunningham ed., *Letters and Diary of John Rowe*, 152-53.

## Chapter Five

### Town Expenses and Political Mobilization in the British-American Northeast, 1763-1775

After 1763, the transition to peace following the Seven Years' War provoked a transformation of British imperial trade and monetary policy. From 1754 to 1763 colonial northeastern port towns like Boston and New York experienced a sudden end of markets for provisioning and wartime financial services. This left urban commercial communities scrambling to adapt their business to the peace. In the port towns, this commercial transition provoked political instability. During the war, the colonies experienced significant circulation of credit backed in part by bullion remittances from London. Boston's merchants, artisans, and government responded to the demands of the war by mobilizing the resources of the colonial economy to fund Britain's war against France. William Pitt's easy credit policies financed Britain's victory over the French. After 1763, however, colonial and metropolitan societies disunited. Town, provincial, and imperial officials competed for revenues to fulfill public obligations to their constituents. Credit circulated for the performance of both public and private exchanges, but credit relationships ultimately required tangible remittances. Colonists in communities like Boston often found the supply of money inadequate for this purpose. This inadequacy proved particularly critical during the postwar economic downturn under the administrations of prime ministers George Grenville and Lord Frederick North.

Municipal governance on which many colonists depended for public services functioned through communal participation and interpersonal credit. This required substantial effort and resource contributions from colonists. Municipal officials in northeastern port towns balanced towns' need for public revenue and the tax burden demanded of their constituents. New

commercial duties and enforcement of trade restrictions that Parliament legislated for the colonies after 1763 introduced additional demands. These competing demands disrupted the traditional equilibrium of the social ecosystem of northeastern American port town government. The costs of militarization further exacerbated this destabilization as British regulars remained in colonial towns after formal peace with the French. Militarization increased throughout the period from 1763 to 1775, and the costs of the deployment of regular soldiers on towns like Boston contributed to popular revolt, which in turn caused metropolitan officials and generals like Thomas Gage to further augment the military presence. This cyclical escalation between military and town continued until traditional municipal public life came into open conflict with British rule.

The individual interests of many colonists coalesced in town units against the British imperial state. Town-level social units formed around longstanding public functions and internal political and financial networks. In northeastern port towns, popular mobilization in the early stages of the American Revolution reflected the town's central role in public finance. This chapter investigates the escalation of conflict between towns and empire, focusing on Boston as a case study. The records of the town's most prominent governing body, the selectmen, allow for the re-creation of regular public administrative and fiscal affairs over most of the eighteenth century. After 1763, these records, along with the correspondence and financial accounts of townspeople, document the centrality of town government in the northeastern colonial economy. They also reveal how Boston's selectmen defended their municipal prerogatives against British regulations and taxes as well as organized the town's population to oppose postwar British policies.

This mobilization against British authority during the imperial crisis did not begin, in the first instance, from an ideological conceptualization of constitutional relationships between colony and metropole. Colonists acted against the British imperial administrative and commercial systems before pamphleteers or colonial leaders articulated resistance with constitutional and political theory.<sup>1</sup> This explanation of the fiscal origins of revolutionary escalation in Boston emphasizes three significant themes. First, the actions of the selectment demonstrate autonomous state capacity of Boston and other northeastern towns. Second, the root of Boston's resistance were the divergent economic interests of provincial towns and the imperial state as these two governments competed for resources and money.<sup>2</sup> Third, networks of commercial relationships and financial interests aligned colonists into a broadly based faction that increasingly regarded Britain as a threat to the town and the people who depended on it.

At the end of the Seven Years' War, unpaid debt obligations within the commercial communities of colonial port towns proliferated. The failure of imperial government to fulfill public reimbursements threatened the welfare and credit of merchants, artisans, and landowners who held notes of credit and relied on the stability of currencies for remittances on obligations. Public appointees from within the town drew on local resources, finances, and labor to provide public improvements, law enforcement, social welfare, in addition to a significant proportion of peacetime defense expenditures. The shared threat of the Seven Years' War initiated a brief period of fiscal unification of Boston and the Massachusetts provincial legislature to coordinate raising money to pay for mutual defense. Provincial governments received direct bullion

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<sup>1</sup> On the ideological interpretation of the American Revolution, see Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017), v-xxxiv, 55-159; Pauline Maier, *From Resistance to Revolution: Colonial Radicals and the Development of American Opposition to Britain, 1765-1776* (1972; New York: W.W. Norton, 1991), v-xxii, 3-48.



reimbursements for wartime expenditures before 1763, particularly under the Pitt administration. However, many of the debts that colonists, like the Apthorp firm and their agents, undertook remained unpaid when imperial policy shifted towards the fiscal austerity of the postwar imperial reforms. In the absence of a credible French threat and ongoing metropolitan payments, New England colonists struggled to fund the functions of their towns. Parliamentary taxes and trade regulations disrupted communal stability by imposing financial obligations and asserting the novel right to impose more in the future. The Currency Act of 1764 and Stamp Act of 1765 mandated the payment of taxes in bullion money.<sup>3</sup> In response, town leaders, such as the selectmen of Boston, consolidated fiscal authority at the municipal level. British politicians like Francis Fauquier and political economists like Malachy Postlethwayt argued for fiscal austerity to mitigate what they saw as the threat to economic stability posed by Britain's dangerous national debt, amassed to fund the war.<sup>4</sup>

Selectmen taxed nonresidents to increase revenue. Traditionally, taxation within a town population drew only from the resources of the resident population. Selectmen collaborated with appointees like the town assessors and tax collectors to organize taxation.<sup>5</sup> Massachusetts town elections required voters to own estates that would rent for £3-6-8 a year, as valued by local

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<sup>3</sup> Andrew David Edwards, "Grenville's Silver Hammer: The Problem of Money in the Stamp Act Crisis," *Journal of American History*, 104, no. 2 (Sep. 2015): 337-62; Joseph A. Ernst, *Money and Politics in America, 1755-1775: A Study in the Currency Act of 1764 and the Political Economy of Revolution* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1973), 3-136; Jack P. Greene and Richard M. Jellison, "The Currency Act of 1764 in Imperial-Colonial Relations, 1764-1776," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 18, no. 4 (October 1961): 485-518.

<sup>4</sup> See Pepijn Brandon, "'The Whole Art of War Is Reduced to Money': Remittances, Short-term Credit and Financial Intermediation in Anglo-Dutch Military Finance, 1688-1713," *Financial History Review*, 25, no. 1 (Apr. 2018): 19-41.

<sup>5</sup> For example, see meeting of the Selectmen, January 27, 1769, in Boston Selectmen, Record Commissioners of the City of Boston, *A Report of the Record Commissioners of the City of Boston Containing the Selectmen's Minutes from 1769 through April, 1775* (Boston: Rockwell and Churchill, City Printers, 1893), 2.

assessors.<sup>6</sup> Because of the widespread ownership of land, and strong demand for hired labor, the estate requirement did not often prohibit participation.<sup>7</sup> The selectmen also regulated entrance into the town. In 1770, the town of Chelsea sent William Dix to Boston. When he arrived, the Boston selectmen challenged Dix's presence in the town. Two selectmen from Chelsea, Sam Sprague and Samuel Pratt, appeared before the Boston selectmen to dispute this ruling. Boston's leaders stated demanded that the Chelsea selectmen defray the cost of charges on the town should Sprague and Pratt leave Dixon there.<sup>8</sup>

To enable the assessors to make valuations of properties within the town, the selectmen drew on paper records of the ownership of buildings and docks that had been continuously updated since at least the 1710s. Propertied Boston men filled the offices of property assessors as well as clerical positions responsible for accounts and bookkeeping; they served as officers in the provincial militia and town artillery companies; and they regulate economic activities in the community as hog reeves, fence watchers, dock wardens, and inspectors of staves and chimneys. They engaged, face-to-face, with their associates, neighbors, and friends in the collective social enterprise of caring for the poor, constructing public buildings, and maintaining the town infrastructure. The selectmen appointed merchants, lawyers, artisans, and landowning farmers to these positions. Most considered town appointments to be public obligations that they undertook to affirm their elite status and high public regard in the community. But the duties of managing

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<sup>6</sup> Robert A. Gross, *The Minutemen and Their World* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1976), 11; Mary Babson Fuhrer, "The Revolutionary Worlds of Lexington and Concord Compared," *The New England Quarterly*, 85, no. 1 (Mar. 2012): 78-118.

<sup>7</sup> John J. McCusker and Russell R. Menard, *The Economy of British America, 1607-1789* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 236-94.

<sup>8</sup> *Report of the Commissioners of Boston*, 55.

the military and economic needs of a growing city were challenging, and reluctant appointees sometimes refused these jobs.<sup>9</sup>

For decades, Boston's localized system of political appointment and revenue collection remained largely unchanged and significant modifications appeared in its fiscal structure. Some merchants had established more extensive political and commercial ties with metropolitan authorities during the war and, as a result, these wealthy Bostonians were less directly accountable to local legislatures and towns to secure their economic interests. To extend local authority over these especially wealthy traders, the selectmen taxed absentee merchants doing business in the town in 1769. Town leaders defended their authority that derived from longstanding rights of towns to tax all inhabitants, including nonresidents who accrued benefits from operating within the town.<sup>10</sup> The selectmen directed the assessors to make claims against "Inhabitants of other Towns in this Province," who, they declared "ought to be taxed here, for the Real Estates they Occupy, and the business they do here, it being agreeable to the Law."<sup>11</sup> The Boston selectmen listed specific names of the individuals residing outside of the town who they intended to tax as of January 4, 1770. This included James Russell, Elisha Doane, Ralph Inman, John Boreland, Joseph Palmer & Company, Jerathmiel Bowers, and Seth Blodget.<sup>12</sup> They made no record how they would physically collect the sums demanded, but the threat of distraint, or the seizure of property in order to obtain the payment, allowed Boston and other town governments to use the provincial justice system to enforce compliance with revenue

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<sup>9</sup> Meeting of the Selectmen, September 29, 1769, in *Report of the Commissioners of Boston*, 37.

<sup>10</sup> H. James Henderson, "Taxation and Political Culture: Massachusetts and Virginia, 1760-1800," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 47, no. 1 (Jan. 1990): 90-114; Alvin Rabushka, *Taxation in Colonial America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

<sup>11</sup> Meeting of the Selectmen, January 4, 1769, in *Report of the Commissioners of Boston*, 1.

<sup>12</sup> Meeting of the Selectmen, February 14, 1770, in *Report of the Commissioners of Boston*, 55-7.

collection.<sup>13</sup> Selectmen continued to add additional names of nonresidents over the subsequent six years as they identified property holders outside of the municipal tax regime.<sup>14</sup>

Some war financiers managed to maintain their personal credit after the war as several of their counterparts went bankrupt. Those who had benefitted the most from military contracts during the war used credit and sterling money to purchase land and maintain branches of their firms across multiple towns. Such investments promoted absenteeism among merchants like Charles Ward Apthorp, based in New York as well as Boston, who purchased large tracts of land from bankrupt merchants forced to liquidate real and moveable property to pay outstanding debts.<sup>15</sup> Merchants more aligned with the selectmen and the provincial government had been excluded from the lucrative military contracts that made these elite merchants wealthy, and they watched as their fellow merchants sold off their assets at below-market prices to enrich them further.

In the period 1769-1770, colonists complained bitterly about Grenville's policies. Opposition to these administrative reforms emerged foremost from the urban merchant and artisan communities, who suffered the most from the commercial downturn of the postwar years. These towns imported manufactures, linen, and salt from England and Europe.<sup>16</sup> In exchange,

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<sup>13</sup> On distraint, tax collection, bankruptcy, coercion, and the common law, see J.H. Baker, *An Introduction to English Legal History*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 237-38, 373, 390-91.

<sup>14</sup> Meeting of the Selectmen, January 9, 1771, in *Report of the Commissioners of Boston*, 2.

<sup>15</sup> Samuel Fitch, "Letter to Robert Treat Paine, March 28, 1765." Riley and Edwards eds. *The Papers of Robert Treat Paine. Volume II: 1757-1774*, 327; Speculation in frontier lands continued through the whole of the eighteenth century. North American colonists had an interest in participating in colonial warfare because it allowed them to secure claims to such lands in disputed territories. For example, see Ian Saxine, "The Performance of Peace: Indians, Speculators, and the Politics of Property on the Maine Frontier, 1735-1737," *The New England Quarterly*, 87, no. 3 (Sep. 2014): 379-411.

<sup>16</sup> Philip R.P. Coelho, "The Profitability of Imperialism: The British Experience in the West Indies 1768-1772," *Explorations in Economic History*, 10, no. 3 (Jan. 1973): 253-80; Cathy Matson, *Merchants & Empire: Trading in Colonial New York* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998); John J. McCusker and Russell R. Menard, *The Economy of British America, 1607-1789: With Supplemental Bibliography* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

they exported timber, fish, naval stores, and other commodities, primarily to the West Indies. The value of goods consumed in the colonies tended to exceed the value of goods exported, and colonists paid their balance to Britain with bills of exchange drawn on London and bullion accrued in exchange with the West Indies, where they obtained Spanish pieces of eight, Portuguese joannes, and Lyon dollars. The enforcement of 1764's Sugar Act reduced the importation of Caribbean bullion, making it more difficult for colonists to clear accounts with Europe. Colonists remitted what little silver and gold money they had to the British Treasury, leaving little to clear accounts between individuals within and between colonial towns.<sup>17</sup>

During periods of peace, town governments in unison with churches administered most of the public services that colonists used in their daily lives. Apart from the mobilization of men for war, many New Englanders did not stray far from their towns of origin. They participated in a predominantly agrarian economy dependent on informal credit relationships and first-person knowledge of the members within their towns.<sup>18</sup> For many colonists, such informal exchange and obligations served as the primary mode of economic interaction even though they also participated in more anonymous, long-distance commercial relationships using financial instruments like bills of exchange and hard money.<sup>19</sup> Within the town economy, selectmen regulated prices, labor, and the distribution of land. Selectmen set the price of bread, regulated the entrance of new members into the town, provided for those they deemed incapable of

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<sup>17</sup> Carl L. Becker, *The History of Political Parties in the Province of New York, 1760-1776* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1909), 65-6.

<sup>18</sup> Fred Anderson, *A People's Army: Massachusetts Soldiers and Society in the Seven Years' War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 37.

<sup>19</sup> Craig Muldrew, *The Economy of Obligation: The Culture of Credit and Social Relations in Early Modern England* (London: Macmillan Press, 1998); Laurel Thatcher Ulrich "A Friendly Neighbor": Social Dimensions of Daily Work in Northern Colonial New England," *Feminist Studies*, 6, no. 2, (Jul. 1980): 392-405; Daniel Vickers, "Errors Expected: The Culture of Credit in Rural New England, 1750-1800," *Economic History Review* 63 (2010): 1032-1057.

working, quarantined individuals suspected of having infection diseases, directed the construction of roads, and determined the boundaries between towns. Town governments served as the first point of contact between individuals and the provincial and metropolitan levels of the imperial state. For example, the Boston selectmen corresponded with the provincial legislature, the General Assembly, the governor, and various judicial institutions. The selectmen often bore foremost responsibility for introducing civil issues to provincial courts and enforced warrants received from judges.<sup>20</sup> They also organized the collection of taxes at the local level and transmitted the public revenues toward expenditures mandated by colonial legislatures, the military, and the crown.<sup>21</sup> The selectmen also exercised the primary economic controls that colonists experienced, including regulation of exchange. In 1771, the Boston selectmen removed the stalls that John Bryant used for selling goods at the market at Faneuil Hall after deeming it in the interest of the town.<sup>22</sup> In 1773, the town appointed Moses Deshon as an auctioneer in accordance with acts of the General Court “regulating the Sale of Goods” at public venues.<sup>23</sup> Colonists experienced the coercive power of their local governments in the form of constables, town watches, economic ostracization, mob action, and the confiscation of property.

The Boston selectmen also exercised authority over credit relations within the town. For example, the town had the authority to care for debtors whose poverty prevented them from fulfilling obligations. In 1770, the keeper of the local jail informed the selectmen that a sick man from Ireland had been imprisoned for debt, but that the keeper no longer held him on any writ

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<sup>20</sup> The signees affirming the mental state of Otis were Joseph Jackson, John Hancock, Samuel Pemberton, Henderson Inches, Jonathan Mason, and Ebenezer Storer. Meeting of the Selectmen, November 25, 1771, in *Report of the Commissioners of Boston*, 103-4.

<sup>21</sup> *Report of the Commissioners of Boston*; Mancke, “The Languages of Liberty in British North America, 1607-1776,” 43-44.

<sup>22</sup> Meeting of the Selectmen, December 14, 1771, in *Report of the Commissioners of Boston*.

<sup>23</sup> Meeting of the Selectmen, July 27, 1773, in *Report of the Commissioners of Boston*.

after his creditor discharged his suit because of his illness. The selectmen arranged to have the sick man transferred to the almshouse under the care of the keeper there, Paul Farmer, on the public charge.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, the town instructed its tax collectors to discontinue suits against constituents who had failed to make required payments, if they deemed that the debtor's economic activities served public goods including the militia and public improvements.<sup>25</sup> The selectmen's ability to intercede in credit relationships indicates significant local governmental power. From the perspective of the average Bostonian, the town, not the empire, had the right and the ability to properly govern the local economy.

Historians have noted the relatively small nominal tax burden of duties, totaling around £36,000, demanded by the Stamp Act and Townshend Acts, contrasting it with much higher domestic taxes for Britons at home. Historian Justin du Rivage notes that this total amounted to less than the total cost of the outfitting a single ship of the line in 1763.<sup>26</sup> Yet this nominal figure does not express the true burden of this tax on colonial towns. Colonists had to pay these duties in specie that was scarce in their community relative to England and thus the cost of the currency was added to the nominal rate of the tax. The more they paid to London, the less they had to support town governments. The imperial government taxed a colonial population that was already taxed by town as well as provincial governments. This fiscal competition pitted colonial societies against the British fiscal state.

For much of the eighteenth century, colonists recognized the existence of metropolitan authority, but this did not imply that legal and fiscal institutions like the Board of Trade,

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<sup>24</sup> Meeting of the Selectmen, December 31, 1770, in *Report of the Commissioners of Boston*, 73.

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, the case of the selectmen instructor collector Henderson to discontinue a lawsuit against Major Doane. Meeting of the Selectmen, September 30, 1772, in *Report of the Commissioners of Boston*, 146.

<sup>26</sup> Justin Du Rivage, *Revolution Against Empire: Taxes, Politics, and the Origins of American Independence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 13.

Parliament, the Exchequer, or the Bank of England bridged the Atlantic effectively enough to supplant local authority. This reality emerged as a norm in British American understandings of constitutional relationships with Britain. Writing on law and governance in the American plantations, influential jurist William Blackstone made little mention of Parliament when he characterized the government of the colonies. Instead, he wrote of governors who acted as representatives of the king and consented to the legislation of local assemblies.<sup>27</sup> In colonial American towns like Boston, selectmen used colonists' individual accounts for public expenses, charging them for purchasing goods and services on credit. Financing town expenditures on private accounts evolved from a colonial credit economy that had adapted to conditions of limited bullion currency necessary for regular remittances. Town selectmen farmed expenditures out to appointees who made public improvements on their own credit. In 1769, for example, the selectmen used an account of George Hardwick for an expenditure of £2.16.0.<sup>28</sup> A month later, the selectmen voted to move supplies to Deer Island, which they financed on "Mr. Williamsons Account" for £5.5.7.<sup>29</sup> The town had obligations against many members of the town for similar expenditures between 1763 and 1775. This included merchants, militia officers, and other colonists including John Rowe, Richard Hiron, Robert Pierpont, John Hancock, Edward Smith, Paul Farmer, and Dr. John Jeffries.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Eliga H. Gould, "Liberty and Modernity: The American Revolution and the Making of Parliament's Imperial History," in Jack P. Greene, ed., *Exclusionary Empire: English Liberty Overseas, 1600-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 114.

<sup>28</sup> Meeting of the Selectmen, January 11, 1769, in *Report of the Commissioners of Boston*, 2.

<sup>29</sup> Meeting of the Selectmen, February 1, 1769, in *Report of the Commissioners of Boston*, 3.

<sup>30</sup> Meeting of the Selectmen, May 22, 1769, in *Report of the Commissioners of Boston*, 42; Meeting of the Selectmen, October 25, 1769, in *Report of the Commissioners of Boston*, 42; Meeting of the Selectmen, March 27, 1771, *Report of the Commissioners of Boston*, 78; Meeting of the Selectmen, May 8, 1771, in *Report of the Commissioners of Boston*, 84; Meeting of the Selectmen, March 25, 1772, in *Report of the Commissioners of Boston*, 112; Meeting of the Selectmen, March 1, 1775, in *Report of the Commissioners of Boston*, 245.



In addition to delegating expenditures to individuals, the Boston selectmen also used individuals' accounts for the collection of public revenues. The selectmen appointed tax collectors who filed bonds with the selectmen and received the right to collect funds from the members of the town. Appointed tax collectors took out bonds on their obligations to the town to assure the selectmen that they would perform their duties.<sup>31</sup> Just as in the case of a private commercial exchange, Bostonians paying taxes to towns dealt with other townspeople on individual accounts. The tax collectors produced receipts of all exchanges with townspeople organized into taxes for use at the town and provincial levels in addition to transfers to the military in times of war. Collectors like Samuel Adams and Edward Hollyday presented receipts to the town treasurer and received a credit on the town account for the expense in addition to a premium for their work. The total of this premium, for example, in Adams's case totaled £272.12.0 sterling for the period 1761-1763.<sup>32</sup> Public expenditures relied significantly on the individual agency of townspeople who often initiated projects themselves and sought approval from the selectmen. Boston's Committee on Ways and Means organized public projects, monitored their costs, and reported to the selectmen. For example, in 1774 Benjamin Austin of the Committee worked with the selectmen to open a brick kiln on the west side of the Boston Neck. He also corresponded with the selectmen to determine how the town might finance the repairs to the damage on Sea Street in the South End.<sup>33</sup>

Public relationships with individual colonists gave town administrators the financial means to achieve public ends. In the long term, town governments used tax revenue to fulfill obligations to creditors it enlisted to work on its behalf. Additionally, the town rented out public

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<sup>31</sup> Meeting of the Selectmen, January 27, 1769, in *Report of the Commissioners of Boston*, 3.

<sup>32</sup> Other tax collectors included Abraham Savage, Richard Salter, Benjamin Henderson, and Benjamin Gray. *Report of the Commissioners of Boston*, 10-1, 42, 49-54, 81, 100, 102-3, 110, 223-4, 233.

<sup>33</sup> Meeting of the Selectmen, August 23, 1774, in *Report of the Commissioners of Boston*, 226.

lands to generate additional revenue. In some cases, the selectmen instructed the town treasurer to discount the rent of tenants of public lands when they improved it with constructions beneficial to the town. This served as a means of encouraging individuals to undertake improvements to public properties on their own accounts. In 1769, the selectmen instructed the town treasurer to discount Gideon Gardner £20 lawful money out of his rent for part of the Boston Neck after he made an addition to a house on the bull pasture there. The selectmen made the discount conditional on him immediately paying the remainder of his arrears on the public lease.<sup>34</sup>

The selectmen used public revenue to pay for other public improvements. In 1772, William Whitwell paid his four-year-old debt of 100 dollars to the town. The selectmen transferred this money to John Hancock for the purpose of planting mulberry trees. Such public improvements relied on the stability of town credit relationships. The town treasurer kept account of “all the Real Estate Incomes &c. belonging to the Town of Boston.” Periodically, the selectmen would direct the town clerk to inquire into these records to collect rents or grant new leases upon the expiration of older grants of land.<sup>35</sup> Town government revenues also benefited from merchants’ rents of public warehouse land adjacent to Boston Harbor such as that of Samuel Breck in 1772. This practice also allowed warehouse renters to improve the public commercial property in exchange for a discount on their rent owed to the town.<sup>36</sup> Bostonians experienced town administration as a nearly ubiquitous presence in economic affairs, particularly those concerning public goods and communal resources.

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<sup>34</sup> Meeting of the Selectmen, January 16, 1769, in *Report of the Commissioners of Boston*, 2.

<sup>35</sup> Meeting of the Selectmen, March 25, 1772, in *Report of the Commissioners of Boston*, 112; Meeting of the Selectmen, April 1, 1772, in *Report of the Commissioners of Boston*.

<sup>36</sup> Meeting of the Selectmen, September 30, 1772, in *Report of the Commissioners of Boston*, 146.

Individuals often performed public tasks without payment from the treasurer. Community leaders like John Hancock undertook unpaid administrative tasks and made donations to public projects. They joined committees, such as the one Hancock chaired in 1769 to examine the accounts of the town granary.<sup>37</sup> By the 1760s, such public services included consultations with lawyers. The selectmen appointed lawyers to advise committees appointed to represent the interest of the town in the Court of General Sessions.<sup>38</sup> The selectmen also organized committees of townspeople as auditors of public business on individuals' accounts and appraisers of the values of property improvements.<sup>39</sup> In 1772, John Hancock donated a fire engine for the use of the town.<sup>40</sup> The Brooker family made large donations to the town between 1769 and 1775 for poor relief.<sup>41</sup> Individual civic participation in eighteenth-century Boston included officeholding and financial support. Town governance emerged from relationships between individuals with overlapping needs and mutual knowledge of their community. These individuals managed the costs of town governance through personal communication and precedent. New costs and power hierarchies introduced during periods of militarization upset the stability of existing town relationships and obligations.

British postwar taxation and regulation provoked protests against Parliamentary sovereignty in the urban colonial Northeast. When Britain decided to post thousands of British regulars to North America, such expensive deployments ran against the English constitutional

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<sup>37</sup> Meeting of the Selectmen, March 6, 1769, in *Report of the Commissioners of Boston*, 10-11.

<sup>38</sup> Meeting of the Selectmen, April 26, 1769, in *Report of the Commissioners of Boston*, 16.

<sup>39</sup> Meeting of the Selectmen, May 17, 1769, in *Report of the Commissioners of Boston*, 18; Meeting of the Selectmen, June 13, 1769, in *Report of the Commissioners of Boston*, 19.

<sup>40</sup> Meeting of the Selectmen, June 17, 1772, in *Report of the Commissioners of Boston*, 130.

<sup>41</sup> Meeting of the Selectmen, December 29, 1773, in *Report of the Commissioners of Boston*, 208; Meeting of the Selectmen, February 22, 1774, in *Report of the Commissioners of Boston*, 211.

aversion to peacetime standing armies.<sup>42</sup> Bostonians' quarrels with peacetime militarization stemmed from competition between towns and the provincial government and the external imposition of troops with the power to enforce imperial objectives. Maintaining a standing army in Boston promised to place new strains on local finances and administrative infrastructure. When Parliament extended the Mutiny Act of 1765, it dictated new regulations for barracks and billeting. A new stipulation required colonial governments to provide resources including candles, salt, bedding, utensils, and alcoholic beverages directly to the military. In 1767 Parliament required direct monetary appropriations from provincial governments, ranging from £1,500 to £4,500 sterling.<sup>43</sup>

In 1769, the Boston selectmen drafted an address to Governor Francis Bernard. They claimed that "mischievous Men have so far prevail'd as to foment & spread divisions in the British Empire." They did not identify these men specifically but argued that they had eroded the reciprocal confidence and mutual advantage between the colonies and the metropole. The selectmen protested that this rupture had led metropolitan authorities to charge them with "being in a state of disobedience to Law, and ready to resist the constitutional authority of the Nation." They warned that they could not remain an unconcerned party given the metropolitan response: "To behold this Town surrounded with Ships of War; and military Troops even in a time of peace; quarterd [sic] in its very Bowels: Exercising a Discipline with all the severity which is used in a Garrison, and in a state of actual War, is truly alarming to a free people."<sup>44</sup> The selectmen denied that Boston required any military presence to maintain civil order because they remained loyal to the sovereign and maintained an "inflexible Zeal for the support of his

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<sup>42</sup> Gould, "Liberty and Modernity: The American Revolution and the Making of Parliament's Imperial History," 119-20.

<sup>43</sup> Becker, *The History of Political Parties in the Province of New York*, 53-5, 57.

<sup>44</sup> Meeting of the Selectmen, February 16, 1769, in *Report of the Commissioners of Boston*, 6-7.

Majestys [sic] Authority and the happy Constitution.” They argued that they would be better able to maintain peace and social order in the absence of the regulars quartered in the town.<sup>45</sup>

Town government promoted its claims to sovereignty in local affairs by appointing townspeople to deliver political orations, including speaking commemorating the anniversaries of the Boston Massacre. In 1774, a town committee chaired by Samuel Adams appointed merchant and fellow selectman John Hancock to give a speech on the fourth anniversary of the Boston Massacre. This oration drew a crowd of over 1,000 people. The audience proved so large that the event was moved from the original venue, the Old South Church, to the more capacious Faneuil Hall. Even this new location could not house all spectators. John Rowe reported that he could not enter Faneuil Hall to hear the oration for want of space. John Adams attended the event and later wrote that Hancock criticized some Bostonians’ preference for “riches” over “virtue.”<sup>46</sup> Hancock himself had risen to a position of public prominence over the previous six years as a result of popular opposition to commercial policy arising from a dispute concerning the confiscation of imports upon Hancock sloop *Liberty* in 1768.<sup>47</sup> The selectmen’s ability to control the dissemination of information during this period of militarization indicates their influence over popular sentiment as protests against Britain mounted.

Over the course of 1769, Bostonians expressed increasing aggravation at the number and behavior of regular soldiers stationed in the town. They presented a petition on this issue to the selectmen on June 28, 1769. In October and November 1769 colonists cited abuses perpetrated

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<sup>45</sup> Meeting of the Selectmen, February 16, 1769, in *Report of the Commissioners of Boston*, 6-7.

<sup>46</sup> Paul D. Brandes, *John Hancock's Life and Speeches: A Personalized Vision of the American Revolution 1763-1793* (Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, 1996), 205-209.

<sup>47</sup> Brooke Barbier, *King Hancock: The Radical Influence of a Moderate Founding Father* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2023), 56-66, 70, 72, 78, 83, 88, 118; William M. Fowler, Jr., *The Baron of Beacon Hill: A Biography of John Hancock* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1980), 83-90; Maier, *From Resistance to Revolution*, 124; Harlow Giles Unger, *John Hancock: Merchant King and American Patriot* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2000), 119-124, 129-132, 202.

by the “Kings Troops” in South Boston, including theft committed at night. They requested that the selectmen call a meeting to “consider what steps may be proper to be taken to prevent such abuses as they have suffered & are still likely to suffer.”<sup>48</sup> Later in the month, Robert Pierpont informed the selectmen that the soldiers at the guard house fortified around Boston Neck had insulted and injured him. The selectmen advised him to seek legal counsel and recommended that he receive a reimbursement for damage done to his property.

Townpeople rallied behind municipal government to protest the costs of maintaining the royal army within the town and entrusted the selectmen to protect them from the abuses of military forces.<sup>49</sup> Reports of robbery and abuse continued around the fortified South End over the following weeks but trail off thereafter once the selectmen had established the watch near the guard house in November.<sup>50</sup> General Thomas Gage maintained a fortification in South Boston and later benefited from the man-of-war *Somerset* kept in Boston harbor. However, Gage’s power concentrated only in these select sites and did not extend beyond Boston Neck. Gage recognized this limitation to the army’s power in Boston. Colonial access to gunpowder stores concerned Gage particularly. By the end of 1774, this had led him to take the precautionary procedure of encamping troops on Boston Common.<sup>51</sup>

Colonists in Boston experienced multiple types of costs resulting from the quartering of royal troops in the town. They paid two types of taxes for direct financial support of the regulars. The first tax came from commercial duties on goods collected at the custom house in hard

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<sup>48</sup> Meeting of the Selectmen, October 7, 1769, in *Report of the Commissioners of Boston*, 39.

<sup>49</sup> Meeting of the Selectmen, October 25, 1769, in *Report of the Commissioners of Boston*, 42.

<sup>50</sup> Meeting of the Selectmen, November 1, 1769, in *Report of the Commissioners of Boston*, 46.

<sup>51</sup> Gross, *The Minutemen and Their World*, 109.

money.<sup>52</sup> The second came from local tax collectors, town government, and provincial assemblies. In addition to these direct taxes, colonists faced another set of, often unintended, economic burdens because of the presence of royal troops. Colonists measured some of these indirect economic burdens in monetary units. Other burdens proved harder to quantify, but colonists found them equally tangible in their physical impact on their material and psychological wellbeing. Theft, property damage, or confiscation of resources were examples. Other costs included introducing increased competition for labor, increasing the demands on the town's limited social welfare system, struggle for limited space, and increased risk of contagious disease.<sup>53</sup> Each of these contributed to tensions between colonists and royal soldiers through the 1770s.

The influx of soldiers correlated with several outbreaks of smallpox in Boston, and locals attributed the cases to the military presence. These attributions were likely warranted given that large aggregations of troops almost always led to outbreaks of diseases like smallpox and typhus in the eighteenth century, particularly in congested urban or fortified areas like northeastern port towns including Boston, New York, and Halifax.<sup>54</sup> Boston had a longstanding quarantine procedure, in which ship captains informed the selectmen of ill passengers who the town government transported to the hospital on Rainsford Island in Boston Harbor. The town government isolated the arrival of potential spreaders of contagion to specific ships and had knowledge of the origin of the introduction of disease into the town. Militarization complicated this public health procedure by denying the right of the selectmen to deny infected passengers

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<sup>52</sup> Gautham Rao, *National Duties: Custom Houses and the Making of the American State* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 1-48.

<sup>53</sup> *Report of the Commissioners of Boston*; William H. McNeil, *Plagues and Peoples* (1976; Garden City: Anchor Books, 1998), 48-59, 208-96.

<sup>54</sup> Paul Kelton, *Cherokee Medicine, Colonial Germs: An Indigenous Nation's Fight Against Smallpox, 1518-1824* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2015), 9-20.

entrance into the town. The military claimed priority in determining the movement of people, yet the burden of caring for the ill, including soldiers and their families, fell on the town's hospital and almshouse system.<sup>55</sup> In the early 1770s, the selectmen responded to multiple smallpox cases introduced by royal troops, which they noted put significant strain on their capacity to document and quarantine the ill.

This conflict between town and military prerogative came to a head in October 1774, when the selectmen met to address the arrival of a ship arriving in Salem from London. The selectmen of Salem identified three men on the ship who had died of smallpox, and they observed four who carried the disease. They directed the ship to proceed to the hospital in Boston's harbor. However, the harbor remained closed under the terms of the Port Act. On the way, a British man of war intercepted the infected ship and refused to let it enter the port. The selectmen appealed to Admiral Samuel Graves, but the Admiral replied that he would follow the terms dictated by the act of Parliament and threatened that he would seize the vessel permanently if it did not leave the harbor within six hours. The selectmen could do little to oppose the threat and adjourned the meeting.<sup>56</sup> The threat of smallpox emerging from newly arrived soldiers and their families continued through 1774. A large outbreak occurred in November, which the selectmen attributed to the arrival of troops of the 59<sup>th</sup> Regiment from New York, where a smallpox epidemic had immediately preceded the one in Boston. The selectmen immediately

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<sup>55</sup> An example of this procedure can be read in the Boston Selectmen Minutes for the date of October 23, 1771, when the keeper of the Rainsford Island Hospital, Samuel Hartley, reported the arrival of a man named Matthew on board the ship of Capt. Derby. Hartley relayed to the selectmen that the ship and cargo had been smoked for the purpose of disinfection. Meeting of the Selectmen, October 23, 1771, in *Report of the Commissioners of Boston*, 100; outbreaks of smallpox among the troops continued into 1775, particularly in the soldiers' barracks. For example, a breakout of smallpox occurred in the barracks near the Bunch of Grapes tavern in November and December of 1774 requiring the transferring of soldiers to the Rainsford Island hospital. Meeting of the Selectmen, December 5, 1774, in *Report of the Commissioners of Boston*, 235.

<sup>56</sup> Meeting of the Selectmen, October 31, 1774, in *Report of the Commissioners of Boston*, 230.



ordered the quarantine of one soldier from the regiment, but this proved insufficient. By the end of the month an advertisement appeared in Boston warning of the spread of smallpox after five children in the house of a soldier of the 59<sup>th</sup> Regiment came down with the disease, killing one. The selectmen reported that regimental policy prohibited the inoculation of the military passengers before their transit through New York.<sup>57</sup>

In addition to the costs placed on Boston's population because of the introduction of smallpox by militarization, townspeople also took on a substantial cost because of the increased demand for social welfare occasioned by the arrival of royal soldiers. Due to illness, death, and destitution common to life in the eighteenth-century British military, regular soldiers and their families often required public services for care outside the purview of the military chain of command. The burden fell on the local population and government where the soldiers resided. In Boston, these occasions increased dramatically through the 1770s as soldiers and their families arrived in the town. In September 1770, the Boston almshouse received a child named George Porbis, the son a deceased grenadier named John Porbis of the 14<sup>th</sup> Regiment stationed within the town.<sup>58</sup> In 1771, members of the town applied to the selectmen for funds to care for the relief of a "disabled Soldiers [sic] Wife."<sup>59</sup> The arrival of soldiers and their families into the care of the almshouse increased over the following year until it prompted the selectmen to write a letter to a captain of a local regiment stating:

We are very sorry either to be troubled ourselves, or give you any Trouble with our Complaints of the Impositions on this Town by having Women & their Children belonging to your Regiment cast upon the Town for their Support – This Sir even yourself being Judge is not only unreasonable but unjust, it being directly contrary [to] to the Law of the Province which probably you may be a Stranger to, & therefor we think it necessary to let you know that the Law is whoever is the Occasion of any Person being

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<sup>57</sup> Meeting of the Selectmen, November 23, 1774, in *Report of the Commissioners of Boston*, 233-34.

<sup>58</sup> Meeting of the Selectmen, September 26, 1770, in *Report of the Commissioners of Boston*, 67.

<sup>59</sup> Meeting of the Selectmen, December 4, 1771, in *Report of the Commissioners of Boston*, 104.

brought into this Town & does not acquaint the Selectmen thereof becomes liable for the Charge of all such Persons.<sup>60</sup>

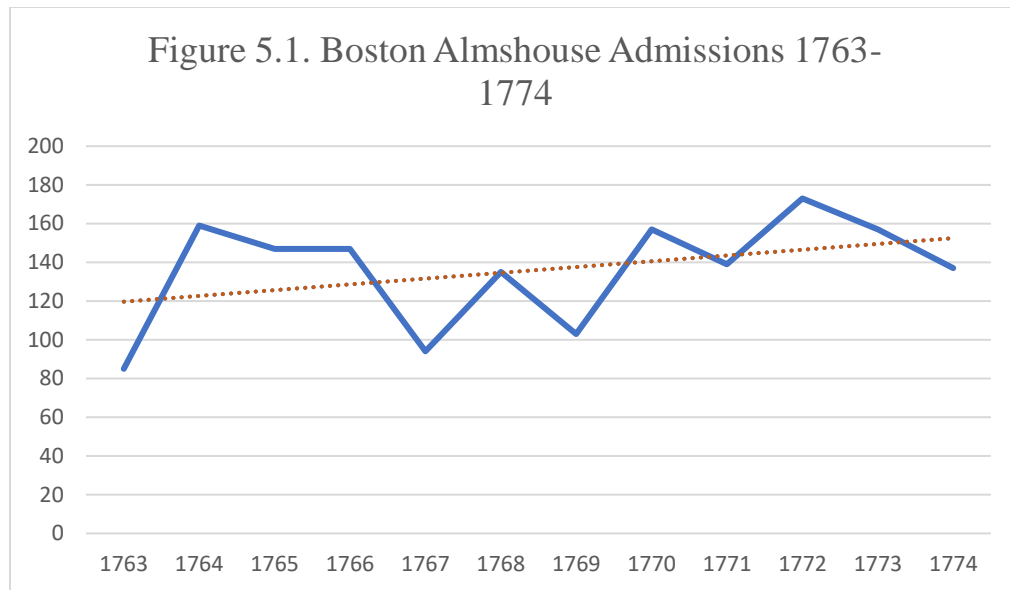
The influx of soldiers and their families into the almshouse system through 1772 included Agnes Yarley and her child, the family of critically ill Robert Yarley of the 64<sup>th</sup> Regiment, and at least three other soldiers' families. The selectmen specifically wrote to the regimental captain that they considered several of these families to be "properly under the Government of your Regiment," and so requested that they pay for the transportation and care of them.

Between 1763 and 1774, the average annual percent increase in Boston almshouse admissions was 10%. The increase was particularly sharp during the transition to formal peace with French adversaries after 1763. Between 1763 and 1764, almshouse admissions increased by 87%. The admission numbers remained relatively high and stable through the administrative reforms of 1764 and 1765 including the Stamp Act Crisis. The admissions numbers decreased slightly following the repeal of the first administrative reforms followed by a 44% increase in the year following the implementation of the Townshend Duties. The next large increase came in 1770. That year, a 52% increase in the rate of admissions correlated with the escalation of conflict between Bostonians and royal regulars including the Boston Massacre that March. Admission numbers stayed high through the 1770s, peaking in 1772, the same year as the onset of a significant British credit crisis. Militarization and credit contraction after the Seven Years' War correlated with a general increase in the rate of almshouse admissions (Figure 5.1).<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Meeting of the Selectmen, October 7, 1772, in *Report of the Commissioners of Boston*, 147.

<sup>61</sup> On the 1772 credit crisis and its effect on the colonies, see Richard B. Sheridan, "The British Credit Crisis of 1772 and The American Colonies," *The Journal of Economic History*, 20, no. 2, (Jun. 1960): 161-86.



Source: “Almshouse Admissions, November 9, 1758-December 31, 1774” in Eric Nellis and Anne Decker eds., *The Eighteenth-Century Records of the Boston Overseers of the Poor*. Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts, Volume LXIX (Boston: The Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 2007), 121-270.

The public costs of social welfare continued to fall on the Boston’s municipal government through the period despite the simultaneous commercial burdens of the port closure and abrogation of town meeting under the Massachusetts Government Act.<sup>62</sup> Consequently, local colonists undertook substantial administrative and resource costs because of such obligations.

Much of the evolution of the concept of personal liberty in colonial British America and the wider early modern world revolved around freedom of movement, communication, and association. This applied to commerce as well as political transactions between different towns and different levels of governance.<sup>63</sup> Militarization and the Tea Act of 1773 upset political equilibriums provoking new coalitions to form among colonial towns, and provincial, commercial interest groups to oppose the perceived incursion.

<sup>62</sup> Meeting of the Selectmen, October 7, 1772, in *Report of the Commissioners of Boston*, 147.

<sup>63</sup> Mancke, “The Languages of Liberty in British North America, 1607-1776,” 25-26, 31.

Through the eighteenth century, the town selectmen controlled the supplying and use of militia supplies and fortifications. Local leaders folded peacetime militia activity within the municipal infrastructure. Working together, the selectmen and the militia regulated the placement and stocking of powder stores and the construction of batteries and other necessary defenses.<sup>64</sup> The selectmen set the budget and granted funds for the military infrastructure of the town. In 1769, the selectmen consented to the request of the members of the artillery company to construct a gun house on the public town land adjacent to the Boston Common and granted £66.13.4 for the purpose. Social units within the town, like the artillery company, funded projects like the gun house in two ways. They received direct resources, such as the use of public land, or the selectmen granted them a draft on the town treasurer. The second option used town credit to make public expenditures. Town credit allowed groups like the artillery company to fund improvements on their own individual accounts. Because book credit served as an effective currency alternative at the local level, recipients of public credit could use this obligation in exchanges with others. Public debt therefore allowed for state expenditures without the immediate need to transmit hard money, or other physical payments, to individuals operating on behalf of the town government.

The use of book credit did not prove a substitute for hard money like silver sterling or Spanish gold dollars, but rather a means to facilitate trade in its absence. Colonists could not pay off debt with more debt, but rather needed concrete exchanges to fulfill obligations. This proved equally true for the town governments, militias, and other colonial institutions as it did for private individuals engaging in commerce. In the eighteenth century, militia units entered

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<sup>64</sup> See for example, Boston Selectmen minutes for March 20, 1771, and March 27, 1771 in *Report of the Commissioners of Boston*, 78-9.

obligations held between themselves and governments in the same way they did with other individuals or firms.<sup>65</sup> Obligations against town treasurers held by groups like the Boston artillery company allowed military improvements without cash on hand in the public coffer. The town treasury would have to reckon accounts with the artillery company at some point so that members of the artillery company could balance their credits against debts they held throughout the community. This meant that towns competed directly with metropolitan and provincial governments for pools of limited remittable money and resources. The defensive and coercive state apparatuses of local social units conflicted with the aims of Parliamentary reforms and attempts at imperial state consolidation in the 1760s and 1770s.

As tensions in towns escalated against the British militarization of colonial port towns, the local militia infrastructure came into direct conflict with imperial prerogatives. Competition over budgets evolved into outright conflict over the right for towns to organize their own defenses. Growing hostilities between regulars and the general colonial population made the right to local defense a contentious issue. For example, on March 7, 1770, just two days after the Boston Massacre, the Boston selectmen appointed a committee to confer with Lieutenant Governor Thomas Hutchinson on the establishment of a town “military watch.” The committee consisted of two colonels and a major in the town militia. The reasoning for the watch presumably emerged from the same anxieties concerning the regular soldiers occupying the town that provoked the Boston Massacre. For example, the selectmen instructed the committee to inform Hutchinson that the “Inhabitants are still apprehensive of danger from the Soldier in the Night . . . & therefore, to desire that he will take such order as he may think necessary for the

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<sup>65</sup> A comparable example appears in Charles Ward Apthorp’s accounts with the provincial government of New York. Charles Ward Apthorp, *Accounts (1755-1768)*, Charles Ward Apthorp Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Box 1, Folder 32.

safety of the Town.”<sup>66</sup> Hutchinson declined to grant permission for the military watch as “it would be Reported on the other side of the Water that he had raised the Militia to drive the Soldiers out of the Town.” Hutchinson permitted the existing Boston regiment under the command of Colonel Joseph Jackson, a member of the committee, to organize a watch and “was very willing it should be done.” Hutchinson admitted the problem of soldiers’ disturbances in the town and sought to confer with the regular officer Colonel Dalrymple about the possibility of disarming soldiers at certain times or confining them to their barracks.<sup>67</sup>

Individuals within the town formed a largely self-contained fiscal unit under the selectmen for the purpose of supporting town defenses. Individual militia officers paid for expenses on their own accounts, which the town treasurer recorded as a credit against the town. The town would periodically pay off interest on their obligations to the officers through donations from wealthy locals. For example, in 1770 one of the members of the committee to form the town military watch, Colonel Henshaw, received a £14 interest payment from the town paid for in money from a part of “Mr. Brookers [sic] Donation ending 23d March last.”<sup>68</sup> This type of public payment out of private donations occurred regularly in Boston through the eighteenth century. However, the direct use for this extent of fortification within the town was unique to the 1770s. In previous decades, selectmen, donors, and town militia members used payments to maintain gunpowder stores and upkeep of the harbor’s battery. The rapid additions to the capacity of the town watch occurred as a specific response to the threat of violent disorder within the town during the last five years of the imperial crisis.

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<sup>66</sup> Meeting of the Selectmen, March 7, 1770, in *Report of the Commissioners of Boston*, 57-58.

<sup>67</sup> Meeting of the Selectmen, March 7, 1770, in *Report of the Commissioners of Boston*, 57-58.

<sup>68</sup> Meeting of the Selectmen, April 11, 1770, in *Report of the Commissioners of Boston*, 59.

Local militia officers relied on the selectmen for defense expenditures and supplies over the following years. In 1772, Major William applied to the selectmen for the use of thirty small arms belonging to the town “in order to exercise a new Company of Grenadiers.”<sup>69</sup> Regulation and distribution of town armaments remained within the effective jurisdiction of the selectmen and their allies through 1775. The individuals responsible for this activity, such as John Scollay, Thomas Marshall, and John Hancock, often held overlapping positions as selectmen, militia officers, and merchants. Town leaders united military, fiscal, and commercial authority into one unit with popular legitimacy supported through the accountability of town meetings. These leaders exercised considerable power and consolidated significant military capacity at the town level. Scollay, Marshall, and Hancock formed a committee in 1773 to inspect the town’s arms and call in those that they had lent for this purpose. This event occurred because of the escalation of commercial tensions following the passing of the Tea Act that May and the boycotts organized in response.

Parliament passed the Tea Act in 1773 to give the East India Company permission to export tea stored in its warehouses free of duties. Importation taxes remained in place, which meant that the cost of the right granted to the East India Company would fall on the colonists who purchased the tea. Colonists regarded this advantage to a chartered monopoly as a form of favoritism rooted in structures of imperial patronage. The East India Company had been teetering on the precipice of bankruptcy in the early 1770s. Parliament deemed the company a necessary public good worthy of state support and passed legislation to support it in profitably unloading its reserves to agents across the British Atlantic. Metropolitan authorities hesitated to charge the importation duty on the colonists after protests. However, as Cadwallader Colden correctly

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<sup>69</sup> Meeting of the Selectmen, April 9, 1772, in *Report of the Commissioners of Boston*.

warned from New York in November 1774, the problem did not arise solely from the duty but from the exclusive grant to the company. Colonists did not accept competition from an external monopoly which threatened their internal fiscal autonomy.<sup>70</sup>

The Boston selectmen initially sought to organize a concerted response against the importation of East India Company tea. Town government proved a venue for popular resentment. In November 1773, following the passage of the Tea Act in May, Bostonians presented a petition to the selectmen requesting them to call a town meeting regarding tea they expected to arrive. The selectmen held a meeting to debate the measure.<sup>71</sup> Jonathan Clark, one of the consignees of the tea that the East India intended to export to Boston, presented himself to the selectmen concerning the reaction of the town. Clark felt that his fellow townspeople had developed an unfavorable opinion of him because of his involvement with the tea importation. He expressed that news had spread within the town that the East India Company had consigned the tea to his company. However, he states, he had not planned to receive it. The selectmen recorded that “he declared that the Consignment was not of his seeking . . . and that it was very disagreeable to him.” Jonathan Clark initially offered to do anything necessary to “restore tranquility to the Town” and restore his reputation. The selectmen immediately informed him that, from their perspective, “nothing would satisfy the Inhabitants but reshipping of the Tea to London.” Clark objected to this on the grounds of impracticability, but the selectmen rejected any other measure. After “much discoursing,” Clark agreed with the stipulation that the selectmen would facilitate the rehabilitation of his public image in the community. Clark and the selectmen reached the agreement that Clark would not take the tea from the arriving vessel.

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<sup>70</sup> Becker, *The History of Political Parties in the Province of New York*, 96, 104.

<sup>71</sup> Meeting of the Selectmen, November 17, 1773, in *Report of the Commissioners of Boston*, 202.



Additionally, they agreed that immediately upon the vessel's arrival in the town, Clark would hand in proposals for the selectmen to lay before the town which would contain plans for the return of the tea.<sup>72</sup> On November 28, with the selectmen received news that Clark had left town, and the selectmen could not ascertain where he went. The selectmen's messenger then proceeded to the home of another of the tea consignees, Benjamin Faneuil, to ask if he had anything to propose to the selectmen in Clarke's place. Upon arrival, the messenger found that Faneuil too had left town.<sup>73</sup>

Clark and Faneuil both had established relationships with the British East India Company after the company had named their family firms as factors. Both families had longstanding commercial connections to London and the West Indies where they engaged in the trade of rum and sugar. They also participated in the slave trade. Through their commercial connections, they developed substantial relationships with London, and generally opposed more radical forms of Whig politics.<sup>74</sup> After Parliament introduced more rigorous commercial controls over the trade from Boston to the West Indies, merchants like Clark and Faneuil diversified their business to focus more on East Indian Company trade. In contrast to the commercial restrictions placed on the West Indian trade under the Sugar Act of 1764, the East India Company enjoyed invigorated public support during this period as London brought it under metropolitan control to avoid the company's imminent bankruptcy. This legal favoritism reflected divergent commercial interests between London and the colonial port towns. While much of the West Indian trade revolved

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<sup>72</sup> Meeting of the Selectmen, November 27, 1773, in *Report of the Commissioners of Boston*, 202-3.

<sup>73</sup> Meeting of the Selectmen, November 28, 1773, in *Report of the Commissioners of Boston*, 202-3.

<sup>74</sup> Clarke's primary business between 1760 and 1773 involved the shipping and processing of sugar from the West Indies via Boston. Clark's involvement with the British East India Company increased in the last few years of this period. This was likely an adaptation to changing commercial conditions in the period of postwar administrative reforms and Parliamentary support for the failing East India Company in the 1770s. Richard Clarke, *Richard Clarke Ledger, 1760-1879*, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA.

around North American entrepôts, the East India monopoly had more direct accountability to metropolitan interests. These economic and financial realities drove mass reactions against the policies favoring the legal monopoly of the East India Company. Mobs numbering in the hundreds in Boston had attempted to break into the Clarks' warehouse after the tea consignees, including Thomas Hutchinson's son, had failed to meet to answer accusations at the Liberty Tree. Further conflicts arose in response to the Boston Port Act of 1774, which quickly circulated among colonial towns in the form of handbills. Commercial organizations allied with selectmen to respond to the terms of the Act's closing of Boston's port to external commerce. Contemporaries noted merchants and "mechanics," or craftspeople, as comprising the core demographic of many of these groups. Much of the membership drew on leading committee members of preexisting Sons of Liberty groups across port towns and particularly Boston.<sup>75</sup>

Colonial agitation through 1774 and 1775 escalated in response to the presence of soldiers in combination with the political and economic disruptions of the Intolerable Acts. Colonists in Boston sought to remedy the costs of such militarization and disruption through appeal to the selectmen. The selectmen, in response, addressed military leadership on the town's behalf and administered economic controls and altered public expenditures to reduce costs on their constituents. In August 1774, the selectmen met the aide de camp of the 4<sup>th</sup> Regiment to discuss the behavior of two royal officers who, by their own admission, assaulted colonists in a fray the previous month. The two officers "expressed their concern that too cheerful a Glass should betray them into such behavior." They requested the selectmen to intercede to prevent any prosecution or civil suits, to which the selectmen agreed under the condition that the soldiers

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<sup>75</sup> Becker, *The History of Political Parties in the Province of New York*, 112-13.

would not commit similar offenses in the future.<sup>76</sup> Disorder, and resultant conflict between soldiers and colonists, continued. In November 1774, the town constables reported that they feared crime perpetrated by soldiers in the night because of Thomas Gage's quartering of troops within the town. The constables urged the selectmen to appoint guards to patrol the town until midnight.<sup>77</sup> Complaints about royal soldiers in the streets continued into 1775. The selectmen instructed the town printers to circulate a public notice concerning recent complaints of soldiers driving sleighs through the town "at unreasonable Times of the Night" beating drums and making other loud noises. The selectmen additionally instructed the town constables to stop any such offenders engaging in such activities "and make Reports of their Names, that they may be dealt with as the Law directs."<sup>78</sup>

The Boston Port Act constrained the ability of town administration to meet obligations to its constituents, particularly concerning the use and availability of public goods within the town. One notable example concerned public lighting. The closing of Boston's trade produced shortages of oil necessary to light public lamps. This proved disruptive because of the absence of light during a period when nighttime disorders and conflict increased in response to the presence of soldiers. The selectmen had to fulfill financial obligations to the town's appointed lamp lighter, Edward Smith, even if he could not perform the task due to the absence of necessary supplies. In August 1774, Smith applied to the selectmen for them to pay him according to their agreed terms despite his inability to perform his task that summer. Given the financial constraints on the town, Smith's request required partial fulfillment of the initial terms. The selectmen agreed to pay Smith forty pounds sterling to clear part of the town's obligations for the period

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<sup>76</sup> Meeting of the Selectmen, August 3, 1774, in *Report of the Commissioners of Boston*, 223-24.

<sup>77</sup> Meeting of the Selectmen, November 30, 1774, in *Report of the Commissioners of Boston*, 234-35.

<sup>78</sup> Meeting of the Selectmen, January 5, 1775, in *Report of the Commissioners of Boston*, 240-41.

earlier in the year when he could perform his task. For the period during which the Port Act prevented Smith from lighting the town's lamps, the selectmen granted him credit against the town. The municipal government relied on their own credibility to survive the effects of resource scarcity occasioned by the closure of Boston to maritime trade.<sup>79</sup> Their inability to fully remit on their obligations to Edward Smith indicates that the scarcity of hard money necessary to balance public and private accounts continued to hinder town administration through the latter stages of the imperial crisis. On at least two occasions, the selectmen, including John Hancock, appealed to General Thomas Gage concerning the escalating conflict between soldiers and townspeople after the Port Act, especially the Massachusetts Government Act's abrogation of the activities of the town meeting without special license from Gage.<sup>80</sup>

Colonial organization against the Boston Port Act occurred through the interaction of town governments. Inter-town communication within Massachusetts, and other port towns like New York, allowed for coordinated responses to the event. Committees of correspondence emerged as key political bodies mapped onto preexisting local government. In July 1774, the Boston selectmen received a letter from the committee of correspondence of Windham, Connecticut. The selectmen received the message via the firm of "Mr. Howard & Company," along with the resolutions of the Windham selectmen from May 28 "relative to the present distress of the Town of Boston occasioned by the late cruel Port Bill."<sup>81</sup> In addition to expressing sympathy with the Bostonians, Windham residents sent 258 sheep "for the relief of the

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<sup>79</sup> Meeting of the Selectmen, August 24, in *Report of the Commissioners of Boston*, 226; Meeting of the Selectmen, August 31, in *Report of the Commissioners of Boston*, 226.

<sup>80</sup> Meeting of the Selectmen, August 13, 1774, in *Report of the Commissioners of Boston*, 224-25.

<sup>81</sup> Meeting of the Selectmen, July 2, 1774, in *Report of the Commissioners of Boston*, 221. Colonists across British America recognized the importance of inter-colonial economic support to Boston following the Boston Port Act. For example, see "Extract from a letter from Maryland, dated Baltimore, Sept. 21, 1774," in *Letters on the American Revolution, 1774-1776*, ed. Margaret Wheeler Willard (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1968), 3-5.

distressed” in the town. In response, the selectmen of Boston empowered the Overseers of the Poor to receive, care for, and distribute the sheep “in concert with a Committee of the Town on Ways & means for employing [sic] the Poor.”<sup>82</sup> The Boston selectmen responded with a letter expressing their gratitude and emphasizing the “deplorable” situation of their town, the annihilation of their trade, and the reduction of thousands of residents “to a state of extreme want.” The selectmen wrote further of the increased militarization of the town, stating: “and superadded to all this to have a military force introduced among us to insult us in our distress, is a measure that must mark the present administration. But amidst Our sufferings it is a great alleviation [sic] that all our Sister Colonies have adopted these sufferings as their own...”<sup>83</sup> Direct connections to towns within New England developed from mutual economic relations and reliance which colonists came to recognize as a norm by the middle of the eighteenth century. At the time of the Boston Port Act, the domestic economy of New England had developed intensive internal trade linked to Boston as a significant regional port town. This largesse from a neighboring town government reflected how the closure of Boston’s port to trade aggravated tensions between imperial policymakers and other smaller towns within Boston’s commercial orbit. Prior to the Boston Port Act, direct communication between town selectmen or committees rarely occurred save with neighboring towns when selectmen demarcated municipal borders. The Port Act and British policy provoked unification of interests among towns in the mid-1770s.

The largest percentage of imports into Boston came primarily from the New England coastal trade and the West Indies followed by the less significant imports from Great Britain and Ireland. Imports from Quebec were well under 1% indicating little economic interdependence

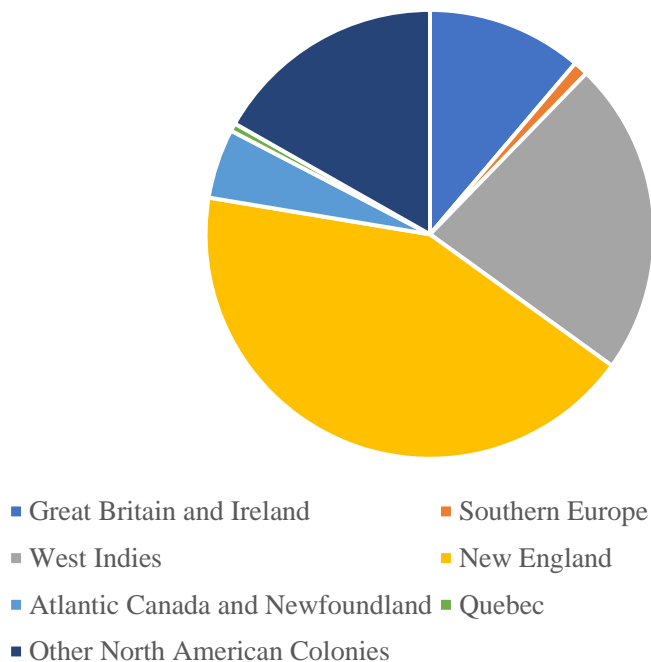
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<sup>82</sup> Meeting of the Selectmen, July 2, 1774, in *Report of the Commissioners of Boston*, 221.

<sup>83</sup> Meeting of the Selectmen, July 4, 1774, in *Report of the Commissioners of Boston*, 221.

between Boston and Quebec at the time of the Quebec Act in the summer of 1774. The closure of the Boston port in 1774 had the most direct bearing on domestic trade within New England and in neighboring colonies given Boston's greater commercial integration with those regions than Great Britain (Figure 5.2).

Figure 5.2. Regional Import Percentages out of Boston Harbor, January 1773-January 1774 (Tonnage)



<b>Great Britain &amp; Ireland</b>	11.21%
<b>Southern Europe</b>	1.06%
<b>West Indies</b>	22.69%
<b>New England</b>	42.67%
<b>Atlantic Canada and Newfoundland</b>	5.02%

<b>Quebec</b>	0.57%
<b>Other Colonies</b>	16.78%

Source: "An Account of the Number of Vessels and their Tonnage port of Boston from Jan 1773 to Jan 5 1774," MHS Miscellaneous Bound. Massachusetts Historical Society. Boston, MA.

Long before 1774, northeastern colonists emphasized their right to assemblies under the rule of law. Colonists expressed their conception of individual liberty as an extension of self-government originating at the level of farm, family, and town.<sup>84</sup> After 1767, a transition in parliamentary administration provoked a conflict between traditional understandings originating in colonial experience and schemes of reform designed to further imperial state oversight. More than theoretical claims of parliamentary authority, this post-1767 era saw the physical intrusion of the imperial state into colonial government. Three transitions during this period escalated the conflict between colonial and imperial governments between 1767 and 1774, each of which concerned commercial controls and public revenue. First, Parliament placed the collection of colonial customs in the hands of crown-appointed commissioners who resided within the colonies. Second, Parliament sought to enforce compliance using writs of assistance issued by admiralty courts, which provided fewer protections for defendants. Lastly, Parliament sought to enforce local payments for regular troops stationed in colonial towns. This proved particularly contentious in New York, where the New York Restraining Act of 1767 suspended the legislative capacity of the New York assembly until they had made provisions for furnishing royal troops.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Mancke, "The Languages of Liberty in British North America, 1607-1776," 25.

<sup>85</sup> Becker, *The History of Political Parties in the Province of New York*, 56.

In 1774, political conflict centered on the terms of the Massachusetts Government Act, which sought to abrogate the rights of provincial legislation and governance delineated under the colony's 1691 charter. Colonists considered this a direct challenge to local authority. The capacity of Parliament to coerce compliance proved limited relative to the town government's ability to defy the dictate without penalty. Massachusetts's legislatures and the colony's town assemblies continued to meet in direct defiance of the Massachusetts Government Act. The Middlesex County convention advocated explicitly for a "well-ordered resistance" to metropolitan intrusion.<sup>86</sup> Provincial social networks enabled for communication and inter-town organization against the British military. Northeastern port towns swiftly took on the role of conduits for information regarding unpopular Parliamentary legislation to the whole of colonial British North America. News of the Boston Port Act reached New York on May 12, quickly spurring the printing and circulation of hand bills. New York's radical leaders in the Sons of Liberty organized a meeting that month consisting largely of "a number of respectable merchants and the body of mechanics." Attendees appointed a committee consisting of twenty-five to address the implications of the Port Act.<sup>87</sup>

In September 1774, the Boston selectmen drafted an address to General Thomas Gage and had the town clerk deliver it to him. They informed Gage that the "apprehensions of the People not only of this but of the neighbouring Towns, are greatly increased by observing the design of erecting a Fortress at the Entrance of the Town, and of reducing this Metropolis in other respects to the state of a Garrison."<sup>88</sup> The selectmen cited cases of complaints made by the town of abuses of regular soldiers, including "assaulting and forceably [sic] detaining several

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<sup>86</sup> Gross, *The Minutemen and Their World*, 57; Mancke, "The Languages of Liberty in British North America, 1607-1776," 43.

<sup>87</sup> Becker, *The History of Political Parties in the Province of New York*, 112-13.

<sup>88</sup> Meeting of the Selectmen, September 9, 1774, in *Report of the Commissioners of Boston*, 227-8.



Persons who were peaceably passing in and out of the Town.” The selectmen complained that coercive measures would harm the town’s commercial relationships with neighboring regions. Boston served as a core entrepot of the domestic economy, functioning as the principal market town of the region. Consequently, the selectmen warned, the regulars’ behavior “may discourage the market People from coming in with their Provisions as usual, and oblige the Inhabitants to abandon the Town.”<sup>89</sup> The selectmen believed it likely that the suppression of commercial relations between town and country would produce popular dissatisfaction across Massachusetts and “hurry the Province into Acts of Desparation [sic].” In his response to the selectmen, Gage disputed that his placing cannons at the entrance of the town counted as “erecting a Fortress,” and denied that people had anything to “fear from that measure, as no use would be made thereof, unless their hostile Proceedings should make it necessary.” Gage argued that he had no intention of controlling the free movement of people into and out of Boston. He denied any attempt to turn Boston into a garrison, as the selectmen claimed, but instead framed the regulars’ role in Boston as a means of maintaining lawful order. Gage wrote: “as it is my duty, so it shall be my endeavor to preserve the peace, and to promote the happiness of every Individual; and I earnestly recommend to you, and every Inhabitant, to cultivate the same spirit – and heartily wish they may live quietly and happily in the Town.”<sup>90</sup> Gage’s wishes proved short-lived, however, as colonial towns as united into a social coalition in opposition to militarization and the commercial blockade. Soon colonists waited in anticipation of the arrival of additional troops in town. The inevitability of the event had become public knowledge. Samuel Adams and John Hancock waited in a parsonage at Lexington to maintain proximity to any events that would unfold. Town minutes record that the last formal meeting of the colonial Boston selectmen

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<sup>89</sup> Meeting of the Selectmen, September 9, 1774, in *Report of the Commissioners of Boston*, 227-28.

<sup>90</sup> Meeting of the Selectmen, September 9, 1774, in *Report of the Commissioners of Boston*, 227-28.

occurred on the day of the battles at Lexington and Concord. The town governments of Concord and Boston, under the direction of Colonel James Barrett, had distributed provisions and arms stored in homes in preparation for the looming conflict.<sup>91</sup>

The escalation of hostilities between colonists and British authorities before 1775 arose, in large part, from changes in the fiscal substructure of the British imperial state. The concerns and behaviors of colonists, royal soldiers, and administrators reveal that political authority depended on the control of public revenue and the allocation of resources. Because of a largely segmented structure of early modern public finance, towns and provinces exercised considerable local authority over the public purse. Consequently, they could use this power to operate as semi-sovereign political units capable of mobilizing coercive state apparatuses to enforce distinctly colonial ideas of social order. In other words, local public officials, like selectmen and members of the General Court, did not rely on external funding and so tended to respond to local interests. Following the Seven Years' War, the growth of these local political units conflicted with metropolitan authority as London policymakers implemented austerity policies meant to reign in the expansionary public credit policies of William Pitt's administration.

Colonists in commercial port towns like Boston and New York experienced a fiscal whiplash effect as the flow of bullion obligations reversed. While colonists still held public debts on their accounts, they were forced to compete with the imperial state for scarce remittable funds. Simultaneously, local populations in towns like Boston and New York bore many costs of militarization in their communities as army troops arrived to impose British authority. Regulars remained in the colonies after the Treaty of Paris in 1763, and this burden only increased in

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<sup>91</sup> Meeting of the Selectmen, April 19, 1775, in *Report of the Commissioners of Boston*, 248; Gross, *The Minutemen and Their World*, 57.

Boston after General Thomas Gage's appointment as governor general of North America in 1774. This postwar transition revealed fissures between town and imperial authorities as competing polities fought for limited administrative resources. Colonists with longstanding, unshakeable, relationships with town governance organized behind established local leadership. Colonists found their preexisting conceptions of constitutional order to be inadequate for the economic exigencies of competing demands between town and imperial institutions. These preexisting conceptions meant that colonists understood the British state as a distant authority which concerned itself primarily with regulation of Atlantic commerce and not internal economic function.<sup>92</sup>

Colonists approached the imperial crisis under social constraints determined by competing obligations to towns, province, and empire. This state-conflict interpretation of the American Revolution emphasizes conflicting fiscal rights of town, provincial, and imperial governments. Intra-empire conflict also reveals significant social continuity through the eighteenth century. Political opposition to Parliamentary taxes during the American Revolution indicates more than an ideological opposition to taxation without representation. Instead, this opposition emerged from long-contested boundaries between group political interests within the larger British imperial polity.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Daniel Dulaney, "Considerations on the Propriety of Imposing Taxes in the British Colonies for the Purpose of Raising Revenue...[Annapolis,] 1765" in *Pamphlets of the American Revolution. Volume I, 1750-1765*. Bernard Bailyn, ed. (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1965), 598-658; Stephen Hopkins, "An Essay on the Trade of the Northern Colonies (1764)," in *Tracts of the American Revolution, 1763-1776*. Merrill Jensen, ed. (Indianapolis: The Bobs-Merrill Company, 1967), 3-18; [Stephen Hopkins], "The Rights of Colonies Examined," (Providence, 1765) in *The American Revolution: Writings from the Pamphlet Debate I: 1764-1772*. Gordon Wood, ed. (New York: The Library of America), 121-142.

<sup>93</sup> See also Robin L. Einhorn, *American Taxation, American Slavery* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), 3. Einhorn also rejects the early American preference for "republican government that was small, weak, and frugal," noting state-level taxation in support of the Revolutionary War and slavery in the early national period.

Daily administrative and economic life in colonial Boston depended significantly on local interaction within the town. The complex system of relationships within these local structures, including hierarchical relationships between Bostonians, emerged through longstanding municipal interaction and social norms. These interactions produced a geographically limited, yet intensive, concentrated, municipal state capacity. By the mid-eighteenth century, town life came to revolve around these strong local social structures. The exigencies of the Seven Years' War in America invited the influence of metropolitan administrators and military officers as they mobilized resources to fight the French. However, this transplantation of metropolitan authority came into contest with the municipal societies' standing claims to resources and labor. Civic society at the town level, as in Boston, depended on participation of inhabitants who coordinated activity and resource allocation among themselves. The introduction of a foreign coercive authority under General Thomas Gage and the royal army disrupted public life. This yielded tensions between town leadership and military regulars.

The efficacy of the town government required significant effort and participation among Bostonians. The work underlying Boston's civic stability functioned through contributions which absorbed much of the economic capacity of the town's population. Denizens relied on each other to support institutions for support of the poor, the construction and repair of public works, law enforcement, and the surveillance necessary to control migration and contagion. Bostonians balanced these obligations on a narrow fiscal margin of stable circulating currency, and competing claims for this scarce resource threw the system out of equilibrium. This occurred in the 1760s and 1770s as imperial administrative reforms along with continued military presence asserted their rights to colonists' time, effort, and resources. The military's presence made new demands on the traditional system of mutual obligations that had evolved in Boston to that time.

The imperial incursion after 1763, therefore, represented a break with local continuities. Rapid integration of the military provoked social shock. This threatened the colonists' concept of rightful relations between the colony and Whitehall. The origins of the American Revolution, in this way, emerged from a conflict of existing states nominally under the auspices of a single sovereign.

## Conclusion

In the eighteenth-century British Atlantic, imperial state expansion and imperial state consolidation were countervailing forces. British colonial subjects strengthened British sovereignty in the sense that they allowed for maximum reach of territorial expansion and commodity acquisition under the authority of the British sovereign. However, this same expansionary process emerged from local action, individual preferences, and incentives distinct from those of metropolitan state-makers in Whitehall. In this sense, sovereignty and British transatlantic constitutionalism did not emerge from a shared understanding. The story of the development of Britain's American empire is not the story of an integrated centralized state system that steadily gained power and efficacy over the course of the eighteenth century. Instead, segmented social units – in the Northeast this meant towns and provincial governments – presided over discrete functions of the “imperial state” and retained a high degree of autonomy in relation to external authorities. These subordinate elements of the larger imperial state struggled against metropolitan authorities – including Parliament, the Crown, Army, Admiralty, Treasury, and the Board of Trade – and voiced their opposition to British fiscal policies that plunged their economy into crisis. They strongly opposed new taxes that invaded traditional prerogatives of their local governments and worsened an already critical shortage of hard money in circulation. The American empire fractured along the lines inscribed by its de facto composite constitutional form when colonists perceived the British state as a hostile, external enemy. The financial mechanisms that funded victory in the Seven Years' War linked large populations of buyers and sellers, borrowers and lenders, merchants and farmers, artisans and ship captains, soldiers and sailors, and indeed everyone who linked their fortunes together by extending credit and undertaking debt.

In this interpretation, social continuity and local community formation informed imperial relationships from the bottom up.<sup>1</sup> Town communities were built on direct peer-to-peer interactions and addressed colonists' immediate concerns with daily life. These local town structures then coalesced through the participation of their members into larger provincial units which carried significant importance as defensive unions in times of conflict. The military campaigns led by William Phips, William Pepperell, William Shirley, and John Winslow reveal the emerging state capacities of colonial provincial governments as a result of provincial fiscal control. Throughout the eighteenth century, Massachusetts's provincial government – even when pressed to subordinate its authority to a general coalition, as proposed in the Albany Plan of Union in 1754 – hesitated before cooperating with neighboring provinces or accepting imperial demands that they believed overreached into their own internal affairs. For over a century, they had managed these affairs for themselves.

British American subjects experienced the confluence of money, credit, and public power in this composite empire as it mobilized and ended a transformative transatlantic war. Individuals within this empire shaped it collectively by the way they used credit and how this credit was exploited as a fiscal resource to make war on a scale that increased drastically through the eighteenth century. Conducting the French and Indian War required purchasing ahead of demand. Various levels of the British imperial state purchased and allocated goods, labor, and capital necessary for mobilizing, supplying, provisioning, and paying troops. British authorities drew on the credit and commerce of the colonial economy to purchase the resources necessary to pursue the war. The fiscal system of the early modern British state limited its coercive capacity. Coinage

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<sup>1</sup> For a similar argument concerning continuity, see Craig Yirush, *Settlers, Liberty, and Empire: The Roots of Early American Political Theory, 1675-1775* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011). A contrasting interpretation emphasizing radical breaks from earlier development is found in Gordon Wood's interpretation of the American Revolution. Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Knopf, 1991).

functioned as an emblem of imperial power, but it was often in short supply in the colonial Northeast. The British state influenced the availability and flow of sterling silver and established it as the hard currency could be used to remit debts. The colonies on the other hand, relied largely on currencies of their own invention or bullion from sources such as the Iberian and French West Indies. These mutually exclusive monetary regimes produced significant conflicts of interest. The record of colonial finance and exchange reveal how early Americans maneuvered obligations under imperfect conditions to find working institutional arrangements that avoided conflict between neighbors, between communities, and between the colonies and England. Additionally, Imperial authority in the colonies depended on colonial military regiments capable of mobilizing local financial capital.

Certain fiscal obligations, including duties on commerce and the minting of coins, allowed for a degree of crown and Parliamentary oversight over colonial activity. London required significant delegation to colonial leaders, however, in order to maximize the chances of success against France and its Native allies in North America. In this context, credit and money were more than a means of organizing exchange or even reflecting ownership of material goods. They also revealed relationships between people. Credit and money connected individuals and the organizations that they formed like firms and governments. Merchants and public financiers functioned as organizers and facilitators of these relationships across large distances. This made them integrators of dispersed individuals into large-scale geographic social structures that both early modern Britons, along with modern historians, refer to as empires.

The Progressive historians of the early twentieth century, including Charles Beard, Carl Becker, J. Franklin Jameson, and Arthur Schlesinger, Sr. described the interdependence of interest and ideology in their interpretations of the American Revolution. They saw constitutional



conflict as the product of individual interests of those whose actions, writing, and language gave the American Revolution its constitutional and cultural ideas.<sup>2</sup> Many structural forces worked beneath the surface of such events that the language of political pamphlets and official colonial protests did not fully encompass. This dissertation supports this interpretation of the origins of the American Revolution as arising from the material interests of the colonists. American conflict with Britain did not emerge foremost from ideology but from earlier divisions of economic interests between colony and empire which motivated colonists to generate new ideas. This was not simply an unwillingness to pay taxes or accept the terms of trade regulations. Instead, colonists' opposition to imperial control emerged as the result of decades of gradual economic division between the colonies and the metropole. Extending back to the provincial government of William Phips, colonists protested the attempts of metropolitan officials to intervene in their ability to create their own local fiscal regime. These interests in local fiscal self-determination continued through the eighteenth century, as evident in the case of Boston town government in the 1760s and 1770s. Both the metropolis and the colonies had an interest in collecting limited revenue to cover the costs of war and civic administration, but available money and resources did not allow for both to realize their claims. This competition gradually divided most of the colonists and British officials into two separate interest groups.

Fiscal autonomy during war reflects the reality of this division. Even when acting towards the common good of the empire, colonists and metropolitans did not operate as a single

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<sup>2</sup> Carl Lotus Becker, *The History of Political Parties in the Province of New York, 1760-1776* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1909); Richard Drake, *Charles Austin Beard: The Return of the Master Historian of American Imperialism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018); Charles Beard, *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States* (1913; Mineola, New York: Dover, 2004); Charles Beard and Mary Beard, *The Rise of American Civilization* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1930); Jameson, J. Franklin, *The American Revolution Considered as a Social Movement*. Princeton (NJ: Princeton University Press, 1926); Arthur M. Schlesinger, *The Colonial Merchants and the American Revolution, 1763-1776* (New York: Columbia University, 1918).

interconnected unit. Additionally, the demands that war placed on colonial populations made them hostile to financial demands from London. The existence of a transatlantic British Empire did not emerge as the outcome of mutual agreement between Americans and officials in England. Instead, it depended on a delicate equilibrium reached between competing interests. Vocal and written expressions of these underlying factional differences were the ones that held over long periods and had the most immediate influence. Taking such considerations into account provides a route to understanding the relationship between obligation, conflict, and imperialism in the colonial British American northeast.

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