British Colonial Policy—A Tradition of Neglect

Assume that you are a French observer traveling in the American colonies in late 1763. On your return home, you expect to write a series of articles on the status of the American colonies in the British Empire. You will interview both a member of the Massachusetts legislature and the royal governor of New York. In doing background research for your interviews, you have listed several critical bits of information regarding both British and colonial developments. Your task now is to list, on your own paper, the six most perceptive questions you can formulate to ask each official. At the end, you will write a one-sentence conclusion showing why the recent British victory in the French and Indian Wars appears to foreshadow difficult times ahead in British-colonial relations.

Essential British Developments, 1607–1763

"Sir Robert Walpole, who became the king's chief minister in 1721, believed that it was to England's interest to let the colonies flourish without interference; and his policy of 'salutary neglect' continued until the 1760s."


"The English government wrongfully assumed that once the colonies were established, often without any help other than a written charter, they could be ignored much of the time. Most people in England had little interest in the colonies; the few who had direct dealings with settlers in the New World were merchants, concerned only with markets or raw materials."


"The recent war (French and Indian War) had almost doubled the English national debt, which stood at £70,000,000 in 1756 and had risen to £130,000,000 in 1763. Taxpayers already grumbled at the rates and would certainly grumble more if asked to bear the total burden of imperial defense. Means would have to be found, it seemed to the ministers, to shift some of the expense to the colonists, who had also profited from the war and whom the garrisoned posts would protect."


"Neither Crown nor Parliament created much in the way of special machinery for colonial affairs, and for the most part regular executive agencies expanded their activities to include the colonies. Final authority over the colonies resided in the Privy Council, but the actual task of supervision was carried on by committees of the Council, regular agencies, and one specially constituted board (Board of Trade)."


"The result of (this) conjunction of too much organization for detail and too little concern for unity—especially when intensified by distance, slowness of communication, inferiority of personnel, corruption, bribery, and colonial obstinacy—was a large measure of self-government for the colonies."

Roster: First American Revolution 42.

- Imperial Structure
  - The middle colony's economy, especially in terms of manufacturing, was closely tied to the economic structure of the colonies. The middle colonies, especially New England, were crucial to the economic prosperity of the colonies.
  - The middle colonies were heavily involved in the production of goods such as textiles, woolens, and iron.

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