

Reflections on "1763 and the Americas" Symposium

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My presentation revisited and expanded the conclusion of my 1981 book *War, Politics and Revolution in Provincial Massachusetts*. Unlike what the British believed, colonial participation in the war was considerable and costly, and occurred most prominently in areas close to home. Thus, British arguments that taxation and more trade regulation were necessary to organize an empire that had "failed" fell on deaf ears, and rightly so. Colonists believed their efforts during the war entitled them to expand the frontier and free trade on the high seas, both of which Britain attempted to curtail. The war was also followed by post-war economic troubles for the men who had previously found employment in military service. Eastern Massachusetts, like the Pennsylvania and Virginia frontiers, which had seen the most action in the French and Indian War, were also among the foremost in the American Revolution.

The most important thing I took away from the conference was a better knowledge of the diverse experiences and expectations of the various peoples involved in response to the French and Indian War. An important though minority group in Britain realized that imperialism did not work well, and came to agree with the colonials that an empire of liberty had evolved with the different parts cooperating voluntarily. Paradoxically, an important group in America (soon forced to leave) believed closer cooperation with Britain rather than traditional colonial quasi-independence was a better solution to the imperial problems. French people in the empire came to adjust to life under British rule as did Native Americans (James Francis's presentation was the one I will remember the most), although scalp bounties were placed on their heads in Maine, came to accommodate with their new American rulers and support the Revolution (unlike in western Pennsylvania where there were also scalp bounties.)

As the end of colonial history, the French and Indian War also marked the beginning of American imperial history. An American empire followed in the wake of the British Empire, far more like the its predecessor than most Americans would care to admit (freedom and prosperity for white folks at home through the subjugation of other peoples). As both the British and American empires expanded beginning in the late eighteenth century (Britain won everywhere except in America in the 1780s) the legacy of the French and Indian War continued to influence the history of both nations.