

“men were prepared to think more favourably of independency”

MASSACHUSETTS-BAY: A Colony of Loyal Britons?

The Governor’s View: 1760-1763

Thomas Hutchinson, *The History of the Province of Massachusetts-Bay, Vol. III: From 1749-1774, Comprising a Detailed Narrative of the Origin and Early Stages of the American Revolution*

Thomas Hutchinson was the last royal governor of the Massachusetts Bay colony before the American Revolution. A Bostonian by birth, he became a Loyalist and was duly deemed a traitor by the rebelling colonists (who looted his mansion while protesting the 1765 Stamp Act). During this tumultuous period Hutchinson published a history of the colony from its founding to 1749. After the Revolution he continued his history into the years 1749 to 1774, which he titled “the Origin and Early Stages of the American Revolution.”

Here we read Hutchinson’s perspective on the critical years 1760 to 1763, from the British defeat of the French in Canada to the final peace treaty which ceded to Britain all French territory east of the Mississippi River. Although elated by the end of “encroachments” and attacks on their western frontier, the Massachusetts colonists bitterly resented the increased taxes and permanent military presence brought by the war. In a self-justifying tone, Hutchinson casts the British policies as reasonable for an imperial power in wartime, although he did not agree with all the British policies that led to rebellion. After the Revolution he moved to England, never returning to America as he wished.

As we enter the *History* in September 1760, Massachusetts receives word that the British forces in French Canada (with 1600 Massachusetts troops) have defeated the French at Montreal, ending the warfare in North America. According to Hutchinson, how did the colonists’ view of “independency” change from 1760 to 1763? How objective was his analysis?

1760: End of war in North America

The news of this event [defeat of the French in Montreal] was brought to Boston on the 23rd of September, and was nowhere received with greater joy, no part of the king’s dominions being more interested in it.

Governor Bernard, in his speech to the assembly upon this occasion, very properly puts them in mind of “the blessings they derive from the *subjection* to Great Britain, without which they could not now have been a free people; for no other nation upon earth could have delivered them from the power they had to contend with.”

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The council, in their address, acknowledge that, “to their *relation* to Great Britain, they owe their present freedom,” and then echo back, in imitation of the pattern they aimed to follow in addresses, that “no other nation upon earth could have delivered them from the power they had to contend with.”

The house, without scrupling to make in express words the acknowledgment of their subjection, nevertheless explain the nature of it. They “are sensible of the blessings derived to the British colonies

National Humanities Center, 2009: nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/. In Thomas Hutchinson, *The History of the Province of Massachusetts Bay, From 1749-1774, Comprising a Detailed Narrative of the Origin and Early Stages of the American Revolution*, ed. John Hutchinson (grandson), published 1828, pp. 83-86, 100-104; full text online in Google Books. Some spelling and punctuation modernized by NHC for clarity. Complete image credits at nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/becomingamer/imagecredits.htm.

from their subjection to Great Britain; and the whole world must be sensible of the blessings derived to Great Britain from the loyalty of the colonies in general, and from the efforts of this province [colony] in particular, which, for more than a century past, has been wading in blood and laden with the expenses of repelling the common enemy; without which efforts, Great Britain at this day might have had no colonies to defend:” and in the same address they observe that “the connection between the mother country and these provinces is founded on the principles of *filial obedience*, protection, and justice.”

These addresses have the appearance of caution, which I have not before met with in any public papers since the revolution. Perhaps it was observed only by the persons who composed them, and not by the council or house in general.

The greatest hopes from the reduction [defeat] of Canada, as far as could be judged from the public prayers of the clergy, as well as from the conversation of people in general, was “to sit quiet under their own vines and fig trees and to have none to make them afraid.” All they had ever suffered, as a community, had been from their French and Indian neighbours. In every respect, except the charges which had been occasioned by Indian wars, they had felt less of the burdens of government than any people besides who enjoyed so much of the benefit of it. That their civil and religious privileges might be transmitted to the latest posterity was an expression in general use among the clergy.

In Massachusetts Bay especially, there was a very general satisfaction with the form of government according to their charter. Although, under the first charter, the government had been more popular, the governor himself being annually elected, they were so fully satisfied with the new, that few persons, if any, wished to return to the old. From heats and animosities in popular elections in towns, they judged of the danger from such an election by all the people of the province.

The controversies between governors and their assemblies had been occasioned by different constructions of their respective powers, as derived from the charter; but these were pretty well settled. When a people are in such a state, they are not apt to be disturbed by mere theoretical notions of government, or with ideas of any particular degree of natural liberty which it is not in their power to alienate.

Speculative men had figured in their minds an American empire, as we have already observed, but in such distant ages that nobody then living could expect to see it. Besides, whilst the French remained upon the continent, the English were apprehensive lest, sooner or later, they should be driven from it. But as soon as they were removed, a new scene opened. The prospect was greatly enlarged. There was nothing to obstruct a gradual progress of settlements, through a vast continent, from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean.

The two colonies of Massachusetts Bay and Connecticut claimed, by charters, the property of this vast territory, at their sole disposal, so far as came within the latitudes to which they were limited; the small territory, possessed by Pennsylvania and New York, only excepted.

Men whose minds were turned to calculations found that the colonies increased so rapidly as to double the number of inhabitants in a much shorter space of time than had been imagined.

From the number of inhabitants then in the several colonies, and a supposition that, for the time to come, they might increase in the same proportion as in the time past, the colonies would soon exceed the parent state.

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Advantages in any respect enjoyed by the subjects in England, which were not enjoyed by the subjects in the colonies, began to be considered in an invidious light, and men were led to inquire, with greater attention than formerly, into the relation in which the colonies stood to the state from which they sprang.

Every argument which would give colour for the removal of this distinction was favourably received; and from various events, men were prepared to think more favourably of independency before any measures were taken with a professed design of attaining to it.

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1763: After the peace treaty

It was well known in America that the people of England, as well as administration, were divided upon the expediency of retaining Canada rather than the islands;¹ and it was also known that the objection to Canada proceeded from an

opinion that the cession of it by France would cause in time a separation of the British colonies from the mother country.

This jealousy [suspicion] in England being

known, it was of itself sufficient to set enterprising men upon considering how far such a separation was expedient and practicable. But the general joy in America upon the news of the cession was not caused by such views. And we may well infer from the addresses of the two houses upon this occasion that they could have no such thoughts. The governor in his speech congratulated them upon so joyful an event. In their address to him, they acknowledge that the evident design of the French to surround the colonies was the immediate and just cause of the war; that, without the protection afforded them [by British troops] during the war, they must have been a prey to the power of France; that without the compensation made them by parliament, the burden of the expense of the war must have been insupportable.

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In their address to the king they make the like acknowledgments, and, at the conclusion, promise to evidence their gratitude by every expression of duty and loyalty in their power.

Mr. Otis,² at the first town meeting of Boston after the peace, having been chosen moderator, addressed himself to the inhabitants in a speech which he caused to be printed in the newspapers, in the following words:

“We in America have certainly abundant reasons to rejoice. The heathen are not only driven out, but the Canadians, much more formidable enemies, are conquered and become fellow subjects. The British dominion and power may now be said, literally, to extend from sea to sea, and from the great river to the ends of the earth. And we may safely conclude from his majesty’s wise administration hitherto that liberty and knowledge, civil and religious, will be co-extended, improved, and preserved to the latest posterity. No other constitution of civil government has yet appeared in the world so admirably adapted to these great purposes as that of Great Britain. Every British subject in America is of common right “by acts of parliament,” and by the laws of God and nature, entitled to all the essential privileges of Britons. By particular charters there are peculiar privileges granted, as in justice they might and ought, in consideration of the arduous undertaking to begin so glorious an empire as British America is rising to. Those jealousies [suspicions] that some weak and wicked minds have endeavoured to infuse with regard to the colonies, had their birth in the blackness of darkness, and it is great

¹ The option was to allow a defeated France to keep Canada or Guadeloupe and several other small Caribbean islands.

² James Otis, Jr., already a staunch political and personal opponent of Hutchinson, led the Massachusetts legal resistance to “writs of assistance” — general search warrants issued by Hutchinson to British officers to search warehouses for smuggled goods. Otis, like his fellow colonists at this point, expresses loyalty to Britain and argues only for the “essential privileges of Britons.”

pity they had not remained there for ever. The true interests of Great Britain and her plantations [colonies] are mutual, and what God in his providence has united, let no man dare attempt to pull asunder.”

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quoting James Otis, Jr.

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The terms Whig and Tory³ had never been much used in America. The Massachusetts people in general were of the principles of the ancient Whigs; attached to the revolution and to the succession of the crown in the house of Hanover. . . .⁴

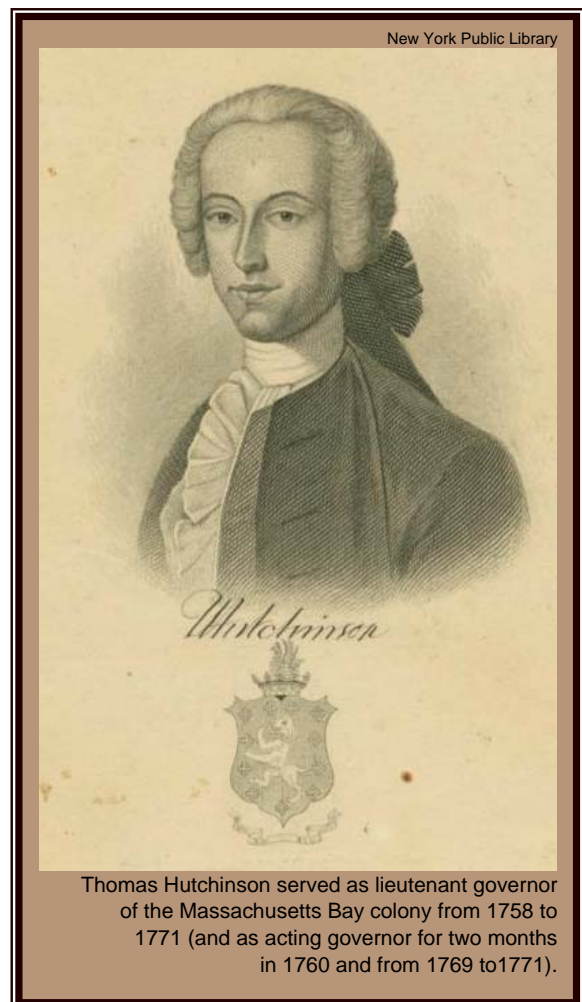
All of a sudden, the officers of the crown, and such as were for keeping up their authority, were branded with the name of Tories, always the term of reproach; their opposers assuming the name of Whigs, because the common people, as far as they had been acquainted with the parties in England, all supposed the Whigs to have been in the right and the Tories in the wrong.

Whilst the people in the province were thus disposed to engage in parties [political factions], the state of the colonies became a matter of more serious consideration in England than it had ever been before. The amazing increase of the national debt by a war engaged in at the solicitations, and for the protection of the colonies, seems to have caused this new attention.

The first proof of it towards Massachusetts Bay was an order to the governor to obtain a more exact and certain knowledge than had ever been obtained, of the number of inhabitants, distinguishing age, sex, &c.

This the governor could not obtain without the aid of the assembly by a law to compel the several towns and districts to make return of their numbers. Objections were made to it. Some suspected that it was required for purposes, though they could not discover them, to the disadvantage of the province. Others, and not a few, seemed to have religious scruples, and compared it to David’s numbering the people. The proposal was referred from one session to another, and, though it was finally agreed to by a majority, yet many remained dissatisfied.

Hutchinson proceeds to 1764 and Parliament’s passing of the Sugar Act to tax molasses and other sugars in order to pay down the huge debt caused by the French and Indian War. While opposed by the colonists, the Sugar Act was not Act One of the prerevolutionary era. That claim goes to the Stamp Act of 1765, the beginning of the end of ensured colonial loyalty to the Crown.



³ British political parties. In the colonies during the revolutionary period, *Whig* came to refer to Patriots and *Tory* to Loyalists (those loyal to Britain).

⁴ The “Glorious Revolution” of 1690, in which James II, a Roman Catholic, was deposed and replaced by his daughter Mary and her husband William, both Protestants. Under their rule, rights and privileges that the colonists had come to assume as Britons were restored.