

British Atlantic, American Frontier

SPACES OF POWER IN EARLY MODERN BRITISH AMERICA

Stephen J. Hornsby

With cartography by Michael J. Hermann

OPPADRE LIBRARY
SANTA CLARA UNIVERSITY
SANTA CLARA, CALIFORNIA

Chapter 6

The Fracturing of British America

THE FIRST CRACKS in the English North American empire began appearing between the 1620s and the 1640s with the retreat of metropolitan capital from direct control over colonization in the Chesapeake and the fishery in the Gulf of Maine, but these fissures would not open fully until the early 1760s and the unrest over the Stamp Act. During the intervening 120 years, the geographic patterns that would shape, dominate, and, ultimately, break up colonial British North America became entrenched. In the Atlantic arena, metropolitan merchants and planters established a maritime space containing nodes of staple production and trade; along the eastern edge of the continent, colonial merchants and planters created territories of staple production and port towns; and in the continental interior, European settlers carved out an extensive agricultural frontier based on family farming. During the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, these spaces expanded enormously, pushing against the imperial space of the French in North America. After French power on the continent collapsed, the enlarged space of the British Atlantic and the spaces along the American eastern seaboard increasingly grated against one another, creating the friction that would eventually lead to revolution and the remaking of eastern North America.

Early Eighteenth-Century Expansion of British America

In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, Britain emerged as a major imperial power. During the two wars fought against the French between 1688 and 1713, the British created a formidable “fiscal-military state”: the Bank of England was established and deficit financing introduced, the Board of Trade was created to administer commerce and the colonies, the parliament of Scotland was subsumed within that at Westminster, and a sizeable public administration overseeing state finances and the military was put in place.¹ The British also enjoyed considerable military success. In the Mediterranean, they captured Minorca and Gibraltar from the Spanish; in the Atlantic, they took Port Royal, the capital of Acadia, from the



FIGURE 6.1. *A Prospect of Annapolis Royal in Nova Scotia*, by J. H. Bastide, 1751. By permission of the British Library, Shelfmark Maps K.Top 11a f83.

French. At the Treaty of Utrecht (1713), Britain gained title to the two Mediterranean territories, as well as Hudson Bay, peninsular Nova Scotia, and the French part of Newfoundland. With the loss of their main fishing bases, the French moved across Cabot Strait and established a new fishery on Île Royale (Cape Breton Island). In 1717, the French began construction of the fortified port town of Louisbourg on the island's Atlantic coast to serve as a base for the new fishery, as an outer bastion of New France, and as an entrepôt of French trade in the North Atlantic.² Meanwhile, the British began incorporating mainland Nova Scotia into their Atlantic realm.

At the time of the British conquest, the French population of Nova Scotia comprised about 1,400 people settled in agricultural communities dispersed around the Bay of Fundy.³ The principal settlements were along the Annapolis Valley and around the Minas and Chignecto basins. Unlike the American settlements farther south, which had expansive agricultural frontiers, the Acadian settlements were little more than enclaves backing into a rocky interior, with little or no room for expansion, and facing outward to the Bay of Fundy and the Gulf of Maine beyond. Transportation by sea connected the settlements together and with the leading trading center of Boston. Much of the rest of the colony lay in the hands of Mi'kmaq Indians, traditional allies of the French. The British established their capital at Port Royal (renaming it Annapolis Royal after Queen Anne), improved the French fortifications, and employed naval vessels and a small army detachment to maintain control over the region (figure 6.1). As in Newfoundland, a military officer was appointed governor.⁴ Although the divide between civil and military affairs was respected, the governor ruled without a legislative assembly, an arrangement that lasted until 1758.

As tension increased between Britain and France in the mid-eighteenth century, Nova Scotia became an imperial battleground. In the first year of the War of Austrian Succession (1744–1748), the French captured the fishing station at Canso (see chapter 3), instigated a privateering war against New England vessels, and

FIGURE 6.2. *A Plan of Chebucto Harbour with the Town of Halifax*, by Moses Harris, 1749. A fortified grid town laid out amid the forest. By permission of the British Library, Shelfmark Maps K.Top 119 f.73.



besieged Annapolis Royal. In response, New England forces, principally from Massachusetts, relieved Annapolis. The following year, a combined force of New England militia and a British naval squadron laid siege to Louisbourg; after a six-week bombardment, the fortress city capitulated. The capture of Louisbourg in 1745 was a stunning demonstration of combined operations, a portent of what would be achieved in the following decade. Nevertheless, the widespread satisfaction in New England at the elimination of the French threat was short lived. At the treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle, Britain handed Louisbourg back to France in return for the English East India Company's trading factory at Madras, which the French had captured during the war. The larger imperial considerations of Britain had overridden the colonial interests of Massachusetts.

In response to the continued threat posed by Louisbourg, the British moved the capital of Nova Scotia from the Fundy backwater of Annapolis Royal to the great Atlantic harbor of Chebucto, where they laid out the new town of Halifax in 1749 (figure 6.2). Even more than St. John's, Bridgetown, or Kingston, Halifax was designed as a fortified garrison town: the governor's residence, parade ground, Anglican church, and citadel dominated the town's grid plan and symbolized British political, military, and religious authority in the colony (figure 6.3).⁵ By 1760, a naval dockyard had also been established.⁶ For much of the second half of the eighteenth century, imperial expenditure on the colonial government, the army, and the navy provided the main source of income in Halifax as well as in much of the rest of Nova Scotia.⁷

The British also strengthened their position elsewhere in the colony (figure 6.4). Concerned at the rapid increase of the French Acadian population along the Fundy shore, the imperial government sponsored the migration of some 2,500 "Foreign Protestants" (a fragment of the much larger German migration to British



FIGURE 6.3. *Governor's House and Mather's Meeting House, Halifax*, after Dominic Serres, circa 1762. The institutional apex of governor's residence, Congregational meeting house, and Anglican church in the nascent imperial capital of Nova Scotia. National Archives of Canada, Ottawa/C-002482.

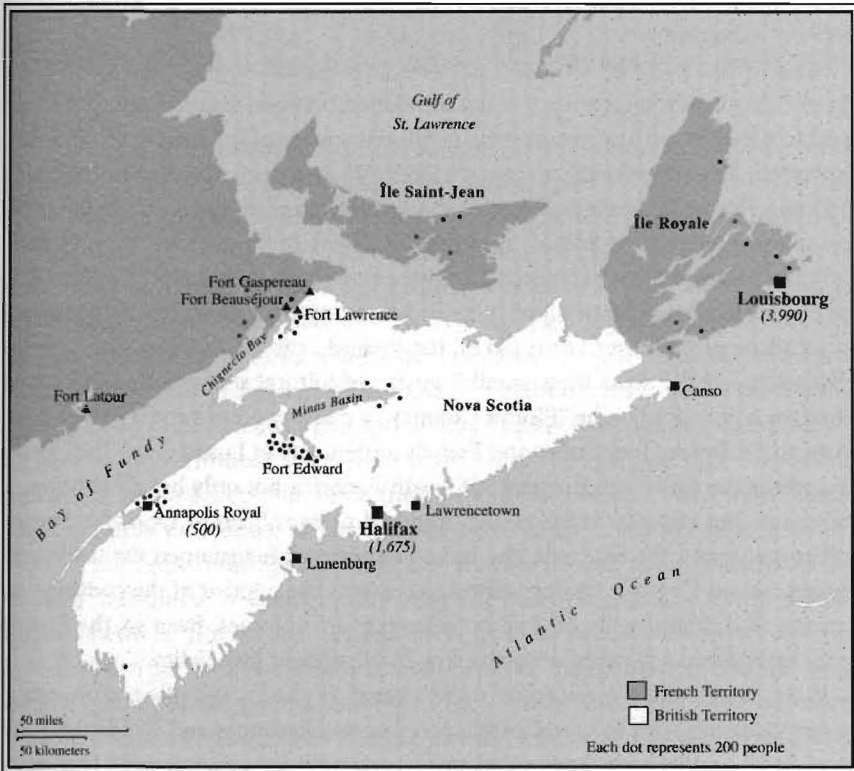


FIGURE 6.4. European settlement in Nova Scotia, circa 1750. After Jean Daigle and Robert LeBlanc, "Acadian Deportation and Return," in *Historical Atlas of Canada*, vol. I: *From the Beginning to 1800*, ed. R. Cole Harris, plate 30 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987).

America) to Nova Scotia between 1750 and 1752. A group of them was settled at Lunenburg, a new town planted to the west of Halifax, the following year.⁸ Situated on the only good patch of agricultural land on the Atlantic shore, Lunenburg quickly became a significant farming settlement and a supplier of produce to Halifax. A less successful plantation was also made to the east of Halifax at Lawrentown.⁹ In addition, forts were placed on the northern periphery of the colony. In 1750, Fort Edward was constructed at the junction of the Avon and St. Croix rivers to control the overland route from the Bay of Fundy to Halifax, while Fort Lawrence was built on the Isthmus of Chignecto to delimit Nova Scotia's northern boundary. The following year, the French countered the British threat by constructing Fort Beauséjour about a mile north of Fort Lawrence. Despite the establishment of forts and agricultural settlements, much of the interior of Nova Scotia was controlled by the Mi'kmaq, who fought an undeclared guerilla war against the British during the early 1750s. Captain John Knox, who was garrisoned at Annapolis Royal for part of the French and Indian War, summarized the situation in 1757: "though we are said to be in possession of Nova Scotia, yet it is in reality of a few fortresses only, the French and Indians disputing the country with us on every occasion, inch by inch."¹⁰ Although the British had managed to establish several nodes of control — Annapolis Royal, Halifax, and Lunenburg — around the periphery of Nova Scotia, which were connected by marine transportation, the British lacked the military power to extend their authority over much of the interior of the province.¹¹

Meanwhile, much farther south and west, in the trans-Appalachian space of the upper Ohio Valley, increasing tension developed between the expanding Atlantic system of the French and the growing territorial empire of the American colonists. During the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the French had flung their waterborne fur trade well west of the Appalachians (figure 6.5).¹² In the 1680s and 1690s, French fur traders, using the waterways of the St. Lawrence, Ottawa, and upper Great Lakes, had pushed a trade route south from Lake Michigan into the headwaters of the Mississippi; in the 1700s and 1710s, a second route was established through the lower Great Lakes, the Wabash, the lower Ohio, and into the Mississippi. At the same time, small French agricultural settlements were set up along the Mississippi in the "Illinois Country," a midway point between French fur posts on the lower Great Lakes and French settlements in Louisiana.¹³ The expansion of the fur trade into the heart of North America not only benefitted French merchants but also furthered French imperial designs.¹⁴ From 1700, the French government used the fur trade, the Indian alliances that sustained the trade, and the garrisoned fur posts strategically placed across the interior of the continent as a means of containing the English in their seaboard colonies. Even so, the French never established a forward defensive line in the upper Ohio Valley.

In the early 1720s, American fur traders began venturing into the region, establishing close ties with the local native peoples, the Shawnees and Delawares.¹⁵ By the early 1740s, Virginian land speculators were coveting the area, hoping to acquire

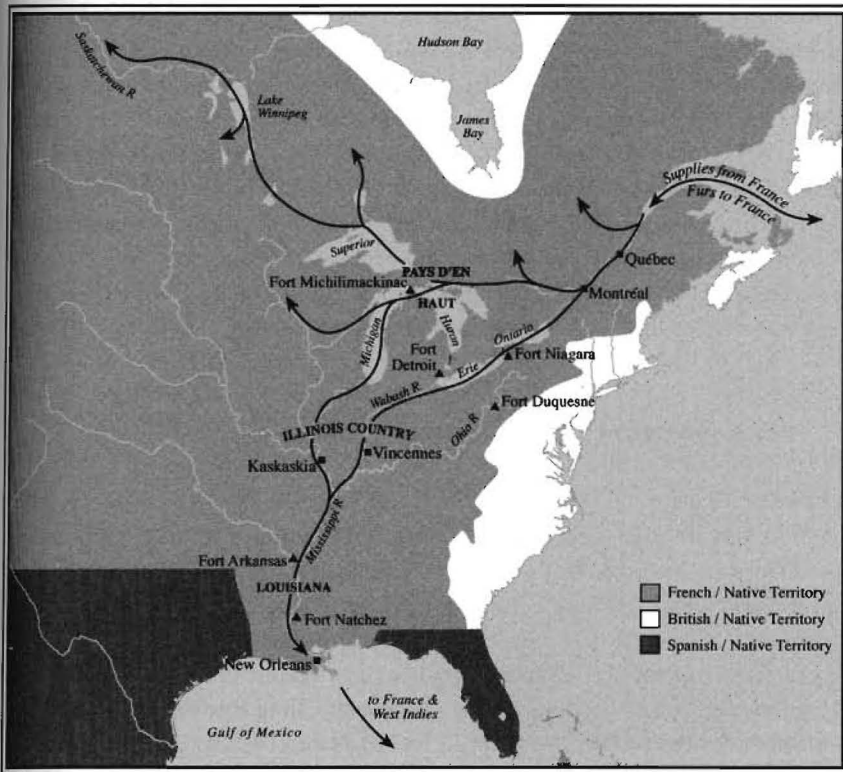


FIGURE 6.5. French fur trade, early 1750s. After Conrad E. Heidenreich and Françoise Noël, "France Secures the Interior, 1740-1755," in *Historical Atlas of Canada*, vol. I: *From the Beginning to 1800*, ed. R. Cole Harris, plate 40 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987).

the territory from the natives and then sell it to incoming settlers.¹⁶ In 1744, representatives of the Iroquois League and the colonial governments of Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia met in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, to draw up an agreement over the territory. While the Iroquois thought they were giving title to the Shenandoah Valley in return for cash and British recognition of Iroquois overlordship of certain southern tribes, they were, in fact, agreeing to the territorial claims of Virginia and Maryland to the Ohio Country. With the treaty signed, the Virginia House of Assembly granted nearly a third of a million acres in the upper Ohio to a group of tidewater planters and speculators, mostly from the Northern Neck of Virginia, who constituted themselves as the Ohio Company in 1747.¹⁷ Just as the expansion of the French fur trade into the Illinois Country fitted into France's larger imperial ambitions, so the designs of the Ohio Company suited Britain's imperial concerns. Pushing the American frontier beyond the Appalachians was officially welcomed in London; settlement of the Ohio country would provide a buffer between the French in the Illinois Country and the seaboard colonies, as well as disrupt French communication between the Mississippi and the Great Lakes. For the British government, the Ohio Country was strategically important in the global chess match with the French; for American speculators, the lands along the river were a potential economic bonanza.¹⁸

Recognizing that the Ohio was a shorter route between their settlements along the lower St. Lawrence and those in the Illinois Country and that British encroachment into the valley threatened their continental position, the French moved to control the river. Between 1749 and 1753, the French and their Indian allies attacked American traders and drove them out of the Ohio Valley; in 1753, a French detachment was sent from Quebec to the upper Ohio to claim the area for France and to build a string of forts from Lake Erie to the forks of the Ohio (the confluence of the Monongahela and Allegheny rivers).¹⁹ Four forts were built, with Fort Duquesne controlling the strategically important forks. Such aggressive action, as well as rising tension along the Nova Scotian frontier, soon led to war.

The French and Indian War, 1754 to 1763

Whereas earlier conflicts between Britain and France in North America had been fought largely through the use of naval power (the taking of Port Royal in 1710 and Louisbourg in 1745), the British were now faced not only with commanding the seas but also with launching a continental campaign against the French and their Indian allies.²⁰ For the first time, the British army was needed on land to defend the western frontier, as well as to launch attacks against the French. The British Atlantic system, which had worked so well in controlling Hudson Bay, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, and the West Indies, had to be deployed far into the interior of North America, a massive challenge for a preindustrial nation-state.

The problem of projecting military power over land soon became apparent. In reaction to the French seizure of the upper Ohio, the British decided on landward attacks on French North America, launching assaults across the Allegheny Mountains toward Fort Duquesne and up the Champlain corridor toward Montreal (figure 6.6). The attack on Fort Duquesne led by British Commander-in-Chief General Braddock in July 1755 ended in spectacular failure. With insecure supply lines and a failure to appreciate the distinctive nature of wilderness warfare, the inexperienced Braddock and his army were cut to pieces by the French and their Indian allies. Two months later, an assault up the Champlain corridor toward the French Fort Saint-Frédéric (Crown Point) ended in muddled victory and no further gain of territory. Over the course of the war, immense resources had to be devoted to these two campaigns before they met with success. In order to capture the forks of the Ohio, the British had to build a transportation infrastructure across the mountainous wastes of western Pennsylvania, as well as detach the Ohio Indians from the French. The “protected advance” on Fort Duquesne comprised the Forbes road hacked through the forest and a series of forts placed every forty miles to protect the lines of communication.²¹ The allegiance of the Delaware and other Ohio Indians was secured through the Treaty of Easton in October 1758, which promised to protect their lands west of the Alleghenies from encroachment. Facing a massive military advance and without Indian allies, the French aban-

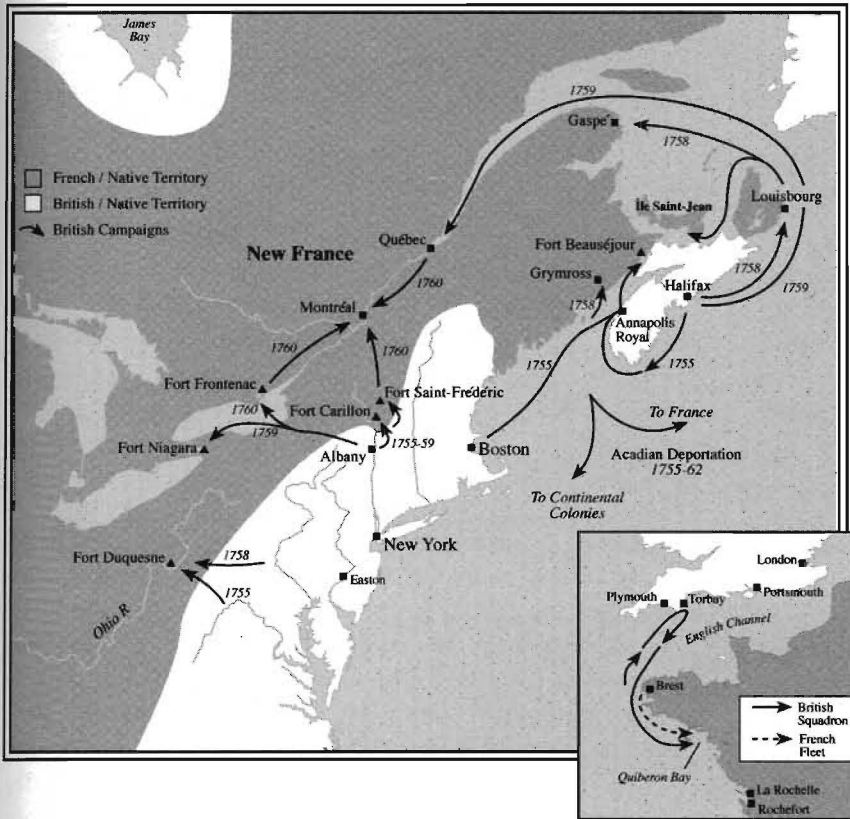


FIGURE 6.6. British campaigns in the French and Indian War, 1754–1763. Inset shows the Battle of Quiberon Bay, 1759. After W. J. Eccles and Susan L. Laskin, “The Seven Years’ War,” in *Historical Atlas of Canada*, vol. I: *From the Beginning to 1800*, ed. R. Cole Harris, plate 42 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987).

done Fort Duquesne in November and pulled out of the Ohio Country.²² The British consolidated their hold over the forks by building Fort Pitt, an enormous pentagonal fortress commanding the banks of the river.²³ Progress up the Champlain corridor was even slower. British attacks against Fort Carillon (Ticonderoga), which commanded the southern entrance to Lake Champlain, were repulsed with heavy losses in 1758, and it was not until the following summer that the British took the fort and then Fort Saint-Frédéric. Even then, the British hesitated to advance northward toward Montreal, and did not resume their campaign until 1760 when two other British armies were converging on the city from the east and the west. By then, the collapse of New France was a foregone conclusion and the advance up the Champlain corridor scarcely mattered.

More critical to eventual British success was the deployment of maritime power (figure 6.6).²⁴ Unlike the army’s campaigns, which were confined to the territorial spaces of North America, the navy’s operations extended over the vast marine surfaces of the Atlantic, Indian, and Pacific oceans. The deployment of a fleet in one theater frequently had strategic implications for naval operations in another. By the mid-eighteenth century, British naval strategists, elaborating on a strategy first used by Drake almost two hundred years earlier, had developed the concept

of a Western Squadron stationed in the Western Approaches to the British Isles.²⁵ With the prevailing westerly wind at its back, the squadron covered the principal French Atlantic port of Brest, located on the western tip of Brittany; protected inbound convoys from North America and the Indies; and was well placed to run up the English Channel to thwart invasion. Moreover, the squadron's vessels could be victualled and refitted by sailing downwind to Plymouth or Torbay. If the French fleet ventured into the Atlantic, the Western Squadron could bring it to battle.

With this maritime watch in place and the French fleet largely restricted to European waters, British naval forces in North America linked up with the army and started laying siege to French bases. The effectiveness of combined operations soon was demonstrated by the British capture of Fort Beauséjour on the Isthmus of Chignecto. Drawing on naval vessels, army regulars, and militia units from New England, the British launched an attack on the French fort in June 1755 and soon captured it. The fort gave the British control over much of Acadia, leaving the French confined to their great fortress at Louisbourg on Île Royale and the Acadian settlers in the region unprotected. Concerned at the large Acadian presence in the hinterland of Halifax and aware that many Acadians had refused to swear loyalty to the British crown, the military governor of the province took the fateful decision to clear the Acadians from their settlements (see figure 6.6). Between October 1755 and the end of 1762, the British army rounded up between 6,000 and 7,000 Acadians, and transported them to several mainland colonies, France, and various islands in the Atlantic.²⁶ A few hundred also escaped to Île Saint-Jean (Prince Edward Island), the Miramichi and Restigouche valleys in present-day New Brunswick, and the lower St. Lawrence. The effectiveness of the clearance owed much to the accessibility of the Acadian settlements from the sea and the extensive wilderness that lay at the back of these settlements; for a sedentary, farming population, there was no place to hide.²⁷

The assault on Fort Beauséjour was but a prelude to further combined naval and army operations against French littoral settlements in the Atlantic region. In the summer of 1758, the British attacked and captured Louisbourg, leaving French settlements in the Gulf of St. Lawrence defenseless. In late summer and fall, attacks were launched against Île Saint-Jean and French fishing stations on the Gaspé peninsula, as well as against Acadian settlements along the north shore of the Bay of Fundy and up the Saint John River (figure 6.7).²⁸ By the end of the year, French Acadia was in British hands. The following summer, one of the largest British fleets ever assembled, comprising some 200 naval vessels and transports, carried 8,500 troops up the Gulf and into the St. Lawrence River. After laying siege to Quebec for two months, the British drew the French into battle and defeated them in front of the walls of the city.²⁹ Since Quebec controlled the entrance to the St. Lawrence and the critical riverine transportation system of New France, the British effectively had throttled French power in North America.

Any attempt by the French to strike back depended on their fleet putting to sea from Brest. Although some vessels had managed to give the Western Squad-

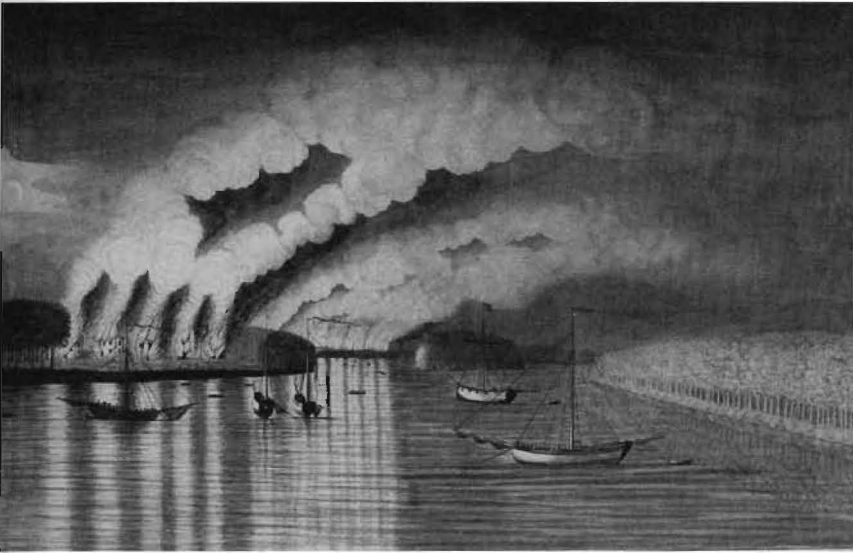


FIGURE 6.7. *A View of the Plundering and Burning of the City of Grimross*, by Thomas Davies, 1758. Davies's eyewitness view shows British troops destroying the Acadian settlement at Grymross, present-day Gagetown, fifty miles up the Saint John River. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.



FIGURE 6.8. *The Battle of Quiberon Bay*, by Dominic Serres, 1759. In a rising storm, the British Western Squadron chases the French fleet along a rocky lee shore. Such marine paintings helped create a powerful cultural image of a British Atlantic. © National Maritime Museum, London.

ron the slip several times in the early stages of the war, the British blockade had tightened considerably by 1759.³⁰ After a storm dispersed the Western Squadron in early November, the French fleet left port to rendezvous with military transports waiting to launch an attack against the British Isles. But a rapid regrouping of the British squadron caught the French fleet south of Brittany and, in the dying light of a stormy day, effectively destroyed it at the battle of Quiberon Bay (figure 6.8).³¹ Without a fleet, the French had no means of invading Britain or recovering New France. Although a small convoy tried to slip through the British naval blockade

in the Gulf of St. Lawrence in July 1760, the French frigate and supply vessels were chased up the Restigouche River and scuttled.³² By then, however, the French position in North America was hopeless. In addition to the British army advancing up the Champlain corridor toward Montreal, a second army was moving from Quebec up the St. Lawrence while a third army was coming down the river from Lake Ontario. In September, the three armies converged on Montreal and the French capitulated.

After the early disasters of the land-based campaign, naval power had rescued the British from a parlous situation in North America and helped deliver a crushing blow against the French. Indeed, the French defeat in Canada was compounded by their loss of the West Indian sugar islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe in 1759, and the capture of their Spanish allies' principal Caribbean base of Havana and their Asian stronghold of Manilla in 1762. The ability of the British state to project naval power across the world's oceans had been demonstrated stunningly; the British Atlantic system had triumphed.

Integrating Canada into the British Atlantic

Under the terms of the Treaty of Paris of 1763, the French ceded Canada to Britain in return for the sugar islands of Guadeloupe, Martinique, and St. Lucia; the fishing islands of St. Pierre and Miquelon; and fishing rights in parts of Newfoundland. The French also allowed Britain to take over Dominica, St. Vincent, Grenada, and Tobago in the West Indies. The Spanish gave up Florida to Britain in return for Havana and Manila. (The French encouraged the Spanish to participate in the treaty by transferring Louisiana to Spain.) While the French had relinquished their North American colonies, the British had acquired an American empire that stretched unimpeded from Hudson Bay to the Gulf of Mexico and from the Atlantic to the Mississippi. Although the British appeared to have gained a massive continental territory, they had, in fact, acquired a French position in North America that was less territorial than linear. The French position consisted of little more than littoral settlements strung along various seaways and waterways in the northern half of the continent: a handful of fishing stations around the Gulf of St. Lawrence, a patch of rockbound agriculture along the lower St. Lawrence, the two medium-sized towns of Quebec and Montreal, and a network of fur posts scattered along several river systems. All these settlements depended on water transportation, and were easily accessible by metropolitan power.

After the conquest, the British began integrating Canada into the political, military, economic, and ideological infrastructure of their Atlantic empire. The army took political and military control of the conquered territory, instituting the "system of the generals."³³ From 1760 until 1791, military governors administered the province of Quebec, introducing a type of government similar to that in Newfoundland and to the one that formerly operated in Nova Scotia. Regular army

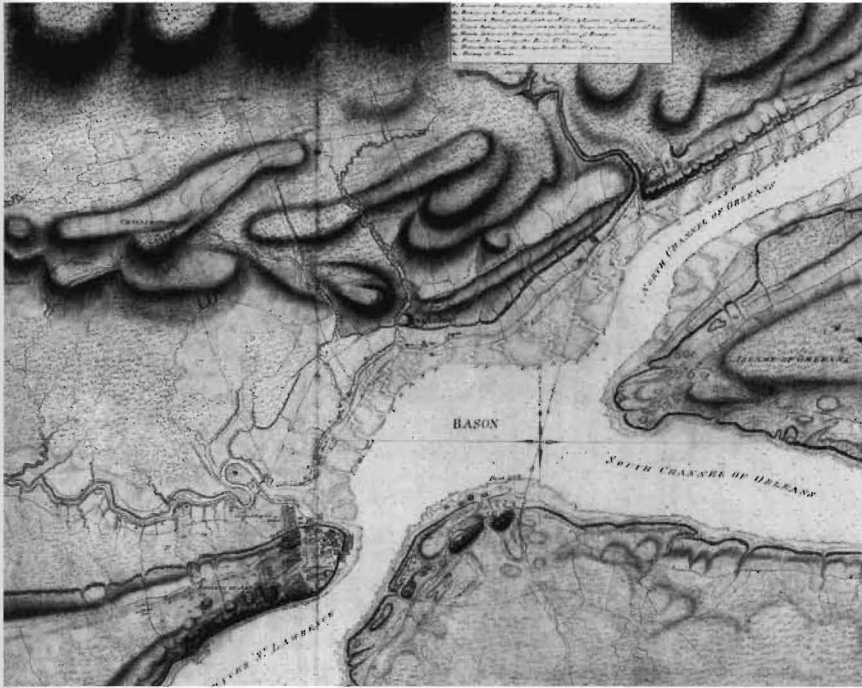


FIGURE 6.9. Murray's Map, Town of Quebec, 1761. National Archives of Canada, Ottawa/NMC 135067.

detachments were stationed across the conquered territories, garrisoning the principal towns of Quebec, Trois-Rivières, and Montreal, as well as the major trading posts of Niagara, Detroit, and Michilimackinac. The Anglican Church was also established in the province, although the Roman Catholic Church was allowed to continue its ministry.

Military surveys of the captured territories were undertaken. The importance of such surveys for controlling territory had become apparent to the British after the Jacobite uprising in the Highlands of Scotland in 1745. Following the defeat of the rebels at the Battle of Culloden in 1746, the British set about pacifying the region: clan warriors were disarmed, garrisons were established at key strategic points, and a comprehensive survey was begun.³⁴ Between 1747 and 1755, military engineers under the command of cartographer William Roy carried out an extensive survey of Scotland.³⁵ By the time the French and Indian War broke out in 1754, the British had the cartographic expertise to make detailed, large-scale maps of North America. As maritime power was the key to controlling the northeastern part of the continent, the military surveys concentrated on the coasts and waterways (figure 6.9). In the Atlantic approaches, the Royal Navy and the Royal Engineers undertook several hydrographic surveys, including James Cook's mapping of the St. Lawrence River (1759–1760) and coasts of Newfoundland (1763–1768); Samuel Holland's surveys of the Island of St. John (Prince Edward Island), the Magdalen Islands, and Cape Breton (1764–1766); and J. F. W. DesBarres' survey

of coastal Nova Scotia (1764–1774). Many of these maps were collected into a great nautical compendium, *The Atlantic Neptune*, which first began appearing in print in 1777 (see figure 4.5).³⁶ Meanwhile, several army engineers worked in the province of Quebec on General Murray's survey of the towns and countryside along the lower St. Lawrence. The survey included an accompanying description and census of every parish.³⁷ These various surveys demonstrated the ability of the British state to survey conquered territory, gather information about subject peoples, and to position the littoral spaces of northeastern North America cartographically within Britain's larger Atlantic empire.

In addition to surveying captured French territory, the British produced a considerable visual record of the towns and countryside. As part of the training at the Royal Military Academy in Woolwich, England, engineers and artillery officers were taught topographical drawing as a means of recording terrain.³⁸ During their participation in the French and Indian War and subsequent garrisoning of Canada, several of these officers depicted the landscapes of the lower St. Lawrence, providing "a storehouse of information" for the military.³⁹ Some of these views were engraved and published in the collection *Scenographia Americana* in 1768, the first comprehensive depiction of Britain's North American colonies.⁴⁰ Numerous unpublished watercolors also circulated back in England. Among these was the work of artillery officer Thomas Davies, who depicted many of the principal sites of the French and Indian War, including Halifax, Louisbourg, the Hudson River, Fort Ticonderoga, Niagara Falls, the St. Lawrence River, Quebec, and Montreal (figure 6.10).⁴¹ As with mapping, Davies and his fellow officers were surveying captured French territory and providing a visual record that could be useful in further military operations in the province. Indeed, British surveys of the province of Quebec were far better than any that existed for the continental colonies, a shortcoming that soon became apparent in the American War of Independence. Moreover, topographical drawings helped incorporate Quebec into a British cultural milieu. Unfamiliar landscapes were made familiar, key artistic vantage points were established. Such topographic drawings laid the artistic foundations for the picturesque and sublime formulations of Quebec, the lower St. Lawrence, and Niagara Falls that became common in the early nineteenth century.⁴²

Britain took a further interest in the natural history of the region. Since the second voyage to Roanoke in 1585 and the production of Hariot's description of Virginia and John White's watercolors, the English had taken a scientific interest in the flora, fauna, and native peoples of the New World, producing, among many works, Mark Catesby's *Natural History of Carolina, Florida and the Bahama Islands* in 1747.⁴³ With naval survey and fishery protection vessels operating in the western Atlantic during the 1760s, this scientific interest was extended to Newfoundland and Labrador. In 1766, the young Joseph Banks took advantage of a naval cruise along the island's east coast and southern shore of Labrador in order to collect specimens for his developing natural history collection back in London.⁴⁴ His voyage coincided with one of Cook's surveying expeditions to Newfoundland, and it

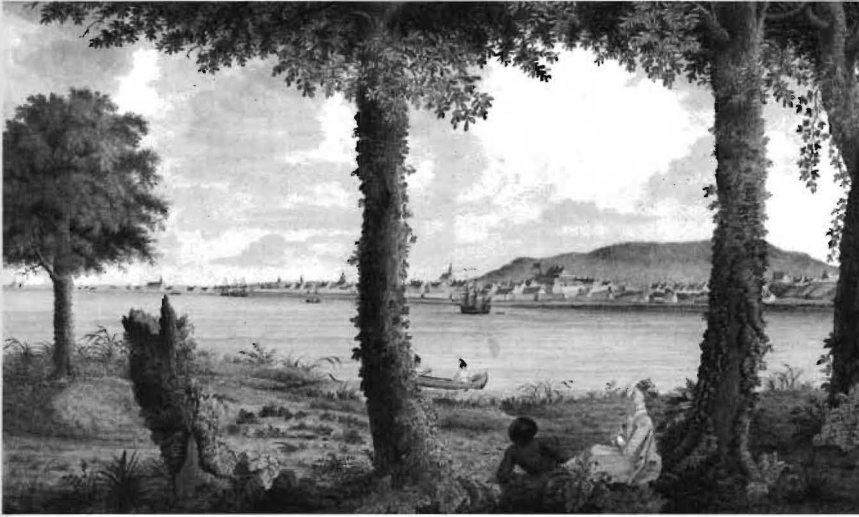


FIGURE 6.10. *A View of Montreal in Canada, Taken from Isle St. Helena in 1762*, by Thomas Davies. Situated at the head of navigation on the St. Lawrence River and at the junction of the St. Lawrence and Ottawa rivers, Montreal served as the principal point of collection and distribution for the Canadian fur trade. The city's role as a place of contact between Europeans and natives is suggested by the well-dressed couple in the foreground and the two Indians paddling a canoe. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

is quite possible that the two men met at a reception hosted by the naval governor in St. John's to celebrate the anniversary of the king's coronation.⁴⁵ Although Cook and Banks did not cooperate actively in Newfoundland, their voyages to the island suggest that the imperial state and metropolitan science were beginning to fashion a network of scientific knowledge and cartographic representation that was to have an enormous impact on the future development of the British Empire. The hydrographic surveys, topographic depictions, and scientific research conducted in the littoral realm of northeastern North America in the late 1750s and early 1760s undoubtedly laid the foundations for the triumphs of Cook and Banks in the Pacific in the early 1770s.⁴⁶

Beyond the province of Quebec, British authority extended over the northwest territory (*Pays d'en Haut*). Although several of the colonial governments along the eastern seaboard claimed jurisdiction over the lands beyond the Appalachians, the British government instituted direct rule over the territory and its Indian inhabitants.⁴⁷ Unused to the complex system of French-native alliances that made possible a French fur-trading and military presence in the interior, the British quickly aggravated native sensibilities.⁴⁸ In an effort to save British government expenditure in North America, General Amherst, the Commander-in-Chief, ordered a reduction in the presents given to interior tribes. The Indians soon suffered privations from the lack of shot, powder, and rum. Meanwhile, American settlers and land speculators, contrary to the terms of the Treaty of Easton, were moving

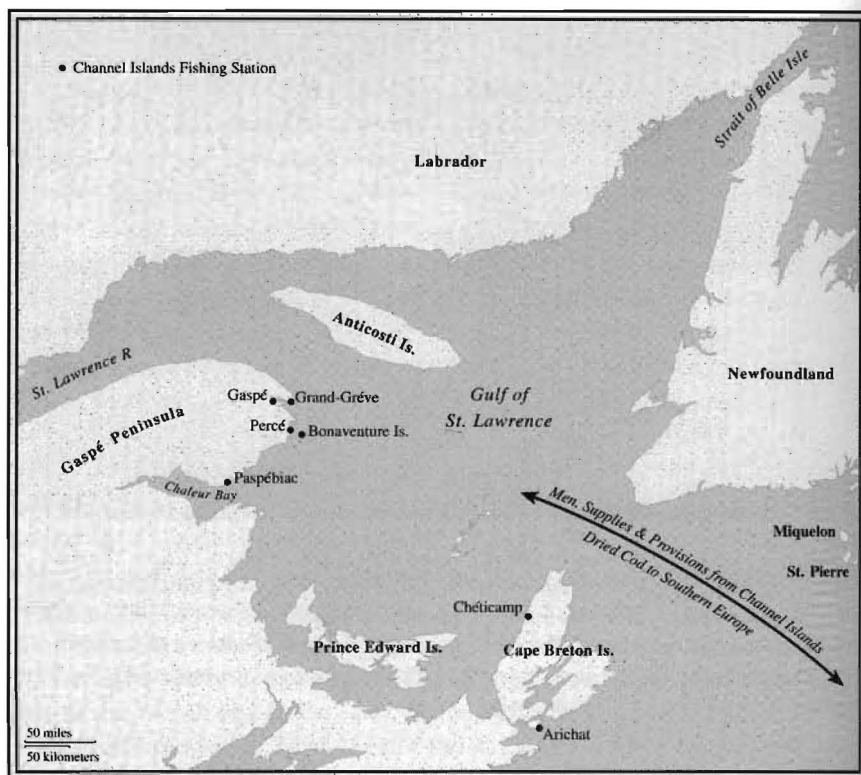


FIGURE 6.11. Channel Islands migratory fishery in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, circa 1770. After Mario Lalancette, "Exploitation of the Gulf of St. Lawrence," in *Historical Atlas of Canada*, vol. I: *From the Beginning to 1800*, ed. R. Cole Harris, plate 54 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987). Also relevant are David Lee, *The Robins in Gaspé 1766 to 1825* (Markham, Ont.: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1984); and Rosemary Ommer, "The Cod Trade in the New World," in *A People of the Sea: The Maritime History of the Channel Islands*, ed. A. G. Jamieson, 245–68 (London: Methuen & Co., 1986).

into the upper Ohio Valley. During the summer of 1763, unrest spread among the Indians of the northwest, and turned into outright rebellion under the leadership of Ottawa war chief Pontiac.⁴⁹ Several forts, including the key trading post of Fort Michilimackinac, were captured, while Forts Pitt and Detroit were besieged. Caught by surprise, the British struggled to reimpose their authority. During the fall and over the course of the following summer, the British relieved the sieges, regained the captured forts, and pacified the Indians. As these events were unfolding, the British government issued the Royal Proclamation in November 1763. Consolidating years of evolving British policy toward the trans-Appalachian west, the proclamation set aside all lands west of the Appalachians as a Native Reserve, established garrisons to protect Indian land, and introduced regulations governing the fur trade. By preserving the trans-Appalachian west for native peoples and the fur trade, and with regular army detachments garrisoning the trade posts, the

British had assumed the former position of the French and brought the interior under some measure of metropolitan control.

The hand of the metropolis was also evident in the economic reorganization of Canada. The two great staples of New France—the cod fishery and the fur trade—were soon in the hands of British merchants. By 1765, Channel Island merchants, who had operated previously along the South Coast of Newfoundland, had entered the Gulf of St. Lawrence and taken over the former French fishing stations on Cape Breton Island and around the Gaspé peninsula (figures 6.11 and 6.12).⁵⁰ The principal Channel Island firm of Charles Robin & Co. established its New World base at Paspébiac on Chaleur Bay, and opened numerous smaller stations along the Gaspé coast. The company extended the migratory fishery into the Gulf, sending out men, supplies, and provisions to the fishing stations each year, as well as establishing a resident fishery to supply local French and Acadian fishermen. As in Newfoundland, little agricultural potential existed along the Gaspé coast or in Cape Breton, and resident fishermen were largely dependent on fish merchants for provisions and dry goods; many fishermen soon found themselves in debt. Like much of the dried fish from Newfoundland, the cod dried along the coast of the Gaspé and the Gulf shore of Cape Breton was of prime merchantable quality suitable for the lucrative markets in the Iberian Peninsula and the Mediterranean. Although merchants resident in Halifax and Quebec tried to break into the Gulf fishery, they never had the capital, trade connections, or local knowledge



FIGURE 6.12. A View of the Pierced Island, a Remarkable Rock in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, engraving after Hervey Smyth, 1760. This view from *Scenographia Americana* shows a British warship cruising past a fishing shallop (right) and the former French fishing stations at Bonaventure Island (left) and Percé (right). These stations were taken over by merchants from the Channel Islands in the mid-1760s. National Archives of Canada, Ottawa/C-000784.

to displace the Jerseymen. The Channel Island monopoly remained intact until the late nineteenth century.

The other great staple—the fur trade—was also tied back to the metropolis. In 1763, the British took over the French fur trade along the St. Lawrence, Ottawa, and Great Lakes (figure 6.13). English, Scottish, and American merchants opened establishments in Montreal, drawing heavily on capital and credit provided by British houses.⁵¹ Commission agents in London forwarded manufactured goods to merchants in Montreal, who in turn supplied traders or wintering partners (*bourgeois*) in the northwest. In return, furs acquired by the traders were sent to Montreal, and then forwarded across the Atlantic to London. As with the fur trade through Hudson Bay, London ultimately controlled the economic system. Unlike the Hudson's Bay Company, however, the Montrealers operated in a highly competitive environment, competing among themselves and with the Company; it was not until the mid-1770s that Montreal merchants, such as McTavish and the Frobisher Brothers, began to pool their resources and form syndicates to rationalize the trade. By reducing competition, the Montrealers could raise prices on their goods and purchase more furs from their native suppliers.⁵² It also placed them in a stronger position in dealing with the London capital market. The McTavish and Frobisher syndicate was the beginning of the North West Company, which would dominate the Canadian fur trade after the American Revolution.⁵³

While the Hudson's Bay Company "slept by the edge of a frozen sea" waiting for Indians to bring furs to trade each spring, the Montrealers, like the French before them, had to reach far into the continent to trade.⁵⁴ Much of the transportation was by birchbark canoe, so cargoes were relatively light: The selection and quantity of trade goods were modest compared to those at the bayside posts, while the furs had to be of high value to cover the transportation costs. Despite these handicaps, the Montrealers maintained the old French trading posts and extended the trade routes deep into the interior. This linear network of rivers, portages, and lakes stretched more than a thousand miles from Montreal to the fur country in the northwest. The first section of the Montreal mainline ran along the Ottawa River, and then across Lake Nipissing, Georgian Bay, and Lake Huron, where it terminated at Michilimackinac situated at the tip of the Michigan peninsula. Michilimackinac served as the great transshipment point "between the upper countries and the lower. Here, the outfits [were] prepared for the countries of Lake Michigan and the Mississippi, Lake Superior and the north-west; . . . here, the returns, in furs [were] collected, and embarked for Montreal."⁵⁵ From Michilimackinac, the mainline continued along the north shore of Lake Superior to Grand Portage, and then across Rainy Lake, Lake of the Woods, and Lake Winnipeg to the Saskatchewan River. By the late 1760s, the Montrealers had cut across the headwaters of several rivers draining into Hudson Bay, and were competing directly for bayside trade.⁵⁶ As one Company trader ruefully remarked, "the Canada pedlars are got in the very heart of the trading Indians' country."⁵⁷

FIGURE 6.13. Trans-Atlantic fur trade, circa 1770.

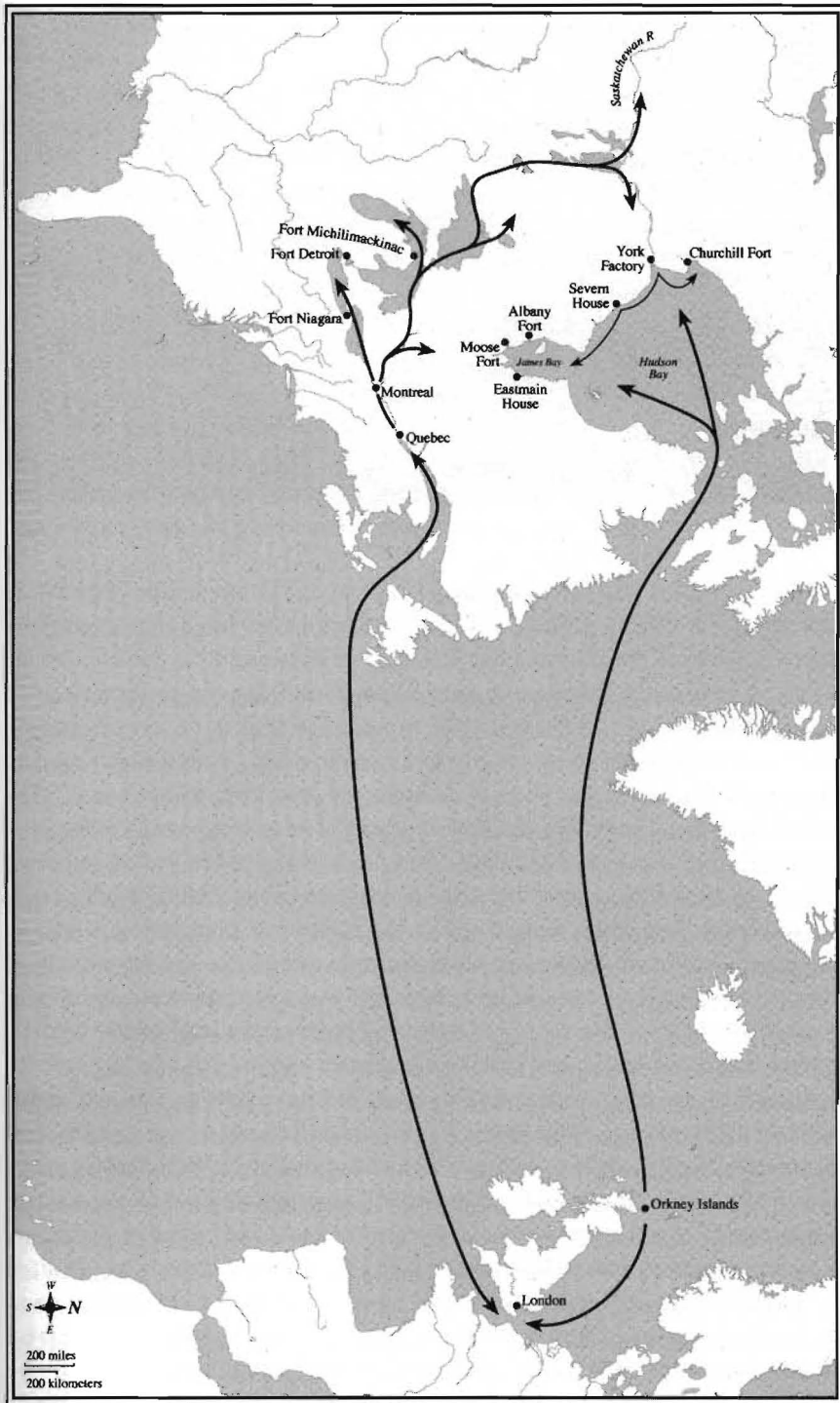


FIGURE 6.14. A View of Detroit July 25th 1794, by E. H. A British garrison and trading post, deep in the continental interior, connected by water transport and portage to Montreal and the St. Lawrence River. Courtesy of the Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library.



The Montrealers inherited the French fur posts and although these were stockaded structures similar to those on the Bay, their internal organization was quite different. Whereas the Hudson's Bay Company maintained strict control over its posts and divided the living areas along hierarchical lines, the old French posts contained numerous buildings belonging to individual traders, the church, and the military. After the British take-over, the posts continued to be populated by traders and Jesuit missionaries, as well as by British army detachments (figure 6.14). The traders formed the largest group; they frequently had native wives and families, and came from diverse backgrounds. Many traders were either Americans from Albany and New York or immigrant Scots, while the canoe men (*engagés*) were a mix of French-Canadians, recruited from the parishes in and around Montreal, and French-Indians.⁵⁸ The balanced demographic structure and ethnic mix of these populations was much different from the predominantly male and British world of the Hudson's Bay Company posts, and reflected the long history of interaction between the French and their Indian allies.

Apart from the fur trade and the fishery, British merchants increasingly dominated the economic life of the towns and countryside. Scottish and English merchants established themselves in Quebec and Montreal, controlling the dry goods trade from Britain, the shipping and shipbuilding industries, and the nascent timber trade.⁵⁹ Army garrisons in the two towns had to be supplied, and many victualing contracts went to British merchants. By the early 1770s, "Quebec traders" formed a powerful opposition group against the military administration in the province, and lobbied for representative government. But like the merchant communities in the West Indies, criticism of imperial power was tempered by the merchants' almost complete economic dependence on Britain.⁶⁰ The countryside of Quebec was less important. Unlike the seaboard colonies, which had large rural

populations, dynamic frontiers, and extensive export trades, the province had a relatively small rural population of some 60,000 in 1760, a limited frontier, and few agricultural exports. Some produce was marketed in Quebec and Montreal, but very little went beyond the lower St. Lawrence. In these circumstances, the agricultural economy of the region was relatively uncommercial and attracted little British investment. A handful of British officers took up estates or seigneuries, more for social status than for economic gain.

In the fifteen years between the Conquest and the outbreak of the American Revolution, the British integrated the Gulf of St. Lawrence, the province of Quebec, and the northwest into their Atlantic empire. Despite the political and cultural differences between the French and the British, the take-over was relatively smooth, involving the maintenance rather than the disruption of the colony's economic and social structures. The reliance on long-distance staple trades, the weakness of the local agricultural economy, and the accessibility of much of Canada by waterborne transportation ensured a good fit with the British Atlantic world. Essentially, one European metropolitan system had been replaced by another.⁶¹

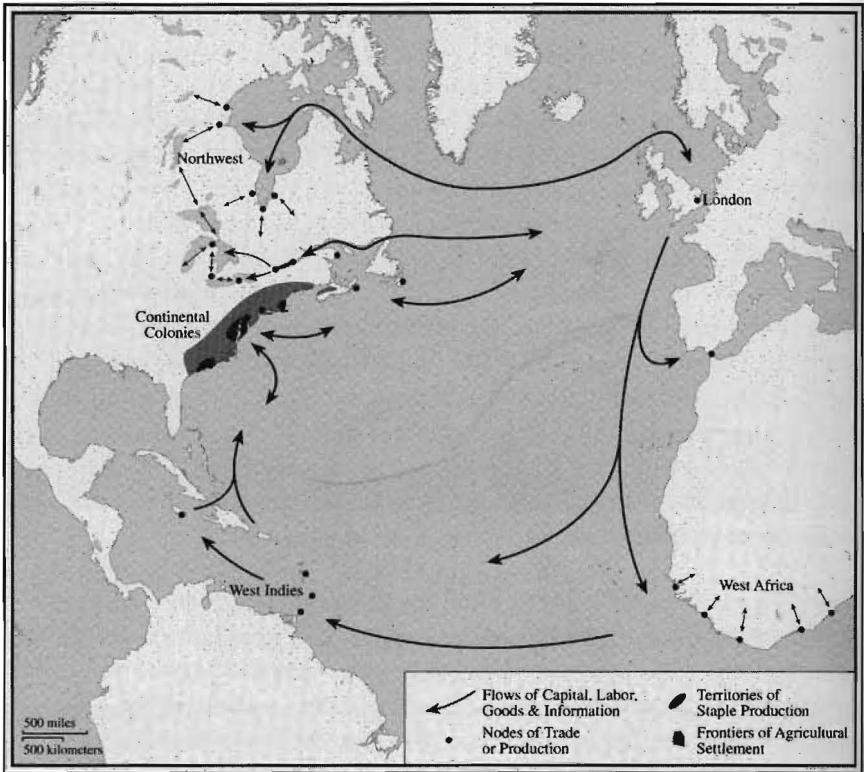
The British Atlantic and the American Frontier in the 1760s

The 1760s marked the zenith of British imperial power in North America. For contemporaries in Britain, the triumph of British arms over the French and the Spanish was an affirmation of innate British superiority and a conquest without parallel in history; as William Pitt, the war-time leader, boasted in Parliament, Britain "had over-run more world" in three years than the Romans had "conquered in a century."⁶² Indeed, the British increasingly saw themselves as new Romans and London as the new Rome.⁶³ Yet, in retrospect, the 1760s marked a turning point between the collapse of French power in North America and the rise of American dominance on the continent. It seems an appropriate point, therefore, to take stock of the geographic spaces that had emerged in the different regions of British America in the early modern period.

With the conquest of New France, the British Atlantic had reached its greatest extent (figure 6.15). In North America and the Caribbean, the area that can be delimited as the British Atlantic included the British settlements in Hudson Bay, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, and the West Indies, as well as the former French settlements that stretched in a great arc from the Gulf of St. Lawrence, through the St. Lawrence–Great Lakes region, to the Ohio and the Mississippi. In other parts of the Atlantic, the British controlled Bermuda, the Bahamas, and several settlements along the coast of West Africa. In the Indian Ocean, the beachheads at Madras, Bombay, and Calcutta had been supplemented, after Clive's victory at Plassey in 1757, with territorial control of Bengal.⁶⁴

All of these various territories comprised islands or littoral spaces. With the exception of the conquered agricultural lands of Quebec and Bengal, these

FIGURE 6.15. A geographical model of Britain's Atlantic empire, circa 1770.



maritime enclaves had limited agricultural room. The West Indian islands were completely settled, Nova Scotia had little agricultural potential, and Newfoundland and Hudson Bay were virtually useless for farming. From the British perspective, the British Atlantic was not a world of expanding agricultural frontiers but rather a collection of commercial nodes, consisting of small islands of plantation agriculture in the West Indies, fishing stations in Newfoundland and the Gulf of St. Lawrence, and trading factories along the rivers and lakes of northern North America and along the coasts of Hudson Bay, West Africa, and India.⁶⁵ All of these nodes faced outward to the sea and the shipping lanes that tied them, across thousands of miles of ocean, to the British Isles.

The commercial importance of these nodes was striking. From 1772 to 1774, 52 percent of all imports into England came from colonial possessions in North America and India. Of these imports, 71 percent came from areas in the British Atlantic. Almost half the imports from the British Atlantic comprised sugar from the West Indies (49 percent); the other significant import was tobacco from the Chesapeake (11 percent), an area dominated by British firms.⁶⁶ In addition, trades in dried fish and slaves contributed further earnings from the British Atlantic. Apart from tobacco, the continental colonies were not a major source of products, although they were taking a major share of English exports by the late eighteenth

century.⁶⁷ Almost all these various long-distance trades were in the hands of metropolitan merchants and chartered companies. The great London and outport merchants controlled the sugar, tobacco, and slave trades; the West Countrymen and Channel Islanders held the dried fish trade; and the Hudson Bay Company had a monopoly over bayside trade. London and the outports also organized much of the dry goods trade to the American colonies.

Within these various nodes, societies were ordered and hierarchical. The staple trades in sugar, fish, and furs provided opportunity for mercantile and landed capital but little chance for labor.⁶⁸ As a result, the societies that developed were dominated by small elites—merchants, planters, factors—who ruled over masses of enslaved and indentured laborers. Keeping these work forces in line produced the slave codes of the West Indies and the rules and regulations of the Hudson's Bay Company. Cultural mores further reinforced this social order. The elites of the British Atlantic were a transient group, as familiar with the world of the metropolis as with the world of the colonies, and well able through their economic wealth and social position to maintain metropolitan customs and culture on the periphery. Moreover, the establishment of the Anglican Church and a general resistance to other religious denominations strengthened the authority of the elites. In contrast, the labor forces in the fishery, fur trade, and sugar plantations were economically so weak that they were in little position to challenge the colonial hierarchy.

Such economic and social structures were reinforced by political and military power. Given the economic importance of the British Atlantic, Britain had little reason to allow much political development; indeed, considerable parts of the British Atlantic—Newfoundland, Quebec, Hudson Bay, parts of India—were under direct administration or corporate government. Centralized political control from the metropolis, rather than local authority in the colonies, marked the British Atlantic empire. Such political control was made possible through the deployment of military power: the navy commanded the sea lanes, strategically placed garrisons controlled important ports and waterways. For American John Adams, glorying in the “Spirit of Liberty” among the population of New England after the Stamp Act crisis of the mid-1760s, the implication of such force was clear. According to Adams, the inhabitants of Quebec were “awed by an Army” while those in Nova Scotia were “kept in fear by a Fleet and an Army.”⁶⁹

From the British perspective, the British Atlantic was a commercial, oceanic, ordered, hierarchical, and militarized space. It was a “grand marine empire” that was readily grasped in Britain through the vessels that unloaded their cargoes in London, Bristol, Liverpool, Glasgow, Poole, and other ports; the colonial products of sugar, tobacco, tea, wines, and calicoes consumed at home; the myriad individual experiences of planters, merchants, factors, and servants; the overseas deployment of warships and regiments; and the illustrations and maps representing the Atlantic world that increasingly circulated in printed form.⁷⁰ In the 1760s and early 1770s, the words of James Thomson's *Rule Britannia*, composed some twenty years

earlier, seemed particularly apposite: Britain had arisen from the azure main and was ruling the waves.⁷¹

And yet, along the American eastern seaboard, vastly different spaces had emerged (see figure 6.15). From the original core settlements established along the coast in the seventeenth century, several western-moving frontiers had coalesced by the late eighteenth century to create a settlement frontier stretching from Machias, Maine, to St. Augustine, East Florida, and extending west to the Forks of the Ohio in western Pennsylvania.⁷² This was an enormous agricultural area, far larger than anything that existed in the British Atlantic, and it appeared to have almost unlimited room for expansion. By the early 1760s, the barrier of the Appalachian Mountains had been breached, and European and American settlers were pouring into the western reaches of New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia. Ostensibly, the western boundary of British America was the Mississippi River, many hundreds of miles farther west. For European immigrants and landless Americans, the agricultural potential of the trans-Appalachian west appeared limitless.

Within this continental frontier, several territories of staple production and nodes of trade had emerged over the course of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The principal staples of the New England fishery, the Chesapeake tobacco plantations, and the Carolina rice plantations supported colonial elites of merchants and planters, while the port towns that handled several of these trades sustained an urban mercantile class. Economically and politically, these elites straddled the worlds of the Atlantic and the continental interior; they were as much concerned with trans-Atlantic connections to Britain as with expansion of the frontier. But these links to the continental interior gave colonial elites a much greater geographic context in which to maneuver than existed on the islands of the British Atlantic. Well able to see the immense economic opportunities that lay in the backcountry, merchants and planters along the seaboard enjoyed considerably more economic independence than elites in Newfoundland or the West Indies.⁷³ Furthermore, these seaboard elites, through their dominance of the colonial assemblies, had acquired a good deal of political power and increasingly saw themselves as equal partners with London in the running of the British American empire.

The composition of American society was also much different. Although the towns and the areas of staple production supported hierarchical societies, only Charleston and the low country came close to approximating the extreme social divisions common in the West Indies and other parts of the British Atlantic. Moreover, American social hierarchies were set within a larger population that was much less stratified and deferential. Unlike the British Atlantic, the agricultural spaces of the seaboard provided European immigrants and American settlers with an opportunity to achieve a measure of economic independence. Widespread ownership of property created a more egalitarian society, and allowed male freeholders to participate in the political process, which led to a more democratic

form of government.⁷⁴ The stratified, deferential society of the British Atlantic or Britain itself simply could not be replicated in the American colonies.

Social hierarchy and authority were weakened further by the American cultural mix. In a population that was increasingly polyglot, the imposition of British cultural norms was especially difficult. To be sure, Americans were happy to participate in British material culture, consuming English manufactured goods and constructing houses in the Georgian style, but there were also well-developed regional vernacular cultures that drew little on Britain. Throughout the seaboard colonies, dialects, agricultural techniques, foodways, and methods of building differed from those across the Atlantic. Moreover, there was considerable resistance to British cultural institutions. The numerous dissenting churches opposed any strengthening of Anglican religious authority in the colonies.⁷⁵ Unlike the Anglican hierarchy of England, with its “degrees of Eminence among the Clergy,” the colonial Anglican Church had only “Priests and nothing more.” The intimate relationship between the Anglican Church and monarchy, which was so strong in the British Atlantic world, had been “totally dissolved.” For British imperial official William Knox, writing in the late 1770s, religious toleration in the colonies had allowed “Every Man . . . to be his own Pope, [thus] he becomes disposed to wish to be his own King, and so great a latitude in the choice of a religious system naturally begets republican and independent ideas in politics.”⁷⁶

Of course, the worlds of the British Atlantic and the American eastern seaboard were not self-contained. American merchants participated in trans-Atlantic and interregional commerce, particularly with the West Indies and Newfoundland; American consumers bought British manufactured goods; and American colonial legislatures lobbied Parliament in Britain. Likewise, British merchants controlled much of the dry goods trades to the colonies and dominated the staple economy of the Chesapeake; British consumers purchased American tobacco; and British officials oversaw colonial governments. Nevertheless, these were different spaces occupied by different peoples with different societies and cultures; the norms of the British Atlantic world were not those of the American continental frontier.⁷⁷ The British and American elites that dominated this bifurcated world had disparate experiences and perceptions; each group viewed British America through its own, particular lens and beheld a different vision of empire.

Tightening the Cordon

British victory in the French and Indian War dramatically changed the geopolitical context in North America. With the French and Spanish removed, the British had responsibility for managing the former French territories of Acadia, Canada, and the trans-Appalachian west, as well as the former Spanish Florida. Within these territories, imperial authority had to be exercised over alien populations, comprising mostly French Canadians and native peoples. At the same time, the

overwhelming British victory almost inevitably meant that the French and the Spanish would go to war again to redress the balance of power.

For the British, the new geopolitical situation carried immense financial cost. Not only had they to deal with the huge expenses generated by the war, but also with the costs associated with garrisoning troops in North America and maintaining naval supremacy over the French and the Spanish. By 1760, Britain had spent more than £160 million fighting the war, twice the country's gross national product.⁷⁸ Much of this expenditure had been borrowed, leaving the government with a national debt of approximately £146 million.⁷⁹ In 1762, the interest charges on this debt were consuming almost half of all government net income.⁸⁰ Meanwhile, the costs of maintaining the army in North America were consuming more than £200,000 a year, and the navy and dockyards also required substantial sums.⁸¹

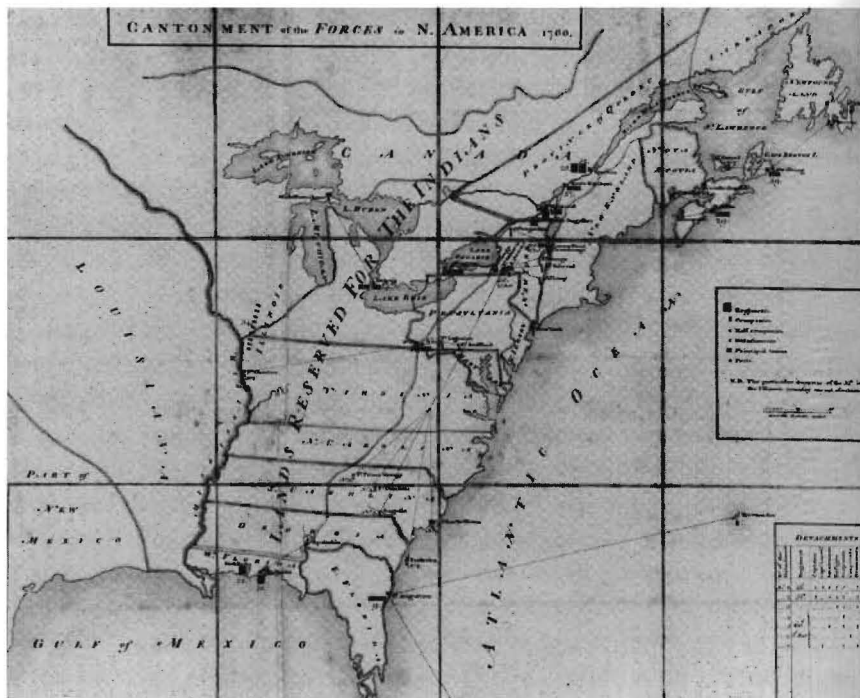
By the mid-eighteenth century, British politicians increasingly had become aware of the link between geopolitical ascendancy and commercial power.⁸² Any weakness in Britain's commercial economy, it was thought, would inevitably lead to a decline in the nation's political and military status. As much of the government's revenue came from customs and excise duties, the health of the country's commercial economy was of critical importance. Reluctant to impose further taxes on trade, the British government decided in the early 1760s to turn to its North American colonies for extra revenue. As the French and Indian War had been fought to defend the colonies and British army units were keeping the peace on the frontier, this action had widespread political support in Britain. Moreover, the only revenues raised from the colonies were customs duties, which were widely evaded and scarcely paid for their collection. In an attempt to improve its fiscal position, the British government decided to reduce expenditure in the colonies and to enhance the collection of customs duties as well as levy new taxes.

The series of measures that were implemented—the Royal Proclamation of 1763, the Sugar Act of 1764, the Stamp Act of 1765, the Townshend Acts of 1767—revealed the strengths and weaknesses of metropolitan government in North America. The integration of Canada into the British Atlantic gave the imperial government a geographic position on the continent that stretched in an enormous arc from the trans-Appalachian west through the Great Lakes, the St. Lawrence River, the Gulf of St. Lawrence to Nova Scotia and Newfoundland. Metropolitan control over Quebec and Nova Scotia was particularly important. The acquisition of the fortified town of Quebec and the establishment of Halifax provided the British government with army and navy bases from which to project military power. From Quebec, the army could maintain garrisons deep into the interior; from Halifax, the navy could patrol the eastern approaches to the continent as well as the eastern seaboard. Although peripheral to the American colonies, Nova Scotia and Quebec allowed the British government to deploy military power along both seaward and landward sides of the continental colonies.⁸³ The significance of these bases would soon become apparent as the government began to implement its legislative program.

The two most effective measures—the Royal Proclamation and the Sugar Act—could be enforced because Britain had the military power to hand. The Proclamation aimed to reduce friction between American settlers and Indians, control the fur trade, and save the imperial government from an expensive frontier war. Although the British government could not prevent American settlers trickling into the upper Ohio Valley, it could withhold legal title to land, which effectively stopped speculation by the Virginia land companies.⁸⁴ Moreover, American settlers were exposed to Indian attack and pressure from the British garrison at Fort Pitt to leave the area. The imperial government also had considerable success in implementing the Sugar Act. During the eighteenth century, American merchants honored the navigation acts more in the breach than in the observance, and this was particularly true of the sugar trade. Molasses was in great demand for making rum in the northern colonies and was cheaper to purchase from the French West Indies than the English West Indies, so American merchants traded with the French, even when Britain and France were at war. Although French imports were liable to stiff duties, colonial merchants frequently evaded them through smuggling. To put teeth into the colonial customs service and to increase revenue from the sugar trade, the imperial government introduced the Sugar Act and deployed the navy to enforce it.⁸⁵ With the naval dockyard and the Court of Vice-Admiralty for All America established in Halifax, the navy had a secure base from which to patrol the eastern seaboard and a sympathetic court in which to try cases. Although the navy did not have sufficient vessels to close down the trade, it had enough to prevent the transshipment of goods at the French islands of St. Pierre and Miquelon and to deter many American smugglers along the coast of New England. Despite bitter complaints from colonial merchants, enforcement soon produced increased revenue. The successful implementation of the Royal Proclamation and the Sugar Act showed that the metropolitan government could wield power reasonably effectively in the continental interior and along the eastern seaboard.

The Stamp Act and Townshend Acts, on the other hand, were failures simply because there was no way to readily enforce them. The purpose of the Stamp Act was to raise revenue by charging a fee for stamped paper in commercial transactions, legal actions, and newspaper publications. Yet the major centers of commerce—Boston, New York, Philadelphia—were not spaces that could be easily controlled by either the British army or navy. In 1765, the great bulk of Britain's troops in North America were garrisoning the Atlantic empire: Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, Quebec, the northwest, and East and West Florida (figure 6.16). These troops, as General Gage, the Commander-in-Chief, ruefully observed were “at a great distance and a good deal Dispersed.”⁸⁶ Boston and Philadelphia had no British troops, while New York had only one company. Moreover, the military bases in the cities were far from being effective platforms to project power. Fort George in New York was in a ramshackle state, while Castle William in Boston was located in the outer harbor. Of more use were the naval vessels moored in New York harbor, which acted as floating fortresses and refuges for government officials. As

FIGURE 6.16. *Cantonment of the Forces in N. America 1766.* A British military map showing the deployment of British troops in North America, the Proclamation Line running from the Gulf of Mexico to Lake Ontario, and the lands set aside for the Indians. Clements Library, University of Michigan.



opposition to the Stamp Act developed, the inability of the imperial government to control the seaboard towns became obvious. In 1766, the British government, in an attempt to regain control over the continental colonies, repealed the act. Nevertheless, the government, still desperate for revenue, introduced the Townshend Acts the following year. The purpose of the legislation was to tax certain imported goods—paper, paint, lead, glass, and tea—and to establish an American Board of Customs Commissioners under metropolitan supervision. The headquarters of the Board was located in Boston, one of the leading centers of opposition to the Stamp Act. Yet an outbreak of rioting against the commissioners in 1768 led to their evacuation by the navy and the introduction of troops from Florida to restore order. Meanwhile, a nonimportation movement among American merchants stifled the import of taxed goods and stimulated domestic production of the same items. Given these circumstances, the British government was forced to back down again, repealing all the taxes except for the one on tea, a symbolic assertion of the government's right to tax the colonies.

Apart from these imperial pieces of legislation, other flash points flared between Britain and the continental colonies. From the start of the French and Indian War, the British navy needed crews, and regularly swept American ports to impress seamen; even after the war, the practice continued.⁸⁷ Of doubtful legality, impresses frequently provoked riots against imperial authority, pitting ordinary seamen fighting for their "right" and "liberty" against naval officers and colonial officials.

Such seamen were only too willing to join with other rioters in the agitation against the Stamp Act in 1765. Colonial elites were also becoming increasingly entangled in metropolitan economic power. In the Chesapeake, the growing indebtedness of tobacco planters to metropolitan merchants during the 1760s and early 1770s (see chapter 3) threatened the long-established social and economic position of the planter class, and helped sway an increasing number of them behind the growing resistance movement to British imperial impositions.⁸⁸

In the early 1770s, pressure from the British Atlantic system on the continental colonies increased. In 1773, the British government, in an attempt to shore up the precarious financial state of the East India Company, granted the company a monopoly of tea exports to British America. For the government, the East India Company was of critical importance. Apart from being the only instrument of British rule in India and a major prop of Britain's commercial economy, the East India Company provided the government with substantial revenue. But while the monopoly helped solve a major problem within Britain's Atlantic empire, it riled colonial merchants dealing in tea. When the first shipments of tea arrived, they were either turned back from American ports or ceremoniously dumped into the harbor, as was the case in Boston. For the British, this was the last straw. In early 1774, the imperial government responded with the Coercive Acts, a series of measures designed to increase metropolitan administrative control in Massachusetts and to strengthen the military presence in Boston.⁸⁹ To implement these acts, General Gage, the Commander-in-Chief, was appointed governor of the province. Meanwhile, in an attempt to maintain its hold over Quebec, the British government passed the Quebec Act, which guaranteed French civil law and protection of the Catholic religion, and extended the boundaries of the province into the trans-Appalachian west.⁹⁰ The preservation of French law and defense of the Catholic Church reassured the majority French inhabitants of the province, and helped ensure that they remained neutral during the coming conflict with the Americans. Extension of the province's boundaries to its "ancient limits" reaffirmed the old French position in the heart of the continent, and confirmed the sway of the Montreal-based fur trade over the interior. For Americans, the Quebec Act was yet another example of metropolitan interference in the internal affairs of the colonies, and was quickly labeled one of the "intolerable Acts" of 1774.

The long-developing differences between the British Atlantic and the continental colonies, which had been masked to some extent by the conflicts with France during the 1740s and 1750s, had come to the fore with the new geopolitical situation in eastern North America in the 1760s and early 1770s. In attempting to govern the enlarged spaces of the British Atlantic, the British government had tightened imperial authority over the seaboard colonies, which, in turn, had provoked a fierce political backlash. As early as the Stamp Act, the conflict between the British government and American legislatures had crystalized over the issue of sovereignty versus representation.⁹¹ On the British side, the American colonies came under British sovereignty and thus could be taxed; on the American side,

colonial legislatures rejected taxation from Westminster because they were not represented in the British Parliament. Within the British Atlantic, raw power soon overrode discussions of political principle. In Quebec, Nova Scotia, and the West Indies, British taxation policies were implemented successfully because the metropolitan government had the power to enforce them; in the American colonies, this power was lacking.⁹² The British government controlled the oceanic and trans-Appalachian spaces that surrounded the eastern seaboard, but not the colonies themselves. The cry of “no taxation without representation” could be made in the continental colonies simply because imperial power was too weak to silence it; in the British Atlantic, that cry could be stifled. The strength of British power over its Atlantic empire reinforced the imperial government’s desire to rein in the continental colonies, while at the same time spurring the colonists to throw off the imperial harness.

The War of American Independence

The revolt of the American colonies posed immense military and logistical problems for Britain. Although the principal theater of operations was in North America, the American Revolution was a fundamentally different conflict than the earlier French and Indian War. In the struggle against France, Britain was essentially trying to capture nodes—Louisbourg, Quebec, Montreal, the sugar islands—that controlled oceanic or riverine spaces. British naval power could be brought to bear on these nodes, frequently with decisive results. Moreover, the British had a continental base—the American colonies—to draw upon for manpower, supplies, and provisions. In the American conflict, however, the geographical context was reversed. Unlike the situation in New France, where Quebec controlled the St. Lawrence and much of the interior, the American colonies had no central node that dominated the continental hinterland. Even though the British held Boston, Newport, New York, Philadelphia, and Charleston at various times during the course of the war, no one town gave control over the interior. To dominate the seaboard colonies, the British needed more than command of the seas; they required an army large enough to control enormous continental spaces and dispersed, hostile populations. Furthermore, British bases in Nova Scotia and the province of Quebec could not supply much in the way of manpower or materiel; virtually all army units, supplies, and provisions had to be shipped across the Atlantic from the British Isles. Through herculean efforts, the British solved the logistical problem of waging war three thousand miles from home, but they never fully grasped the challenge of capturing and holding the eastern edge of the continent.

The military conundrum facing the British soon became apparent.⁹³ In April 1775, General Gage in Boston decided on a military sweep of the interior to gather up and destroy weapons that could be used by rebel militia. Although Gage sent troops to Concord, only twenty miles from Boston, they were forced to beat a

bloody retreat in the face of attacks from militia and patriots.⁹⁴ The difficulties of projecting military power over land into hostile territory had become dramatically obvious. With the surrounding countryside in rebel hands, Gage and his troops were confined to the Boston peninsula from where they had to be evacuated by the navy to Halifax in March 1776. With no bases left in the continental colonies, the British focused their attention on capturing New York, a city that had an ice-free port and was strategically located at the mouth of the Hudson River–Champlain corridor. In August 1776, the navy ferried General Howe's army from Halifax to New York. Although Howe forced the continental army under George Washington to withdraw from Brooklyn and New York, the British failed to position warships on the East River or troops on Harlem Heights to cut off the rebel retreat. As a result, much of the continental army escaped. Having missed an excellent opportunity to destroy the rebel army, the British quickly compounded their error. Control of New York should have allowed them to create a defensive pale around the city and across southern New Jersey, which would have provided a base from which to launch combined naval-army operations against coastal New England and the Chesapeake. Such a strategy would have made full use of the flexibility afforded by the navy, and caused havoc up and down the seaboard.⁹⁵ Moreover, control of New Jersey would have provided an agricultural hinterland from which to feed the army. Instead, the British weakened their position in New York by sending reinforcements to Canada in order to launch an offensive headed by General Burgoyne down the Champlain corridor in 1777. The strategic aim was to cut off the rebel colonies in New England from those in the Mid-Atlantic region. But the lessons of Amherst's laborious advance up the Champlain Valley as well as Braddock's disastrous foray into the Appalachian Mountains during the French and Indian War had not been learned. Burgoyne's advance got bogged down in rugged terrain north of Albany, while his ever-lengthening lines of communication and supply back to Quebec became ever more vulnerable to attacks from New England militia. The slowly unfolding disaster of the British advance reached its denouement at the Battle of Saratoga and the capitulation of Burgoyne's army.⁹⁶ At the same time, Howe took the army in New York on a lengthy sea voyage down the coast and into the Chesapeake Bay in order to launch an overland attack on Philadelphia. Although Howe took the city, the campaign served little strategic purpose; he also failed to support Burgoyne's advance by driving north from New York up the Hudson Valley. Both campaigns revealed a failure to coordinate strategy and to solve the logistical difficulties of overland warfare.

The American victory at Saratoga provided enough encouragement for the French, keen to revenge their earlier defeat, to join the rebels and declare war on Britain. The involvement of the French changed the strategic situation completely. Now the British Isles, as well as valuable colonies in the West Indies and India, were open to attack. As the theater of conflict spread, the war in the continental colonies was quickly relegated to a sideshow. For the British, the strategic priorities were to defend the country against French invasion and to protect the West Indies.

Naval vessels were redeployed to home waters, while troops and vessels were sent to the Caribbean. These redeployments left the units of the army still operating in the continental colonies with much less naval support.⁹⁷ Nevertheless, the British pressed ahead with a new campaign in the southern colonies. In 1779, they attacked Savannah and quickly overran Georgia; the following year, they moved on to take Charleston and gained control over South Carolina. By spring 1781, the British, having fought a frustrating campaign in North Carolina, decided to move north into Virginia. Despite considerable military success in the Chesapeake during the summer, the British army was gradually being boxed in. By late summer, Washington's continental army, reinforced by French troops who had marched overland from Rhode Island, had pinned the British into their camp on the Yorktown peninsula. Meanwhile, a French fleet positioned itself at the mouth of the Chesapeake, cutting off the British army's lines of supply and retreat. Although a British squadron sailed from the West Indies and joined forces with naval vessels from New York in order to engage the French, the British were beaten off at the Battle of the Virginia Capes. With this temporary loss of maritime supremacy, the army at Yorktown had no means of resupply or evacuation — a situation faced by the French in Quebec twenty-one years earlier — and had little alternative but surrender.⁹⁸ After defeat in the Chesapeake, the British had lost their principal army in North America and thus effective control over much of the eastern seaboard. Nevertheless, the navy managed to salvage the British position in the West Indies by destroying the French fleet the following year at the Battle of the Saintes.⁹⁹ At the Treaty of Paris in 1783, Britain recognized the independence of the United States of America, but held onto its islands in the Caribbean as well as Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, Quebec, and parts of the northwest. Although the loss of the thirteen colonies seemed like a great disaster for Britain at the time, American independence had, in fact, shorn the British empire of its immense geographic anomaly.

Diverging Empires

The Treaty of Paris confirmed a geographic division of North America that had been developing over the previous 150 years. The new British North America comprised all land within the colonial boundaries of Nova Scotia and Quebec north of the Great Lakes, while the United States comprised all land south of the Great Lakes, east of the Mississippi, and north of Florida and New Orleans. By agreeing to a boundary through the Great Lakes, the British had given up the old French territories in the Ohio and Mississippi that formerly belonged to Quebec, although Britain held onto several fur posts south of the lakes until 1796. Such a division of the continent reflected different visions of empire. The British position in North America and the Caribbean represented a metropolitan, commercial, and maritime view. Command of the sea allowed the British to control islands in the West

Indies, as well as littoral spaces in the northeastern part of North America: the rim of Hudson Bay, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, the Gulf of St. Lawrence, and Quebec. British control of the upper St. Lawrence and the Great Lakes extended their imperial reach deep into the heart of the continent, protecting the northwest from American encroachment. In contrast, the American position on the continent rested on a territorial, agricultural vision of empire. From their base along the eastern seaboard, Americans looked westward to the lands that stretched from the Appalachian Mountains to the Mississippi. This enormous new space represented an immense opportunity to expand an agricultural economy, provide support for a growing population, and extend a democratic society.

Although British and American visions of empire had been protected by the Treaty of Paris, the aftermath of the American war produced significant geographical change. In British North America and parts of the Caribbean, considerable growth of population and expansion of settlement occurred. The influx of some 40,000 to 50,000 Loyalist refugees from the United States to British North America created new settlements in Nova Scotia and Quebec. The migration of almost 40,000 Loyalists to Nova Scotia led to the division of the province in the early 1780s and the creation of new Loyalist colonies in New Brunswick and Cape Breton Island.¹⁰⁰ Although several thousand refugees soon left the region, about 13,500 migrants settled in New Brunswick, approximately 19,000 stayed in peninsular Nova Scotia, and a few hundred moved to Cape Breton. Almost 6,000 Loyalists moved to Quebec, most of them settling along the upper St. Lawrence, with other pockets in the Eastern Townships, Montreal, Sorel, and along the bleak shore of the Gaspé peninsula.¹⁰¹ The settlement of a large English-speaking, Protestant group in the western portion of Quebec led to the division of the province in 1791 into Upper and Lower Canada. Farther south, a few thousand Loyalists, a mix of white planters as well as free and enslaved blacks, moved to the Bahamas.¹⁰²

In British North America, the influx of Loyalists led to significant economic growth and development. Agricultural settlement pushed up the Saint John River valley in New Brunswick, and along the upper St. Lawrence and Niagara rivers in Upper Canada. New towns were established at St. Andrews, Saint John, and Fredericton in New Brunswick; while a string of settlements, many bearing Hanoverian names, stretched along the upper St. Lawrence and Niagara rivers. In the Bahamas, Nassau became the center for island trade and government. Although the major staple exports of the British Atlantic economy remained in place, the West Indies and Newfoundland were no longer able to import produce legally from New England and the Mid-Atlantic, and needed new sources of supply. Despite importing agricultural produce from Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Quebec, West Indian merchants could not meet the demand and illicit trade with the United States soon developed. A similar situation existed in Newfoundland. As the resident population increased during the last quarter of the eighteenth century, there was a growing demand for provisions, which was satisfied by imports from Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and southeastern Ireland.

The influx of Loyalists introduced a new social and cultural mix to the remaining British colonies. The migration to Nova Scotia reinforced the American presence among the New Englanders settled in the colony since the early 1760s, while the migration to the province of Quebec introduced a significant English-speaking minority to Lower Canada. Although these immigrants were loyal to the Crown, they had generations of American living behind them, and were less socially deferential than British officials in Quebec, Halifax, and Fredericton expected. In Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, Loyalists strengthened the houses of assembly and resisted centralized, imperial control.¹⁰³ Moreover, the Loyalists introduced several Protestant denominations, which weakened British designs to establish the Anglican Church as the principal church in each of the Maritime colonies.¹⁰⁴ The Loyalists also brought with them an American material culture, best exemplified by the delicate Anglican churches, modeled on New England prototypes, that were built in Nova Scotia in the 1790s.¹⁰⁵

Yet for all the demographic, economic, social, and cultural changes engendered by the Loyalist influx, the political and military superstructure of the British Atlantic remained in place. The British imperial historian P. J. Marshall has observed that the imperial response to the loss of the American colonies "was less than strictly logical . . . Much survived unchanged . . . In the most important of the colonies that remained . . . the West Indian islands, the old system which had failed so disastrously from Britain's point of view remained in operation."¹⁰⁶ Yet this imperial framework, represented by the Crown, the military, and the Anglican Church, was indigenous to the British Atlantic and had served the empire well; the northern and southern flanks of North America had been protected from rebellion and the critically important sugar islands and fishery retained for Britain. Indeed, this imperial framework was maintained and enhanced as the empire expanded and developed in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.¹⁰⁷

The new United States also changed considerably. The imperial restriction on westward expansion had been swept away, allowing settlers to move into western New York, the Ohio Valley, and the Kentucky country. What had been Crown land became the public domain controlled by the federal government. In 1785, Congress passed the Northwest Land Ordinance, allowing the survey and sale of this huge area. The survey began in the upper Ohio Valley. Through Jefferson's influence, land was sold cheaply to encourage immigration and settlement and to extend the American empire of yeoman farmers; the guarantors, thought Jefferson, of American democracy. The navigation acts also had been repudiated, allowing American merchants to trade around the Atlantic. In 1778, trade was opened with France, and this was soon extended to the German states, the Netherlands, and Scandinavia.¹⁰⁸ Americans also became more involved in the African slave trade, and developed a new trade to China. Other remnants of the old imperial system were dismantled. The Anglican Church was disestablished, and a division between church and state enshrined in the new constitution. State governments created new capitals, more central to their expanding backcountry populations: in South Carolina, the capital



FIGURE 6.17. View of the City of Richmond from the Bank of James River, by Benjamin Henry Latrobe, 1798. An American vision of a continental, republican empire represented by Jefferson's Capitol building dominating the fledgling town of Richmond, the new capital of Virginia, situated on the fall line between the tidewater and the Piedmont. The Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore, Maryland.

was moved from Charleston to Columbia; in Virginia, it was shifted from Williamsburg to Richmond. Jefferson's state capitol at Richmond represented the new nation's republican vision. Modeled on the Roman temple at Nimes, the capitol dominated the Piedmont town, emphasizing the importance of a democratically elected legislature (figure 6.17). The building was a direct repudiation of Nicholson's layout of Williamsburg, which had emphasized imperial authority, and served as a bold assertion of American political and cultural independence.¹⁰⁹

More generally, the years after the American Revolution saw the British and American empires move farther and farther apart (figure 6.18). For Americans, the

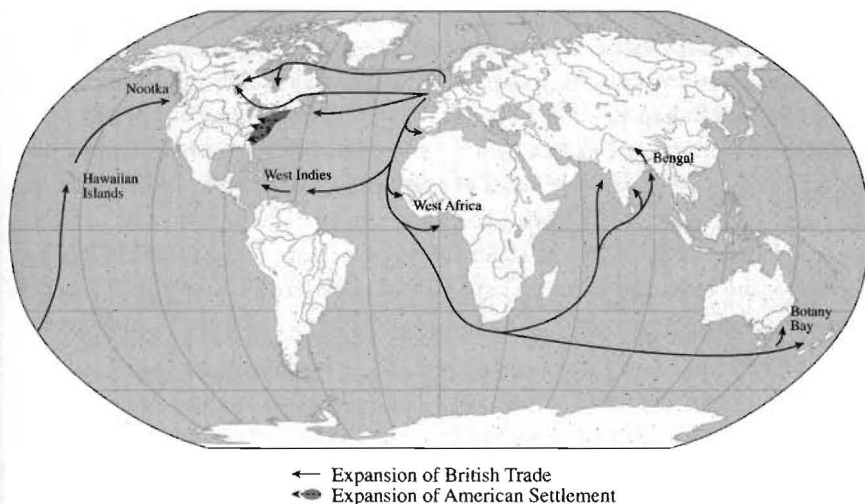


FIGURE 6.18. British and American empires in the 1780s.

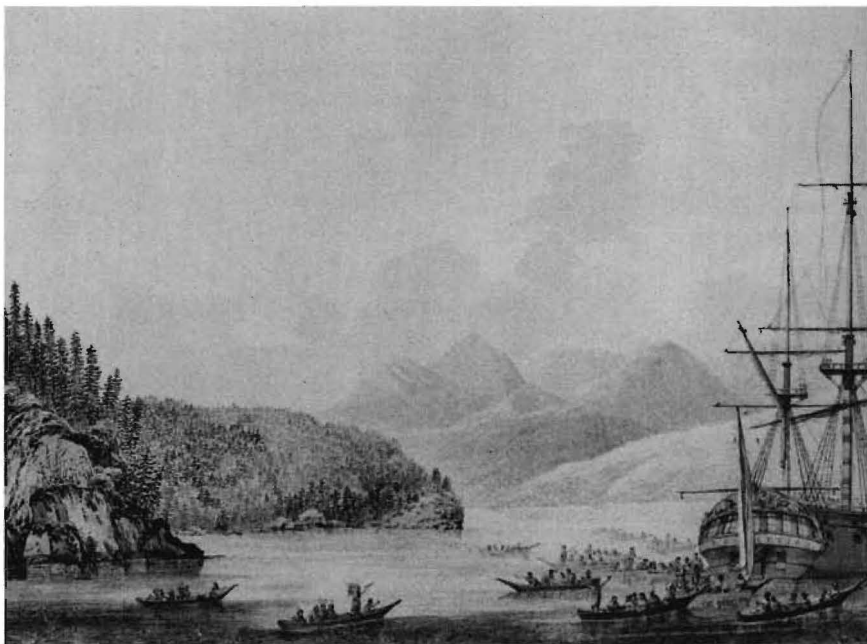


FIGURE 6.19. *A View in Ship Cove*, by John Webber, 1778. A British vision of a maritime, commercial empire represented by James Cook's *Resolution* trading with the Nootka on the Northwest Coast. A comparison with John White's view (figure 1.4) of Frobisher's men encountering the Eskimo on the other side of the continent almost exactly two hundred years earlier suggests the continuity of the English maritime enterprise. By permission of the British Library, Shelfmark Add. 15514 f.10.

course of empire lay westward into the interior of the continent. Another century would pass and half of North America would be resettled before the American frontier officially closed in 1890. In the process, Americans would turn away from the Atlantic and become a transcontinental power. For the British, the course of empire lay eastward into the Indian and Pacific oceans. During the 1760s and 1770s, the British had expanded up the Ganges—South Asia's equivalent of the St. Lawrence—turning Calcutta into a version of Quebec and tightening their imperial grip over the princely states of north India. Meanwhile, James Cook had been exploring the Pacific, allowing the British to lay claim to Australia, New Zealand, and the Northwest Coast (figure 6.19). American expansion was internal, landward, and isolationist; British expansion was external, seaward, and engaged. The legacies of these continental and oceanic empires continue to influence our world today.