**Salutary Neglect**

Encyclopedia of the American Revolution: Library of Military History, 2006

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Salutary Neglect

**SALUTARY NEGLECT.** In the generation of British politicians that arose after the end of the War of the Spanish Succession (1701–1714), management of domestic politics, especially in Parliament, was more important than the close supervision of overseas colonies. Accommodation of interests and the promotion of trade were valued more highly than strict enforcement of the Navigation Acts or confrontation over new policy initiatives, so much so that the years after the rise of Robert Walpole as the king's chief minister in 1721, to about the middle of the eighteenth century, were called a period of "salutary neglect." To be sure, when serious conflicts of interest arose, the concerns of North American colonists were subordinated. In the Hat Act of 1732, English hatters won from Parliament a prohibition against the production of hats in the colonies. In the Molasses Act of 1733, British West Indian sugar planters influenced Parliament to levy a higher duty on sugar from the French islands as the price of allowing North Americans to continue importing a non-British-produced commodity. Nonetheless, local elites in the colonies were able to prosper, consolidate their positions, and become self-aware in a time when the burden of empire was comparatively light. By mid-century, when this period began to come to an end after the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle, colonial elites had come to view "salutary neglect" as the correct state of affairs between the mother country and the North American colonies. Many colonists believed they participated in the crisis of the final French and Indian war as junior partners rather than subordinates, and thus were stunned when, after 1763, the imperial government began to enforce regulations and generate new ways of mulcting the colonial economies.

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**Introduction to the American Revolution (1754–1820)**

Gale Encyclopedia of U.S. History, 2008

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Introduction to the American Revolution (1754–1820)

The period between 1754 and 1820 was monumental in the history of the United States. British colonial policy in North America changed significantly after the French and Indian War, which set in motion a series of events that would culminate in American independence. Earlier in the century the British had pursued a policy of “salutary neglect,” allowing the colonists to run their own affairs as they saw fit. But after the French and Indian War the British attempted to tax the colonies in order to offset the cost of the colonies’ defense.

This was a fateful choice. Colonists had gained valuable military experience during the war but, perhaps more importantly, had begun to develop a sense of unity as they worked together against a common enemy. When faced with Parliament’s Stamp Act, they quickly organized in opposition. They discovered in their resistance to that act a tool they would successfully use some years later against the Townshend Acts—the boycott. Refusing to buy stamped paper—and later goods taxed by the Townshend Acts, like paper, glass, and tea—was an effective means of forcing change. At the same time, a more radical, direct resistance developed, beginning with the founding of the Sons of Liberty in Boston. Later, this group would be responsible for the Boston Tea Party, a direct action designed to protest the Tea Act. The resulting British military crackdown on Boston led to the formation of a unified governing body in the colonies, the Continental Congress, and eventually to the Declaration of Independence and the outbreak of war. The colonists’ view of themselves had been transformed—they were no longer loyal British subjects but rather independent citizens of a new nation.

This Revolutionary generation had accomplished an extraordinary feat—founding a new nation. They would go on to create not one, but two forms of government for the United States. The first, guided by the Articles of Confederation, was a decentralized government with most powers vested in the states, formed based on the colonists’ fears of tyrannical, centralized governments. The limitations of such a decentralized government quickly became apparent, however, when the national government lacked the power to respond effectively to the many problems that faced the new nation.

When nationalists met in the summer of 1787 and drafted the Constitution, the result was an enduring, three-branch government that included many “checks and balances” to safeguard the nation from the tyranny colonists believed could result from a government with broad powers. This government saw the new nation through the development of political parties, the first peaceful, if controversial, transfer of power from one political party to another in 1800, conflict with France, and eventually the outbreak of war with Britain in 1812.

The War of 1812 proved to be another crucial turning point in the nation’s history. Congress declared war in response to British trade restrictions that were crippling the nation’s economy as well as other slights by Britain that seemed to disregard the nation’s status as an independent state, including the practice of impressing American sailors into the British navy and their continued aid to Native Americans resisting American settlement of the Western frontier. Although the war essentially ended in a stalemate, Americans emerged with a strong sense of national pride, a booming economy, and the opening of vast lands on the western frontier. By 1820, Americans looked forward to a prosperous future for their young nation, although the divisions in American society that would ultimately lead to the nation’s greatest crisis—the Civil War—were already apparent.



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