



“some new state of things arising . . . some new crisis forming”

Gov. Thomas Pownall __ *The Administration of the Colonies* __ 1764

EXCERPTS

Thomas Pownall, an Englishman who had served as the royal governor of several colonies, designed the engraving above to represent the colonies' growth as from a rude settler's hut to an established farm (left to right). Observing the power struggles between the colonies and the Crown during the French and Indian War (1754-1763), he published *The Administration of the Colonies* as a warning to Britain — implement clear central governance over the colonies while respecting their treasured privileges, or jeopardize Britain's future as a global commercial power.

While convinced that the colonies would never revolt for independence, Pownall predicted their resistance to Britain's increased imperial authority and military presence after the war. Don't think of the colonies as "mere appendages to the realm," he counsels, but as loyal partners in "one organized whole, the *commercial dominion of Great Britain*." What must not happen, he emphasizes, is the colonies becoming *unified* as an entity in the commercial system.

The several changes in interests and territories which have taken place in the colonies of the European world on the event of Peace¹ have give a general impression of some new state of things arising. One cannot but observe that there is some general idea of some revolution of events beyond the ordinary course of things, some general apprehension of something new arising in the world, of some new channel of business, applicable to new powers — something that is to be guarded against on one hand, or that is to be carried to advantage on the other. There is an universal apprehension of some

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¹ Britain's victory in the French and Indian War (1754-1763).

new crisis forming: yet one does not find anywhere, in all these various impressions of this matter, any one precise comprehensive idea of this great crisis; and consequently all that is proposed is by parts, without connection to any whole, . . .

“the spirit of commerce will become that predominant power”

This has tempted me to hazard my sentiments on this subject. My particular situation gave me early opportunity of seeing and observing the state of things which have been long leading to this crisis. I have seen and mark'd where it was my duty, this nascent crisis at the beginning of this war, and may affirm, have foreseen and foretold the events that now form it. . . .

. . . [S]ince the people of Europe have formed their communication with the commerce of Asia; have been settling on all sides of the Atlantic Ocean and in America, and possessing every seat and channel of commerce, and have planted and raised that [commerce and imperial expansion] to an interest which has taken root; — since they now feel the powers that derive from this and are extending it to a combining it with others, the spirit of *commerce* will become that predominant power which will form the general policy and rule the powers of Europe; and hence a grand commercial interest, the basis of a great commercial dominion, under the present site and circumstances of the world, will be formed and arise. The rise and forming of this commercial dominion is what precisely constitute the present crisis. . . .

It is now the duty of those who govern us to carry forward this state of things . . . that our kingdom may be no more considered as the mere kingdom of this isle, with many appendages of provinces, colonies, settlements, and other extraneous parts, but as a grand marine dominion, consisting of our possessions in the Atlantic and in America united into a one interest, in a one center where the seat of government is. As the rising of this crisis above described forms precisely *the object* on which government should be employed, so the taking leading measures towards the forming all these Atlantic and American possessions into

a one dominion, of which Great Britain should be the commercial center, to which it should be the spring of power, is the *precise duty* of government at this crisis. . . .

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It becomes the duty of the mother country to nourish and cultivate, to protect and govern the colonies, which nurture and government should precisely direct its care and influence to two essential points.

1st, That all the profits of the produce and manufactures of these colonies center in the mother country: and

2dly, That the colonies continue to be the sole and special proper customers of the mother country. It is on this *valuable consideration* (as Mr. Dummer, in his prudent and spirited defense of the colonies says²) they have a right to the grants, charters, privileges, and protection which they receive; and also on the other hand, it is from these grants, charters, privileges and protection given to them that the mother country has an exclusive right to the external profits of their laborr and to their custom. . . .

It has been often suggested that care should be taken in the administration of the plantations [colonies], lest in some future time these colonies should become independent of the mother country. But perhaps it may be proper on this occasion, nay, it is justice to say it, that if by becoming independent is meant a revolt, nothing is further from their nature, their interest, their thoughts. If a defection from the alliance of the mother country be suggested, it ought to be and can be truly said that their spirit abhors the sense of such. . . nothing can eradicate from their hearts their natural, almost mechanical, affection to

² Jeremiah Dummer, *A Defense of the New England Charters*, 1721: a successful appeal to oppose Parliament's revoking the original New England charters—the documents that established the colonies' rights and privileges, including self-governance—and imposing closer more imperial authority over the colonies. Excerpts in *Becoming American: America, 1690-1763* at americainclass.org/sources/becomingamerican/text2/text2read.htm.

Great Britain, which they conceive under no other sense, nor call by any other name, than that of *home*. Besides, the merchants are, and must ever be, in great measure allied with those of Great Britain. Their very support consists in this alliance. The liberty and religion of the British colonies are incompatible with either French or Spanish government; and they know full well that they could hope for neither liberty nor protection under a Dutch one. No circumstance of trade could tempt them thus to certain ruin. Any such suggestion, therefore, is a false and unjust aspersion on their principles and affections, and can arise from nothing but an entire ignorance of their circumstances.

Yet again, on the other hand, while they remain under the support and protection of the government of the mother country, while they profit of the beneficial part of its trade, while their attachment to the present royal family stands firm, and their alliance with the mother country is inviolate, it may be worth while to inquire whether they may not become and act in some cases independent of the *government and laws* of the mother country: — and if any such symptoms should be found, either in their government, courts, or trade, perhaps it may be thought high time, even now, to inquire how far these colonies are or are not arrived at this time at an independency of the government of the mother country: — and if any measure of such independency, formed upon precedents unknown to the government of the mother country at the time they were form'd, should be insisted on, when the government of the mother country was found to be so weak or distracted at home, or so deeply engaged abroad in Europe, as not to be able to attend to and assert its right in America with its own people. Perhaps it may be thought that no time should be lost to remedy or redress these deviations — if any such be found — or to remove all jealousies [suspicions] arising from the idea of them, if none such really exist.

“it may be thought high time, even now, to inquire how far these colonies are or are not arrived, at this time, at an independency of the government of the mother country”

If the colonies are to be possessed as of right and governed by the crown . . . then a revision of these charters, commissions, instructions, so as to establish the rights of the crown and the privileges of the people, as thereby created, is all that is necessary. But while the crown may, perhaps justly and of right, *in theory*, consider these lands and the plantations thereon as its domains, and as of special right properly belonging to it . . . — While this is the idea on one hand, the people on the other say that they could not forfeit nor lose the common rights and privileges of Englishmen by adventuring under various disasters and difficulties, under heavy expenses and every hazard to settle these vast countries, to engage in untried channels of labor, thereby increasing the nation’s commerce and extending its dominions; but that they must carry with them, wherever they go, the right of being governed only by the laws of the realm, only by laws made with their own consent — that they must ever retain with them the right of not being taxed without their own consent or that of their representatives

. . . it is therefore that the people do and ever will, until this matter be settled, exercise these rights and privileges after the precedents formed here in England . . . and it is therefore also, in matters where laws, made since [the colonies’] establishment, do not extend to them by special proviso, that they claim the right of directing themselves by their own laws. While these totally different ideas of the principles whereon the government and the people found their claims and rights, remain unsettled and undetermined, there can be nothing but discordant jarring and perpetual obstruction in the exercise of them. There can be no government, properly so called, but merely the predominancy of one faction or the other, acting under the mask of the forms of government. . . .

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. . . it is essential to the preservation of the empire to keep [the colonies] disconnected and independent of each other. They are certainly so at present — the different manner in which they are settled, the different modes under which they live, the different forms of charters, grants, and frame of government they possess, the various principles of repulsion — that these create the different interests which they actuate, the religious interests by which they are actuated, the rivalry and jealousies which arise from hence, and the impracticability, if not the impossibility of reconciling and accommodating these incompatible ideas and claims, will keep them forever so. . . .

. . . Under the guidance of these principles, with a temper and spirit which remember that these are our own people, our brethren, faithful, good, and beneficial subjects, and free-born Englishmen, or by adoption, possessing all the right of freedom . . . let a revision be made on the general and several governments of the colonies, of their laws and courts of justice, of their trade, and the general British laws of trade . . . ; and then let those measures be taken which, upon such a review, shall appear necessary, and all which government can do, or ought to do at present, will be done. . . .

. . . [T]he people of the colonies say that the inhabitants of the colonies are entitled to all the privileges of Englishmen, that they have a right to participate in the legislative power, and that no commands of the crown . . . are binding upon them, further than they please to acquiesce under such and conform *their own actions* thereto; that they hold this right of legislature, not derived from the grace and will of the crown . . . that this right is inherent and essential to the community, as a community of Englishmen: and that therefore they must have all the rights, privileges, and full and free exercise of their own will and liberty in making laws which are necessary thereto, uncontrolled by any power of the crown or of the governor

. . . And if the colonies, under any future state of administration which they see unequal to the management of their affairs, once come to feel their own [commercial] strength in this way, their independence on government . . . will not be an event so remote as our leaders may think, which yet nothing but such false policy can bring on. For, on the contrary, put their governments and laws on a true and constitutional basis, regulate their money, their revenue, and their trade, and do not check [limit] their settlements, they must ever depend on the trade of the mother country for their supplies . . . they must always remain subordinate to it, in all the transactions of their commerce, in all the operations of their laws, in every act of their government. . . — and the several colonies, no longer considered as domains of the crown, mere appendages to the realm, will thus become united therein, members and parts of the realm, as essential parts of a one organized whole, the *commercial dominion of Great Britain*. The taking leading measures to the forming of which, ought, at this juncture, to be the great object of government.

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