

**Volume 19**

**Number 041\**

**America's Revolution (26) – Inept  
British Colonial Policy – I**

**Lead: In the 1700s the United States broke from England. No colony in history had done that before. This series examines America's Revolution.**

**Intro: *A Moment in Time with Dan Roberts***

**Content: The crisis that severely altered the relationship between Britain and its thirteen North American colonies was fundamentally rooted in an increasingly divergent perception of control. By the 1700s, though the colonies were theoretically**

**under the direction of Britain, the reality was that all of them were largely independent in the way they conducted their own social, political, economic and religious life. They were, to paraphrase the words of sociologists Beatrice and Sydney Webb, virtually autonomous. Distance was too great and effective governmental communication too deficient to permit a closely held control of colonial affairs. Britons may have thought they played the dominant role in the cross-Atlantic relationship, but that was a snare and a delusion. Americans may have not reached the point where they defined this circumstance as independence, but within 12 years after the end of the French and Indian War in 1763, a powerful plurality of**

**the colonists would embrace independence as a reality, and Britain's sclerotic response made things worse.**

**One of the major problems was that Britain was very, very late in figuring out how to run the colonial enterprise. Hypothetically, all the colonies were under the guidance of the Crown, but London never figured out how to make that work very well. For more than a century the colonies were left to their own devices and in order to survive had to come up with solutions that were pretty much locally devised and administered. Until much too late in the game London signaled confusion and ineptitude with direction coming from everywhere - the Privy Council,**

**the Secretary of State for the Southern Department and the Board of Trade. Therefore, the colonies did what they wanted to do and when Britain tried to clamp down and engage the mechanism of control they suddenly realized they had a Revolution on their hands. Next time: Inept exercise of control.**

**At the University of Richmond's School of Professional and Continuing Studies, I'm Dan Roberts.**

#### Resources

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