

Salutary Neglect

Salutary Neglect was a phrase used by Edmund Burke a conservative political philosopher and leader in England. What he understood, King George and his ministers did not, was that the American colonists were **different** than the people who populated England's other colonies, such as India. The colonists in America were basically believed that they were Englishman who just happened to be living far from home. The colonists believed that they had all the rights of Englishmen. England had done a good job of teaching the colonists a political culture of liberty and rule of law.

Burke also understood that, as with children, giving them more freedom can actually result in their staying close, while trying to reduced their freedom can drive both children and the colonists away.

As we go along it might be useful to keep in mind some lessons the colonists learned but the English government never seemed to understand.

The character of the colonists was of a consistent pattern and it persisted along with the colonists.

In the 17th century, a group of colonists came and established the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

In 1644, the Massachusetts Bay Colony had a fairly modern state government and began participating and gaining confidence in governing themselves. They knew all the English rights and implemented them. They had a bill of rights, trial by jury, taxation only when representatives voted for taxes, protection of property, and no one can be deprived of life, liberty or property without due process of law.

In other words, in 1644, you had a government that wouldn't be a bad deal today. Some problems-freedom of religion, which had to be worked out and soon was.

Meanwhile, from the middle of the 17th century, the colonists were left alone to do things and govern themselves almost by themselves. Not all were as advanced in practicing their rights as were the colonists of Virginia and Massachusetts, but all were moving in the right direction. And they were practicing their rights without ill effects.

One reason they were left alone, the English were very busy beating each other up in the English Civil War.

In 1643, they formed a loose confederation without asking anyone permission, the New England Confederation.

American really wasn't an overnight success. They had been practicing for years.

1763 marked the end of the France as an important power in North America. In this year, the Treaty of Paris was signed. This treaty ended the seven year war, which some have described as the First World War. While we certainly did participate in the war by fighting on the North American front, the fighting in America was just a part of the War, which also raged across Europe and Asia.

Just as important: 1. Washington had his first practice as a warrior in the fight for Fort Duquesne (now Pittsburg) 1754. He lost that fight.

But he persisted: 2. He gained experience and lost again, this time also at Fort Duquesne under the command of an English General who would not listen to the advice of Washington.

While Washington was practicing warfare, another American practiced politics and also failed. Benjamin Franklin proposed a plan for political union, but his idea was not adopted by what was called the Albany Congress. Like other overnight successes, the American Revolution, both in its military and political efforts required a god deal of practice before it made something that worked.

By the 1750s, there were about one million folks here and there was remarkably little fighting among themselves. Practice getting along was working.

The economic growth rate, which probably contributed to the self-confidence of the colonists, was so great that by 1775 colonial economic output was 40 % of England's and this from a standing start.

Much like a parent who sees that their children are grown and prosperous it probably seemed reasonable for the England to ask the colonies to contribute to a war that was the most costly war England had ever fought so far.

The need for money was there and so England decided to settle several problems at the same time...

1. The Western Question/Indians
2. Enforce laws that had already been passed but not enforced. After all the English were a nation of laws and surly all the Englishmen, including the colonists would be prepared to obey the law
3. Contribute money for the defense of the colonies

England e.g. ordered the Sugar Act to be enforced

E.g. The British may have made a mistake when they used general warrants that allowed British officers to enter any place at any time in search of smuggled goods. This was a violation of privacy rights, which is forbidden today, and was greatly resented then as well.

The British wanted a rather humane policy toward the Indians of North America. And they probably thought that it would be best for the colonists to people the Eastern part of America before venturing further West. This would be good for Britain because it would not involve endless fighting with the Indians and the Americans would not start manufacturing things that they would be too far away from England to get, if they moved inland.

But the Americans had been developing a policy of brutality towards the Indians.

One year the English tried another way to generate revenue. The Stamp Act: This act taxed any kind of legal paper, every diploma, license, newspaper and playing cards.

Unfortunately for the British this seemingly reasonable tax hit almost everyone who was likely to be educated and used to voicing their opinions their opinions in public. And it made a major public relations mistake. It was constantly coming up with policies that hurt those who were used to complaining in public.

And England continued its aggressive/passive methods. It repealed the Stamp Act.

The British, which had so few places to keep its troops in America that they often had to sleep in the open, like the commons in Boston, decided to quarter its troops and demand that the colonists had to provide them with drink as well as housing. This aggravated the colonists and there was a small riot in New York.

George III tried to accommodate the colonists by repealing all the taxes on British goods except for tea. This certainly seemed reasonable to the British. It made the tea the Americans drank cheaper than ever.

In Boston, 20 British soldiers guarding a customs house confronted several hundred colonists who were busy pelting soldiers... with stones and clubs. (The British soldiers opened fire and killed 5 men. Was this action warranted?)

The action was quickly named the Boston Massacre and described as the killing of peaceful people by a brutal.

This action drove the British to pass what the Americans called the Coercive Acts. From 1774 to 1776 it was a losing fight for those who wanted peace between the two nations.

Now the question was just who had the power? The legal and constitutional fights were over.

The King of England demanded satisfaction for the tea and the destruction from the New York riots. The British closed the Boston Harbor.

This really was the act of a tyrant. The first Continental Congress met at Philadelphia in 1774. This Congress issued a Declaration of rights stating that Americans were entitled

to all English liberties and citing all the acts of Parliament which had violated that principle.

There were a number of British leaders who thought that the better part of valor would be to leave the Americans alone. Edmund Burke repeatedly called for reconciliation with the Americans.

In 1775, the fighting began in earnest at Concord and Lexington.

In 1775, the second continental congress met at Philadelphia. Then came the fighting at Bunker Hill and the revolution was on. Too many of the colonists now believed that only independence would guarantee their liberty.

I think it is fair to say that the demands of the British up to the coercive acts were reasonable. Compared to the acts of most government throughout the history of world until then they were very reasonable.

Except that they were not reasonable to people who viewed themselves the equal of any other Englishman and had been running their own affairs for about a century, before being told that the mother country still regarded them as her children and demanded the right to order their affair. This worked about as well as it does today when parents try to treat their own children who come home for a visit- as children. There was a revolt. Perhaps the only surprise was who won.

The Declaration of Independence

The two purposes of the Declaration of Independence are to convince the European powers to side with us or at least stay neutral, and to convince colonists to join the cause.

From the beginning the colonists thought they might be able to get some European allies. They were right. We got the Dutch to loan us money and the French to loan us money and send men and ships. Indeed both proved very important to the cause and I would doubt if we could have won without the support.

How to convince the European powers to stay neutral or even help? I think it is fair to say that we appealed to their better natures.

We need to appear as a responsible country that would be built on enlightenment values. Then, as now, there were opinion leaders and we wanted their opinion of us to be a good one. The idea that we were going to set up a nation based on eternal principles which were well known in Europe was very appealing. Thus we see the emphasis on the eternal laws of nature. It was hard to argue with these principles. We also wanted to show that we were not wild people, crazy anarchists so to speak. Thus we need to show that we were instead long suffering people who had endured most could endure before they were pushed beyond their endurance and anyone else's endurance. Thus we have along list of terrible abuses making the instigator of these abuses look like a most tyrannical government indeed.

Who were we fighting?

One of the best land forces and naval forces in the world.

This document is full of good reasons to get colonists to show up for the fight.

First there is natural law: the Declaration states that you are aligned with natural law. This is a law that is not just a human creation. This is a set of rules higher than just a human creation. It is law that is eternal and universal.

The truths are held to be self-evident: What does that mean?

Do you need to be well educated?

Do you need to be rich?

Or powerful?

Or a genius?

No.

Anyone who is of reasonable intelligence can see the truth within these words.

All men are created equal: How was this meant?

We all share common humanity. We can all argue as to whether the founders lived up to these ideals at all times (they obviously did not- although at that time they did better than others) but somehow the meaning stuck.

The idea is that all human beings have the same nature, and if they possess certain rights by virtue of having that nature, then it follows that they are all equally endowed with those same rights. These rights be forfeited-by committing a crime e.g. but everyone starts with these rights.

What are these rights?

LIFE? Why write that down? Of course you have a right to your life. Who else would have a right to it? It was common for the government to have a right to your life and labor.

Liberty? Liberty is the prime political value of the West

It also says these rights are inalienable. What does that mean?

The emphasis is on the idea that the state can't take them away. They did not give them. You have them by virtue of being a human being. Since the state did not give them they can't take them away.

Freedom of speech. You can say I will speak no more forever but then you can speak and it is OK.

People First-Government Second

This may be the first time that, at least in a written form, we have a record of people stating that the people come first and then the government. That is, viewing the government merely as an instrument.

This document will have none of the usual "the government is the mandate of heaven" or the ruler is divine.

Just the opposite. The government is called upon to do one thing: Secure the rights of the people. If it can't do that it should be dismissed.

"Stop in the name of love before you break my heart"

The Train of abuses

1. We want to be totally in line with the key elements of a constitutional democracy.

But he has

- a. dissolved our representation houses
- b. he has not made the judges independent of the executive will
- c. not allowed trial by jury
- d. quartered soldiers here without our consent
- e. not always allowed us to be tried near our homes
- f. suspended out legislatures

Note: The constitution is to a large degree a reaction to experience. We have taken note and will make certain that the wrongs herein committed will not be repeated when we are in charge.

Money:

1. He has cut off our trade, not to mention our not paying taxes and engaging in smuggling, and thus caused us to lose money

And

Taxation without representation

'The colonies had been practicing being adults and were not about to go back to being children again.

Note: He has taken the side of the side of the Indians and the colonists don't like this.

But we have been patient and peacefully petitioned the government but now we can take no more.