

Trade, Colonies, and State Power:
French Officers' Economic Views on French and English America, 1755-1783

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Our understanding of the changing nature of French economic thought in the eighteenth century rests almost entirely on studies of "mercantilism", the physiocrats, government legislation, and the main proponents of new economic ideas: men such as François Quesnay, Adam Smith, Turgot, and Necker. Attempting to gauge public attitudes toward these economic theories, however, is more problematic. One particularly useful route we can follow to gain further insight into public opinion is to investigate the accounts of French army and navy officers who visited North America during the second half of the eighteenth century. During the Seven Years' War, over three hundred army officers served in Canada under the command of the Marquis de Montcalm, and twenty years later, during the War of American Independence, almost one thousand army officers served in the United States, some as volunteers in the American forces, but most in the expeditions of the Comte d'Estaing and the Comte de Rochambeau. Numerous naval officers also visited North America during these two conflicts. These visitors were literate Frenchmen who assessed the relative importance of agricultural development, state intervention in the economy, overseas trade, and the role of colonies in promoting the state's wealth and power, all issues which were at the centre of intellectual debate. While their economic observations were often simplistic, their complex attitudes toward commerce and capitalism reveal their awareness of the close ties between economics and the stability of the traditional social order.

The historiography of the French officer corps in North America has concentrated on the issue of whether officers were democrats and "progressive" supporters of liberty, thereby deserving our praise, or whether they were "backward" authoritarian conservatives who are unworthy of further mention, except as objects of opprobrium. There is also a tendency to divide officers into two groups: the "good", progressive ones and the "bad" traditionalists. Hopefully, the debate will be able to progress beyond this stage to consider officers as multi-dimensional human beings capable of offering us insight into the complex issues of their time, and in oblique ways, the problems we face today. Officers, like many contemporary peasants, were usually suspicious of capitalism and feared its ability to undermine their society's well-being. They did not perceive the social and political leadership of entrepreneurs as beneficial, and generally doubted that the gospel of free competition advocated by the physiocrats was a sound means of addressing the needs of society. On another note, officers arrogantly assumed that their own class interests were synonymous with the public interest, that their own elite values were the standard by which others' behaviour should be measured, and that their authoritarian corporate ideology was the most rational, mature means of addressing human problems. Finally, they commonly believed that reinforcing the wealth and regulatory power of the state would bring about desirable change without endangering

their own interests or the good of society. Members of the officer corps were divided over each of these issues, and individually could be "liberal" on one point and "conservative" regarding another. To make matters more complex, an officer's desire to keep merchants from charging extortionate prices can be seen in both a positive and negative light. We need to show more care in our assessments of the alleged sins and virtues of French officers, and try our best to escape from the stereotypes we have so often employed in the past.

Montcalm's officers were chiefly concerned about the best means to develop and diversify Canada's economy with minimum cost to the crown. They also perceived, even if they did not completely understand, the growth of the American colonial economy, and sought the means to restrict its expansion by preventing American settlement and trade beyond the Appalachians. In their eyes, a country's internal economy had finite natural limits; the chief means of increasing wealth was to siphon it off from other countries or annex new territory. French officers in Canada saw the colony's development in terms of achieving as quickly as possible the highest possible population in the area and setting these people to work exploiting with maximum efficiency the resources of the region. Efficiency, for them, was chiefly a matter of hard work; improved methods and technology were of secondary importance. Economics, not yet an independent discipline, was less a science than an issue of moral philosophy.

In keeping with this thinking, Montcalm's officers were convinced that Canada's agricultural problems, in particular the periodic food shortages in the colony, were a result of laziness among the habitants. They overlooked the importance of crop failures and the lack of a market for Canadian agricultural produce. Amateur interest in agricultural reform shared by educated Englishmen and Frenchmen since the early decades of the century helped to transform many of the visiting officers into self-appointed experts on agriculture, whether or not they had any experience in this area. The Engineer-in-Chief of the Fortress of Louisbourg during the Seven Years' War, Lieutenant-Colonel Louis Franquet, wrote a report on Canada in 1752-1753, shortly before the outbreak of hostilities. In his view, it was deplorable that such a fertile country was unable to produce a food surplus, and he advocated establishing a bureau of agricultural affairs to assess agricultural censuses compiled by the curé and captain of militia in each parish. The curé and captain would not only report basic information, but project what each farm's production should be and record the personal habits of each male habitant: whether he hunted and fished on a long-term basis, left the area, or went to the city as a worker or salesman. The bureau would threaten to punish lazy habitants and put beggars, vagabonds, salesmen, and discharged soldiers to work on pieces of land. This made sense to Franquet, "for in a well-ordered state, everyone must occupy themselves usefully and work".¹ The king would exempt new settlers from *corvées* and buy their produce at a fixed price to help them subsist, but settlers at the forts in the far west should be allowed to sell their produce to the garrisons for as much as they could get in order to encourage agriculture there and avoid the cost of transporting food from the east at royal expense.²

¹Louis Franquet, *Voyages et mémoires sur le Canada* (Montreal: Éditions élysée, 1974), 179-87.

²*Ibid.*, 187-96.

In Franquet's opinion, the habitants' tax-free status should be ended, for the people of the countryside lived with too much ease, a condition brought about by their excessively high standard of living.³ Franquet constantly stressed the need to maximize the rural population at the expense of a more or less useless urban population, to make peasants work as hard as possible, and to allow the state to benefit from that production. Habitants should only be allowed to accumulate profits in special cases when it served the king's interests.

Other officers of the Seven Years' War period also showed scant sympathy for the relatively comfortable lifestyle of Canadian habitants. Brigadier François-Charles de Bourlamaque proposed that a tax be imposed on the "naturally lazy" habitants in order to force them to maximize production on their land and abandon their errant ways.⁴ He also believed that special severity was required to prevent Canadian and French "libertines" from living amongst the natives "because once adopted by them, they are lost to the state."⁵ Officers wished to limit any further expansion of the fur trade because of its supposedly pernicious influence on Canadians, who were distracted from agricultural pursuits.⁶

Montcalm's senior aide de camp Colonel Louis-Antoine de Bougainville also addressed the disoluteness of *coureurs de bois* and the need to "conserve the men in Canada and augment the number of cultivators, which are the basis of the state."⁷ He approved of the way the church took care of the "deserving" poor such as the sick and aged, but did not encourage beggars who were too lazy to work; in his opinion, "hospitals of the poor only serve to encourage idleness".⁸ It was impossible for able-bodied people to be legitimately unemployed, for theoretically at least there was always work to be done. Bougainville also suggested that the number of horses in the colony be restricted to one per family, for despite the fact that habitants used horses for plowing as well as transport and recreation, he considered them a luxury that reduced the number of cattle on

³*Ibid.*, 27, 158.

⁴François-Charles de Bourlamaque, "Memoir on Canada", in *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York (NYCD)*, 10 vols. (Albany: Weed Parsons, 1853-1887), 10: 1147.

⁵*Ibid.*, 10: 1149.

⁶This reflected official opinion since the time of Colbert. See William J. Eccles, *The Canadian Frontier, 1534-1760* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1983), 104-13.

⁷Louis-Antoine de Bougainville, "Mémoire sur l'état de la Nouvelle-France (1757)", *Rapport de l'archiviste de la province de Québec (RAPQ)* (1923-24): 43-45. *Laboureur* can be translated as cultivator.

⁸*Ibid.*, 64.

each farm.⁹ While it never would have occurred to him to restrict nobles from riding for recreational purposes, he had no inhibitions about regulating the lives of the common people for their own good. For a French officer, a habitant on a horse embodied the prevalent danger of "savagery" or social anarchy that the government vigorously had to suppress in Canada. When discussing methods of developing Louisiana, Bougainville advocated temporary concessions or privileges rather than a permanent free market: tax free status for settlers in Louisiana for twenty years, *permission* for settlers to cultivate whatever crops they wanted, no export taxes on furs and merchandise from New Orleans for ten years, and free commerce for foreign slave ships for five years in order to build up the slave population quickly.¹⁰ One of the dangers of a free market, especially in a colonial context, was that it threatened to enrich the wrong people, French and foreign merchants and Canadian peasants instead of nobles and royal tax officials. The free market also refused to conform to all of the state's political and military interests.

Canada's greatest need was a large population. Without it, the colony would produce little revenue and remain vulnerable to attack. A number of officers had schemes to attract settlers to Canada, but they were reluctant to do so at the expense of France's population, since despite widespread poverty in France the mother country was considered under populated. This is one reason why Montcalm and Bourlamaque wanted to attract the descendants of Huguenot refugees to Canada. These senior officers cautioned, however, that Protestant settlers would have to be subjected to a variety of restrictions, for unlike Catholic Canadians they were potential traitors and might transfer their allegiance to a foreign monarch.¹¹ Officers do not seem to have seriously considered the possibility that Canada might become independent one day. "It is true", one of them wrote, "that in the passage of time these vast lands could become separate kingdoms and republics; the same is true for New England. But how many centuries must one first wait?"¹²

French officers in Canada all considered agricultural production fundamental to a country's wealth, and had no qualms about using state incentives or coercion to ensure that it was maximized. They all favoured interventionist, fiscalist policies designed to

⁹*Ibid.*, 42.

¹⁰Louis-Antoine de Bougainville, "Transmigration: Mémoire pour la transmigration proposée du Canada à la Louisiane", April 1761, Bibliothèque nationale, Paris (BN) Département des manuscrits, Nouvelles acquisitions françaises (N.A.F.) 9406, fols. 313-16 and Louis-Antoine de Bougainville, "Moyens de peupler la Louisiane— Encouragements à donner aux habitants du Canada pour passer au Mississippi", June 1761, BN N.A.F. 9406, fols. 319-20. Bougainville's views on this colony paralleled Voltaire's, for the latter vastly preferred Louisiana to Canada. Carl L. Lokke, *France and the Colonial Question: A Study of Contemporary French Opinion 1763-1801* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), 41.

¹¹Anonymous, "Extrait des mémoires de Mr. de Montcalm", NA, MG18, K7, vol. 1 and Bourlamaque, "Memoir on Canada", *NYCD*, 10: 1148.

¹²Anonymous, "Mémoire sur le Canada", *RAPQ* (1923-24): 24.

raise state revenue by all available means, and thought only in terms of North America's benefits to the French crown. Although the price and marketing controls they envisioned were to a great extent rational and pragmatic, the eagerness with which these state servants sought to regulate the lives of the popular classes reveals the absence of an economic ideology that individual self-interest might serve a positive, ethical purpose.

Montcalm's officers also contradicted emerging physiocratic doctrines in their belief that commerce and manufacturing were as important as a sound agricultural sector. They knew that colonial exports played an important role in bringing wealth to the metropolis and the crown. Montcalm and Broulmaque provided lists of potential exports, from hemp and wool to lumber and ships, and hoped that trade with the French West Indies could be developed.¹³ While the Frenchmen were aware that Canada was not a profitable colony, they acknowledged its strategic role in containing British power on the continent and their rivals' potential wealth.¹⁴ Paradoxically, however, while officers valued colonial trade, they displayed contempt for merchants.¹⁵ Their objective was not to create a happy, prosperous merchant class, but a wealthy state. Franquet developed a detailed flour quota system to prevent exporters, or in his words "rogues and rascals", from sending too much grain to Louisbourg and other destinations, causing shortages in Canada.¹⁶ Together with Bougainville, he sharply criticized Canadian military officers for degrading themselves by profiting from the fur trade, and worried that commerce and luxury would distract them from their profession and erode social distinctions.¹⁷ Officers

¹³Anonymous, "Extrait des mémoires de Mr. de Montcalm", National Archives of Canada, Ottawa (NA), MG18, K7, vol. 1 and Broulmaque, "Memoir on Canada", *NYCD*, 10: 1140-41. See also Clarence P. Gould, "Trade Between the Windward Islands and the Continental Colonies of the French, 1683-1763", *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 25 (1939): 473-490; James S. Pritchard, "Commerce in New France", in *Canadian Business History: Selected Studies, 1497-1971*, ed. David S. Macmillan (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1972), 38; Dale Miquelon, *Dugard of Rouen: French Trade to Canada and the West Indies, 1729-1770* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1978), 1-11, 91-117; Inès Murat, *Colbert* (Paris: Fayard, 1980), 203-7, 293-300; and Jacques Mathieu, *Le commerce entre la Nouvelle-France et les Antilles au XVIIIe siècle* (Montreal: Fides, 1981), 209-22.

¹⁴Anonymous, "Extrait des mémoires de Mr. de Montcalm", NA MG18 K7, vol. 1; François-Charles de Broulmaque, "Abstract of a Plan to Excite a Rebellion in Canada", 1762, *NYCD*, 10: 1155-57; and anonymous, "Mémoire sur le Canada", *RAPQ* (1923-24): 23-24.

¹⁵Franquet, *Voyages*, 194-95.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 153-54, 179-81, 189-90.

¹⁷Franquet, *Voyages*, 67-68; Bougainville, "Mémoire sur l'état de la Nouvelle-France", *RAPQ* (1923-24): 61; and Louis-Antoine de Bougainville, *Adventure in the Wilderness: The American Journals of Louis Antoine de Bougainville, 1756-1760*, ed. and trans. Edward P. Hamilton (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1964), 248. See also William J. Eccles, "The Social, Economic, and Political Significance of the Military

were also uneasy about the concept of profit, especially profits which exceeded customary levels. They were disgusted by the war profiteering of French and Canadian officials in the colony, although their scruples did not prevent them from attending the dinners and dances hosted by these wealthy individuals.¹⁸

Canada's weakness made French officers acutely conscious of the economic and demographic strength of the English colonies.¹⁹ When Captain Pierre Pouchot arrived in New York City as a prisoner of war, he was stunned by the stark contrast between Canada and the booming American metropolis.²⁰ The American colonies produced a number of valuable export commodities, and Captain Jean-Guillaume-Charles Plantavit de Margon, Chevalier de La Pause, noted that tobacco made Virginia Britain's most important North American colony, furnishing the mother country with huge revenues from tobacco duties and occupying a significant proportion of Britain's shipping.²¹ British skill in commerce, colony-building, profit-making, and general enterprise aroused a general feeling of jealousy among the Frenchmen, who sensed that their country was falling behind the British economically, at least in the American hemisphere.²²

Establishment in New France", in William J. Eccles, *Essays on New France* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1987), 118-19 and John Bosher, *The Canada Merchants, 1713-1763* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 68-69, 78-84.

¹⁸Anonymous, "The Siege of Quebec in 1759", in *The Siege of Quebec in 1759: Three Eye-Witness Accounts*, ed. Jean-Claude Hébert (Quebec: Ministère des Affaires Culturelles), 87. See also Montreuil to d'Argenson, Montreal, 12 June 1756, *NYCD*, 10: 419 and James Johnstone, "The Campaign of Canada, 1760", *Collection de manuscrits contenant lettres, mémoires, et autres documents historiques relatifs à la Nouvelle-France, recueillis aux archives de la Province de Québec ou copiés à l'étranger (MRNF)*, 4 vols., ed. Jean Blanchet and Narcisse-Henri-Édouard, Faucher de Saint-Maurice (Quebec: Imprimerie A. Côté et Cie., 1883-1885), 4: 242.

¹⁹Bougainville, "Mémoire sur l'état de la Nouvelle-France", *RAPQ* (1923-24): 63.

²⁰Pouchot, *Memoir*, 2: 80-89. For the size of Canadian concessions see Richard C. Harris, *The Seigneurial System in Early Canada: A Geographical Study* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1966; reprint, Kingston, Ont.: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1984), 117-19.

²¹Jean-Guillaume-Charles Plantavit de Margon, Chevalier de La Pause, "Mémoire sur la campagne à faire en Canada l'année 1757", *RAPQ* (1932-33): 333. For a good description of the importance of North American trade and markets for the British economy see Ralph Davis, *The Rise of the Atlantic Economies* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973), 264-87.

²²Louis-Joseph, Marquis de Montcalm, *Journal du marquis de Montcalm durant ses campagnes au Canada de 1756 à 1760*, in *Collection des manuscrits du maréchal de Lévis (Lévis MSS)*, ed. Henri-Raymond Casgrain, 12 vols. (Quebec: L.J. Demers et frère, 1891-1895), 7: 289 and Bougainville, *Adventure in the Wilderness*, 289. The French

They could only ascribe the prosperity of the American colonies to the good climate and soil of the region and the British government's willingness to allow British dissenters and German Protestants to settle in the colonies, a policy of which the officers were dubious because they doubted that these minorities were completely loyal to the British crown.²³ Montcalm's subordinates were able to describe the economic results of the increasingly capitalistic and consumer-oriented nature of American society, but they also saw the democratic, multi-ethnic, and commercial nature of these colonies as a weakness to be exploited. Their noble values did not permit them to believe that merchants and farmers had the organizational skills or the moral fibre to establish and maintain truly mature, successful modern states. As we shall see, misconceptions about capitalism and suspicion of capitalist values were not confined to officers in the 1750's.

Twenty years later, during the War of American Independence, French officers observed with satisfaction the apparent disintegration and collapse of the British empire. Officers and most educated Frenchmen were persuaded that if the Americans succeeded in gaining their independence, then Britain's share of world trade would drop drastically, and since Britain's wealth was perceived to depend largely on external trade and credit, financial disaster would ensue. They expected to see this upstart country revert to its natural place as a second or third-rate power, for without trade and the wealth derived from it, the British would be unable to maintain the large navy with which it dominated the seas.²⁴

French officers' ardent desire to see the British brought low, however, was not invariably matched by a corresponding ambition for France to take Britain's place as the master of the seas, monopolizing the world's commerce and colonies.²⁵ There were a number of reasons for this. First, Frenchmen believed that their country was blessed by nature and that under "normal" conditions France's agricultural and demographic

were certainly holding their own in general overseas trade, however. Davis, *Rise of the Atlantic Economies*, 307.

²³Bougainville, *Adventure in the Wilderness*, 323.

²⁴See François Crouzet, "The Sources of England's Wealth: Some French Views in the Eighteenth Century", in *Shipping, Trade and Commerce: Essays in Memory of Ralph Davis*, ed. P. L. Cottrell and Derek H. Aldcroft (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1981), 61-79 and Vergennes to Beaumarchais, Versailles, 2 May 1776, in *Naval Documents of the American Revolution*, 9 vols. by 1986, ed. William B. Clark and William J. Morgan (Washington, D.C.: Naval Historical Centre, Department of the Navy, 1964-1986), 4: 1084.

²⁵For official French policy see Jean-François Labourdette, *Vergennes: Ministre principal de Louis XVI* (Paris: Éditions Desjonquières, 1990), 94-123. See also Ramon E. Abarca, "Classical Diplomacy and Bourbon 'Revanche' Strategy, 1763-1770", *Review of Politics* 32 (1970): 313-37 and Ramsay, "Anglo-French Relations 1763-1770", *University of California Publications in History* 17 (1942): v-viii, 146-47, 151, 157, 164-66, 168-69, 214, 222-26, 232.

preeminence would make it the dominant economic power of Europe. In addition, France's customary weakness on the seas, its costly and often disastrous experiences in Canada, Acadia, Louisiana, and India, the concept of the balance of power, and to some extent the anti-colonialism propagated by certain intellectuals meant that officers were usually more concerned about cutting France's enemies down to size than aggressively expanding French territory.²⁶

Rochambeau's officers frequently compared the American economy with that of their own country, and were particularly impressed by the Americans' standard of living, substantial economic equality, and commercial activity.²⁷ Repeatedly they stressed the absence of either luxury or extreme poverty in the United States, and Sub-lieutenant Nicolas-François-Denis Brisout de Barneville remarked that "The people have an air of ease and well-being which is a pleasure to see."²⁸ As far as most officers were concerned, however, American farmers did have certain vices, for although they had plenty of food, they allegedly neglected the principles of scientific agriculture and displayed "indolence" compared to French agricultural workers.²⁹ As in the previous war, French officers blamed insufficient food production on the moral shortcomings of agriculturists. They

²⁶See Thomas A. Cassilly, "The Anticolonial Tradition in France: The Eighteenth Century to the Fifth Republic" (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, New York, 1975), 19-62 and Vincent Confer, "French Colonial Ideas Before 1789", *French Historical Studies* 3 (1963-64): 338-59.

²⁷See Patrice L. R. Higonnet, *Sister Republics: The Origins of French and American Republicanism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 82-88. According to Richard Sheridan, Americans had among the highest living standards in the world. Richard B. Sheridan, "The Domestic Economy", in *Colonial British America: Essays in the History of the Early Modern Era*, ed. Jack P. Greene and Jack R. Pole (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 43, 49. See also Alice H. Jones, *Wealth of a Nation to Be: The American Colonies on the Eve of the Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 298-305.

²⁸Nicolas-François-Denis, Brisout de Barneville, "Journal de guerre de Brisout de Barneville, mai 1780-octobre 1781", *French-American Review* 3 (1950): 241. See also Claude Blanchard, *The Journal of Claude Blanchard*, ed. Thomas W. Balch, trans. William Duane (New York: New York Times & Arno Press, 1969), xv, 50, 79, 81-82. For the American economy in wartime see James F. Shepherd, "British America and the Atlantic Economy", in *The Economy of Early America: The Revolutionary Period, 1763-1790*, ed. Ronald Hoffman, John J. McCusker, Russel R. Menard, and Peter J. Albert (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1988), 19-23.

²⁹Ternay to Sartine, Rhode Island, 2 Dec. 1780, AN Marine B4 183, fol. 66; Galvan to Sartine, Charleston, 19 April 1778, in Galvan, "Recueil de quelques lettres d'un officier au service des Etats Unis d'Amérique à Mrs. de Sartine et L.", AN Marine B4 192, fol. 213; and Charles-Albert de Moré, Chevalier de Pontgibaud, *A French Volunteer of the War of American Independence*, ed. and trans. Robert M. Douglas (Paris: Charles Carrington, 1898), 67-68.

also held the allegedly lax republican authorities responsible, for these leaders were unable to infuse the comfortable citizenry with the same degree of discipline and self-sacrifice as citizens of the Roman republic, or the obedience and good order of well-ruled monarchies. Inflation caused by excessively large issues of paper money and other factors only reinforced this impression, and virtually everyone except the well-educated Major-General François-Jean de Beauvoir, Chevalier de Chastellux, rejected the use of paper money.³⁰ The Frenchmen frequently indicated that American governments should do more to control the marketplace, which enriched private citizens but not the coffers of the Continental Congress or the state legislatures.

French officers of the 1770's and 1780's also resembled Montcalm's in that they had difficulty accepting the idea of profit as a societal good. All mentioned Americans' penchant for money and the willingness of local farmers, military suppliers, innkeepers, and ferrymen to charge high prices for goods and services which the French required.³¹ When an enraged farmer threatened to strike the Comte de Vioménil with a cane after a mounted French hunting party brazenly trampled the farmer's crops, Captain Claude-Marie-Madeleine, Chevalier de Lavergne de Tressan, complained that Americans even extorted money from people by beating them with sticks.³² The United States seemed to be dominated by the marketplace, and the Frenchmen could not avoid feeling that this was somehow immoral. Lieutenant Jean-Baptiste-Elzéar, Chevalier de Coriolis

³⁰Anonymous, "Notions sur les 13 Etats Unis de l'Amerique", AN Marine B4 192, fol. 216; Pierre-François de Boy, "Mémoire sur les peuples du nord de l'Amérique fait par le Sr. De Boy Major à leur service, et envoyé au Consul français De Caillery en Sardaigne le 10. mai 1780", AN Colonies E50; Davis, *Rise of the Atlantic Economies*, 247-49; anonymous, "Quelques observations sur les Etats unis d'amérique", AN Marine B7 458; Galvan to Sartine, Charleston, 19 April 1778; Galvan to Sartine and L., West Point, N.Y., 8 Oct. 1779, and Galvan to L., Totowa Bridge (Paterson), N.J., 22 Oct. 1780, in Galvan, "Recueil de quelques lettres", AN Marine B4 192, fols. 211-12, 226, 236; and François-Jean de Beauvoir, Chevalier de Chastellux, *Travels in North America in the Years 1780, 1781, and 1782*, 2 vols., trans. Howard C. Rice (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1963), 1: 6, 180-81, 187.

³¹René de Kerallain, "Bougainville à l'escadre du comte d'Estaing: Guerre d'Amérique 1778-1779", *Journal de la Société des américanistes de Paris (JSAP)* 19 (1927): 171; anonymous to friend, Easton, Penn., 13 Nov. 1777, in anonymous, "Letters of a French Officer, Written at Easton, Penna., in 1777-1778", *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography (PMHB)* 35 (1911): 99; Rochambeau to Ségur, 4 Sept. 1781, AN Archives de Guerre (AG) A1 3734, fol. 94, cited in Lee Kennett, *The French Forces in America, 1780-1783* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1977), 70; and Montesquieu to Comte de Chastellux, Newport, 12 Oct. 1780, in "Lettres de divers officiers prenant part à la guerre d'Amérique, adressés au comte de Chastellux, ct. [commandant] le régiment de Beaujolais à Versailles (1779-1782)", AN Série M 1021 IV.

³²Lavergne de Tressan to Commandeur, Newport, 24 Jan. 1781, in Claude-Marie-Madeleine, Chevalier de Lavergne de Tressan, "Lettres du Vte de Tresson etc. (1779-1788)", BN N.A.F. 21510.

d'Espinousse, who planned to marry a Virginian heiress and make his fortune in the country, took great pains to explain in a letter to his mother that he would acquire his fortune as a French consul, where he could use his connections to monetary advantage, or else as a plantation owner; he had no intention of becoming a merchant.³³ Contemporary interest in liberty of commerce and substantial noble investment in French mines, ironworks, and trade with the West Indies did little to change officers' attitudes toward personal involvement in commercial money-making, for even though they considered it important for France to have a large overseas trade they were still prejudiced against the mercantile profession.³⁴ They accepted the concept of a "fair" profit, but not the idea of charging the maximum market price under all circumstances. Rochambeau's officers, like Montcalm's, did not embrace economic individualism.³⁵

Officers had ambiguous attitudes toward monopoly. Their remarks indicate that the concept still had considerable vitality in the second half of the century, but that the negative aspects of creating a privileged company were also apparent. For example, a naval lieutenant, Hippolyte-Louis-Antoine, Comte de Capellis, wanted the navy to protect American convoys so that the Patriots could obtain supplies in the French islands, believing that this trade benefited French colonists in both peacetime and wartime. He did not suggest that free trade in the French islands would be detrimental to the French metropolis.³⁶ On the other hand, another lieutenant, Vigny, proposed the destruction of the Hudson's Bay Company and its replacement by a French company run along similar lines. This new company's conduct, however, would be carefully regulated in order to avoid, in his words, "the tyranny of monopoly".³⁷ Few officers of the 1780 period were ideologically opposed to monopolies, but they usually preferred to avoid them.

Officers were concerned about American commerce because they believed that it was of vital importance in determining whether Britain or France was to be the dominant European power on land and sea. It was evident that Britain's production and trade depended to some extent on the American colonies, for before the war Americans consumed large quantities of British manufactures.³⁸ Officers were inclined to believe

³³Coriolis to mother, Baltimore camp, 17 Aug. 1782, in Jean-Baptiste-Elzéar, Chevalier de Coriolis d'Espinousse, "Lettres d'un officier de l'armée de Rochambeau: Le chevalier de Coriolis", *Le Correspondant* (Paris), vol. 326 (n.s. 290), 25 mars 1932, 808-12.

³⁴See George V. Taylor, "Types of Capitalism in Eighteenth Century France", *English Historical Review* 79 (1964): 478-97.

³⁵Higonnet, *Sister Republics*, 4-5.

³⁶Capellis, "Projets relatifs à la Marine", Papiers Capellis, AN Série T 228, fol. 22.

³⁷Vigny, "Projet d'une expedition pour la baye d'Hudson" (ca. 1780), AN Marine B4 183, fols. 123-24.

³⁸See anonymous, "Mémoire sur la nouvelle angleterre", AN Marine B7 458, a pre-war proposal on how to attack and plunder Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, Boston, and Rhode Island, with comments on British-American trade. During the period 1772 to

that Britain's loss of this trade would bring about the virtual collapse of British power.³⁹ In addition, several officers worried about the development of American ironworks and manufacturing industries, for while they had no desire to see the Americans remain dependent on British goods the prospect of American self-sufficiency threatened their dreams of a peaceful French conquest of American markets.⁴⁰ The volunteer Major Galvan argued that "We can keep their industry useless for a long time" if the proper means were employed.⁴¹ He proposed that the French navy help escort American ships and produce to French ports so that the Americans did not have to build their own fleet. This would keep them dependent on French naval protection, and therefore subject to French political influence.⁴² The Americans might even be persuaded to close their ports to all but French vessels during the duration of the war as the price of a French military alliance. Nevertheless, Galvan warned that it was not worth starting a war with the Americans to ensure that this absolute monopoly continued after Britain was defeated: "Fighting for this scrap is to play with men's lives and merit as much misery as we have already met with for four acres of snow", a reference to the lives lost defending Canada

1774, Britain imported 5.4 million pounds sterling worth of American produce. Jacob M. Price, "The Transatlantic Economy", in *Colonial British America*, ed. Greene and Pole, 28.

³⁹Hippolyte-Louis-Antoine, Comte de Capellis, "Protection du commerce des Etats-unis", AN Marine B4 183, fol. 237; Jean-Baptiste-Antoine de Verger, "Journal of the Most Important Events that occurred to the French Troops under the command of M. le Comte de Rochambeau", in *Rochambeau's Army*, ed. and trans. Rice and Brown, 1: 125, 160, 162; Hans Christoph Ludwig Friedrich Ignatz, Freiherr von Closen-Haydenburg, *The Revolutionary Journal of Baron Ludwig von Closen 1780-1783*, ed. and trans. Evelyn M. Acomb (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1958), 33, 246, 325; and Curt Bogislaus Ludvig Cristoffer, Baron von Stedingk, "Count Stedingk", *Putnam's Monthly: A Magazine of Literature, Science, and Art* 4 (1854): 352.

⁴⁰Boy, "Mémoire sur les peuples du nord de l'Amérique", AN Colonies E50; Jean-François-Louis de Lesquevin, Comte de Clermont-Crèvecoeur, "Journal of the War in America During the Years 1780, 1781, 1782, 1783", in *The American Campaigns of Rochambeau's Army 1780, 1781, 1782, 1783*, 2 vols., ed. and trans. Howard C. Rice and Anne K. Brown (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972 and Providence, R.I.: Brown University Press, 1972), 1: 75; and Montesquieu to Latapie, Newport, 11 Nov. 1780-29 Jan. 1781, in Raymond Céléste, "Un petit-fils de Montesquieu en Amérique (1780-1783)", *Revue philomathique de Bordeaux et du Sud-Ouest (RPBSO)* 5 (1902): 545. By the 1770's Colonial American iron production was equal to half that of Britain. Higonet, *Sister Republics*, 36, 82, 118.

⁴¹Galvan to Sartine, Charleston, 19 April 1778, in Galvan, "Recueil de quelques lettres", AN Marine B4 192, fol. 214.

⁴²*Ibid.*

during the Seven Years' War.⁴³ Although he advocated expanding France's overseas trade, pragmatism dictated that France avoid the problems of trying to monopolize absolutely the continent's resources.

Wealthier, better-educated officers were often more forthright in their support for free trade, and their rigorous, ideological stance suggests that they had absorbed more physiocratic free trade doctrine than the average officer. The Marquis de La Fayette, who served in the Continental Army, devoted serious attention to French-American trade after the war. A vital element in encouraging American trade, he believed, was liberty of commerce, *la liberté*, which would result in proportionally greater revenue, consumption of manufactures, and agricultural production in the colonies. Especially onerous for American merchants were French internal customs barriers, "that establishment against nature", and vexatious regulations such as those of the tobacco monopoly of the Farmers-General. In his view, Americans should be allowed to trade freely in France and the French islands.⁴⁴ Although La Fayette was more interested in trade privileges for Americans than in opening French markets to the world, his writings suggest that he was at least indirectly influenced by physiocratic ideas.⁴⁵ Other senior officers also spoke out in favour of liberty of commerce. Second-Colonel Louis-Philippe, Comte de Ségur, hoped that one day the islands of the French West Indies would be self-governing or independent countries in friendly alliance with France, and Chastellux, who wrote a paper supporting liberty of commerce, criticized Pennsylvania for fixing prices and banning grain exports during part of the war, which instead of helping the province and Washington's army ruined the farmers and prevented them from paying taxes.⁴⁶ Despite these examples, the sheer variety of officers' economic opinions suggests that most of them employed a piecemeal approach to economic problems: faced with a particular situation, they provided a solution, usually a traditional one, to remedy the situation.⁴⁷

⁴³Galvan took this phrase from Voltaire's *Candide*. Galvan to Sartine, Charleston, 19 April 1778, in Galvan, "Recueil de quelques lettres", AN Marine B4 192, fols. 213-16.

⁴⁴Marie-Joseph-Paul-Yves-Roch-Gilbert Du Motier, Marquis de La Fayette, "Observations sur le commerce entre la France et les Etas-Unis", AN Marine B7 460. See also Olivier Bernier, *Lafayette: Hero of Two Worlds* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1983), 151-53, 159-60.

⁴⁵See Louis R. Gottschalk, *Lafayette Between the American and the French Revolution (1783-1789)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1950), 37-51.

⁴⁶⁴⁶Louis-Philippe, Comte de Ségur, *Mémoires ou souvenirs et anecdotes par M. le comte de Ségur, de l'Académie française, pair de France*, 3 vols., 2d ed. (Paris: Alexis Eymery, 1825), 1: 485; Chastellux, *Travels*, 1: 180-81; and Alan C. Kors, "François-Jean Marquis de Chastellux", in *Abroad in America: Visitors to the New Nation 1776-1914*, ed. Marc Pachter (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1976), 4.

⁴⁷Ternay to Sartine, Rhode Island, 2 Dec. 1780, AN Marine B4 183, fol. 66. See also John W. Rogers, "The Opposition to the Physiocrats: A Study of Economic Thought and Policy in the Ancien Régime, 1750-1780" (Ph.D. dissertation, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, 1971), 277-315. Colonial governments fixed food prices and ferry

Few revealed that they were aware of or cared about the current debate in France between more radical advocates of free trade such as Turgot and more moderate ones such as Necker.⁴⁸ One suspects, however, that most officers would have preferred Necker's stance in favour of government regulation of the economy and the retention of France's colonial monopolies in conjunction with a liberalization of trade barriers within the country.

French officers, including volunteers who were actively serving in the Patriot forces, differed over the wisdom of aiding the Americans. Many were concerned that France might exhaust her military and financial resources to topple British power in North America, only to see an aggressive and unfriendly republic rise in its place. One school of officers favoured only clandestine military aid to the rebels, while others advocated either naval or full military intervention.⁴⁹ Officers frequently visualized

rates when necessary, and this practice continued in wartime. Sheridan, "Domestic Economy", in *Colonial British America*, ed. Greene and Pole, 70.

⁴⁸Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot, Baron de l'Aulne, "Réflexions rédigées à l'occasion du Mémoire remis par Mr. le comte de Vergennes sur la manière dont la France et l'Espagne doivent envisager les suites de la querelle entre la Grande Bretagne et ses colonies", April 1776, AN Série K 1340, no. 10, pp. 13-14, 31-32. See also Keith M. Baker, *Inventing the French Revolution: Essays on French Political Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 122-23; André Labrouquère, *Les idées coloniales des physiocrates* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1927), 85-91, 115-25; Georges Weulersse, *La physiocratie sous les ministères de Turgot et de Necker (1774-1781)* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1959), 79-101; Jean Egret, *Necker: Ministre de Louis XVI, 1776-1790* (Paris: Librairie Honoré Champion, 1975), 14-21, 32-40, 90-92, 140-42; Cassilly, "Anticolonial Tradition in France", 77-79, 116-19; Robert D. Harris, *Necker: Reform Statesman of the Ancien Régime* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 19, 53-67; Janis Spurlock, "What Price Economic Prosperity?: Public Attitudes to Physiocracy in the Reign of Louis XVI", *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 9 (1986): 183-96; Jean Tarrade, *Le commerce colonial de la France à la fin de l'Ancien Régime: L'évolution du régime de "l'Exclusif" de 1763 à 1789*, 2 vols. (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1972), 1: 13-63, 373-402, 2: 675-712; John F. Bosher, *The Single Duty Project: A Study of the Movement for a French Customs Union in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Athlone Press, 1964), 53-62 and Harold T. Parker, *The Bureau of Commerce in 1781 and Its Policies with Respect to French Industry* (Durham, N.C.: Carolina Academic Press, 1979), 47, 53-57, 70-74, 85-86; and John F. Bosher, *French Finances 1770-1795: From Business to Bureaucracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 150, 306-8. See also Simon Schama, *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution* (Toronto: Random House of Canada, 1989), 88-95.

⁴⁹La Fayette to Marquis de Castries, New Windsor, Conn., 30 Jan. 1781, AN Marine B4 192, fols. 164-68; Louis Le Bègue de Presle Du Portail, "Copie d'un mémoire de Mr. Duportail, commandant le corps de génie des américains", AN Marine B4 192, fols. 245-46; Thomas-Jacques Goislard, Chevalier de Villebresme, *Souvenirs du chevalier de Villebresme, mousquetaire de la garde du Roi 1772-1816: Guerre*

French naval commitment in terms of manoeuvring and commercial raiding rather than pitched naval battles, for despite the revival of the French navy since 1763, army and navy officers were uncertain about risking their fleet in a major encounter with the British. Army captain Armand-Charles-Augustin de La Croix de Castries, Comte de Charlus, argued that it was vital for the French navy to protect French shipping and attack British convoys to the Indies, for "It is only the credit of private individuals which upholds England and to destroy it is to ruin the merchants."⁵⁰ The volunteer Galvan supported intervention not because of any love for Americans but because it was so advantageous for France. Independence for the United States, he felt, would break Britain's control of the seas, shift half of the world's commerce to new routes, and give France an American overseas empire without the high costs of defending and administering it. Like La Fayette, he wished to see the Americans conquer Canada, but only because he feared that if the British retained it after the war the Americans would fall under the domination of their former masters.⁵¹ The most imperialistic of all the French officers it seems, were those who had personal connections with the former French colonies in North America and India, and wanted these territories back in French hands.⁵²

d'Amérique, émigration (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1897), 75; Pontgibaud, *A French Volunteer*, 69, 87-88, 105, 149; Romand de l'Isle to Count, Reading, Penn., 25 March 1778, in Romand de l'Isle, "Letters", *New Jersey Gazette*, Dec. 10, 1777; and anonymous, "Notions sur les 13 Etats Unis d'Amérique", AN Marine B4 192, fols. 219-20.

⁵⁰Armand-Charles-Augustin de La Croix de Castries, Comte de Charlus, "Journal de mon voyage en Amérique (7 mai 1780-27 septembre 1780)", AN Marine B4 183, fol. 182; Coriolis to mother, Boston, 5 Dec. 1782, in Coriolis, "Lettres", *Le Correspondant* (Paris), vol. 396 (n.s. 290), 25 March 1932, 821; Capellis, "Protection du commerce des Etats-unis", AN Marine B4 183, fols. 237-41; and Jacomet de Cauvigny to Comte de Chastellux, Chesapeake Bay, Virg., 22 Oct. 1781, in "Lettres de divers officiers", AN Série M 1021 IV.

⁵¹Galvan to Sartine, Paris, 26 April 1777, and Galvan to Sartine, Charleston, 19 April 1778, in Galvan, "Recueil de quelques lettres", AN Marine B4 192, fols. 204, 210-11, 218.

⁵²For veterans of Montcalm's army with plans to recapture Canada see Anne-Joseph-Hippolyte de Maurès, Comte de Malartic, *Journal des campagnes au Canada de 1755 à 1760 par le comte de Maurès de Malartic* (Paris: E. Plon, Nourrit et cie., 1890), p. 331; Bourlamaque, "Abstract of a Plan to Excite a Rebellion in Canada", 1763, *NYCD*, 10: 1155-57; François-Gaston de Lévis, Chevalier de Lévis, *Souvenirs et portraits, 1780-1789*, 15, cited in Marcel Trudel, *La Révolution américaine: Pourquoi la France refuse le Canada (1775-1783)* (Sillery, Que.: Éditions du Boréal Express, 1976), 166; Charles-Nicolas Gabriel, *Le maréchal de camp Desandroüins, 1729-1792: Guerre du Canada, 1756-1760, guerre de l'Indépendance américaine, 1780-1782* (Verdun, France: Imprimerie Renvé-Lallemant, 1887), 368; and Jean-Nicolas Desandroüins, "Mémoire sur le Canada par M. Desandroüins, ancien ingénieur dans cette colonie", Sarrelouis, 26 Aug. 1778, *Lévis MSS*, 4: 319-22.

Rochambeau's officers applauded the peace treaty as a major victory for France. As Blanchard wrote, "This peace, advantageous to France, was disastrous for England, and it seemed to all that if the former knew how to avail herself of this prosperity, she might recover the superiority in Europe to which England pretended."⁵³ Many of these hopes were soon dashed. Nevertheless, a new nation had emerged in the Americas that many French officers believed would one day have an important influence on European affairs. Coriolis predicted that the United States might one day be "the most powerful empire in the entire world", although he had no clear idea whether this would be for good or ill.⁵⁴

If we compare French officers' writings of the late 1750's and early 1780's, it quickly becomes evident that their economic attitudes remained largely the same. The differences that did exist can be ascribed as much to new geopolitical circumstances as to changes in economic ideology. Officers continued to believe that agriculture and natural resources were the principal source of a nation's wealth, and assumed that commerce and credit were chiefly an artificial manipulation of the wealth created by production. Control of land, including land overseas, provided access to that wealth, and therefore formal sovereignty over colonies was desirable. If formal control were difficult, however, then the best alternative was to make certain that no rival power was able to monopolize that land and divert its wealth into exclusive channels.

One important change that did occur by 1780 was that a few highly-educated officers were influenced by a systematic economic doctrine that promoted liberty of commerce, although these men rarely went so far as to advocate an end to national customs barriers and colonies. Most officers, however, continued to favour considerable government intervention in the economy, and increasingly emphasized the direct use of state authority rather than the simple distribution of economic privileges in exchange for immediate revenue. Independent commercial monopolies were generally unpopular, but the government's moral right to regulate the economy was upheld, and possibly strengthened, a stance which would be reflected in French economic policy far into the future. Even the officers we consider "liberal" in their thinking were unwilling to contemplate the withering away of the state.

While officers failed to understand important aspects of British and American capitalism, they instinctively realized that capitalist values threatened the foundations of France's social structure. If status were based on money-making skills rather than aristocratic virtues such as honour, newly-recruited members of the elite might retain their values when they entered their new social station and push aside the old elite rather than assimilate into its lower ranks. Many officers held a conservative and pessimistic image of Canadian and American societies as crumbling, leaderless outposts of European civilization whose inhabitants were steadily degenerating into a state of savagery. While this was obviously a distortion of reality, so was the more optimistic image of America entertained by a minority of liberal officers, who saw what they wanted to see, a fragile

⁵³Blanchard, *Journal*, 193-94.

⁵⁴Coriolis to mother, Boston, 4 Dec. 1782, in Coriolis, "Lettres", *Le Correspondant* (Paris), vol. 326, 25 March 1932, 826.

refuge of republican virtue amid a corrupt but possibly reformable world. Paradoxically, while more liberal officers associated political liberty with economic liberty and therefore supported capitalism, they also feared the consequences of unfettered commerce because it tended to promote luxury and inequality, both dire enemies of embattled liberty. More conservative officers, on the other hand, were suspicious of capitalism because they feared that it undermined social stability, but they did not fear luxury and inequality in themselves because they saw these conditions as the natural result of social development. Nobles were not so much threatened by new wealth as by new economic and social values which might undermine the prestige and the privileges that reinforced their own wealth. In the face of new social, political, and economic ideas in the second half of the century, conservative officers, while not completely opposed to change, believed that their status and a healthy society could be maintained by rationalizing but preserving economic and political privileges. Liberal officers, on the other hand, were more optimistic that members of the second estate could maintain their position of honour and increase social harmony with fewer formal privileges. Less than a decade after their return to France in 1783, Rochambeau's officers, liberal and conservative, would see their fondest hopes and worst nightmares become reality.