RHODE ISLAND'S WARS: IMPERIAL CONFLICTS AND
PROVINCIAL SELF-INTERESTS
IN THE OCEAN COLONY,
1739-48

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Abstract

Rhode Island's Wars: Imperial Conflicts and Provincial Self-Interests in the Ocean Colony, 1739-48

Whether in terms of political and military threats or economic and demographic growth, this thesis argues that Rhode Island's involvement in this period of imperial warfare was characterized by self-interest on a variety of levels. The government's military plans, the expansion of provincial power, attempts to raise expeditionary forces, the use of privateers, and the indirect participation of non-combatants all depict a colonial society very interested in its own local political and economic interests. Although literally "provincial," these interests exhibit the Atlantic and global networks that the smallest of the New England colonies was situated in. These two different sets of concerns, the political and economic, sometimes clashed and at other times combined as politicians, merchants, sailors, soldiers, and citizens participated in the dual conflicts. The War of Jenkins' Ear and King George's War may have been imperial in origin, but personal and colonial interests were paramount to regional New England and imperial British concerns.

Keywords: Rhode Island, New England, Politics, Colonial America, King George's War, War of Jenkins' Ear, Military History, War and Society, Privateering, Merchants, Maritime

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Figure 1. Colonial Rhode Towns and Boundaries

Figure 2. Rhode Island's Civil Defense

Figure 3. Imperial Atlantic Expeditions

Table 1. Governors of Rhode Island during the Dual Conflicts

John Wanton	May, 1734	July 5, 1740 (died in office)
Richard Ward	July 15, 1740	May, 1743
William Greene	May, 1743	May, 1745
Gideon Wanton	May, 1745	May, 1746
William Greene	May, 1746	May, 1747
Gideon Wanton	May, 1747	May, 1748
William Greene	May, 1748	May, 1755

Table 2. Abbreviations of Sources

See the bibliography for full citations. Roman numerals indicate volume numbers while Arabic numerals denote page or document numbers.

<i>The Correspondence of the Colonial Governors of Rhode Island</i>	CCGRI
Governor and Council Records	GCR
Petitions to the Rhode Island General Assembly	PRIG
<i>Records of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations</i>	RCRI

Introduction

Between 1739 and 1748 the colonists of British North America, especially in New England, endured incessant war. The initial conflict, the War of Jenkins' Ear, began in 1739. Sparked by grievances leveled at Spain before the House of Commons by harassed mariners, most notably of which was the eponymous Robert Jenkins, the war set off a series of naval engagements, expeditions and invasions that reached from the colony of Georgia to the shores of South America. This conflict widened in 1744 as the British Empire became entangled in the War of Austrian Succession. Britain and her allies soon faced a host of enemies in addition to Spain, including France, Prussia, Sweden, and smaller Italian and German states.

As was the case with both earlier and future wars of the seventeenth and eighteenth century, these overlapping conflicts were global in nature, with actions taking place in Europe, the western hemisphere, and on the high seas. Colonial North American involvement began with the War of Jenkins' Ear and intensified greatly in 1744 with the start of King George's War, a conflict that pitted the colonists against the French for the next four years. During this time New England soldiers and sailors conducted several expeditions against the colonial possessions of their enemies. In 1740 they were involved in the botched amphibious assault on Cartagena, a strategic trading post in the Spanish colony of New Grenada.¹ Five years after this stunning failure, New England forces again took to the sea and landed at another enemy colonial strongpoint: the French fortress at Louisbourg located on the northeastern shore of Cape Breton Island.

Among the participants in these endeavors were contingents of men from the colony of Rhode Island. Despite having one of the lowest populations of Britain's

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¹ Cartagena is located on the Caribbean coast of modern day Columbia.

mainland colonies² and being the smallest in size, Rhode Island was actively involved in this period of war. The 1740s were a time of both growth and vulnerability for the colony. On the one hand, Rhode Island colonists were a people on the move. The colony's merchant and privateer ships cruised the Atlantic and Caribbean, raiding enemy commerce and conducting a lucrative trade with the West Indies, Britain and the coastal ports of the mainland colonies. On the islands, peninsulas and mainland of the colony during this period, highways were being constructed, bridges being built, and a number of new towns formed as the population continued to climb at a steady pace. Providence and Newport, the colony's dual urban centers, were also expanding, creating a considerably urban population, especially when compared to the other British possessions of this period.³

At the same time the colony was also facing a number of threats that endangered its borders, safety, and the relative independence of its government. Because of the wars the people of Rhode Island felt that their security was directly threatened by the possibility of raids or even invasion. This fear was felt not only by the governor and assembly but also by vulnerable groups such as the merchants of Newport and the inhabitants of Block Island. In addition to these wartime perils, Rhode Island faced political threats abroad and close to home. During the years leading up to the start of hostilities in 1739, the charter of the colony, which allowed for self-governance of the colony, came into question by the increasingly scrutinous imperial metropole. At the

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² In 1740, Rhode Island is estimated to have had a little over 25,000 inhabitants. It only ranked higher than Georgia, New Hampshire, and the semi-autonomous Delaware. Jack P. Greene, ed., *Settlements to Society 1607-1763: A Documentary History of Colonial America* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1975), 238.

³ By 1748 over one-third of the population of Rhode Island lived in either one of these cities. Lynne Withey, *Urban Growth in Colonial Rhode Island: Newport and Providence in the Eighteenth Century* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1984), 115.

same time the colony was embroiled in a bitter and long lasting dispute with neighboring Massachusetts. Years of litigation, claims, and counter-claims occurred as they battled for possession of a collection of small towns located near eastern Rhode Island and southeastern Massachusetts.

Given this context of war, vulnerability, and growth, a study of Rhode Island during this period raises several questions. For instance, how did the smallest of the British North American mainland colonies wage war? What motivated its people and government to involve themselves in seemingly non-local, imperial conflicts? How did this nearly decade long period of violence shape society? Whether in terms of threats or growth, I will argue that Rhode Island's involvement in this period of imperial warfare was characterized by self-interest on a variety of levels. The government's military plans, the expansion of provincial power, attempts to raise expeditionary forces, the use of privateers, and the indirect participation of non-combatants all depict a colonial society very interested in its own local political and economic interests. Although literally "provincial," these interests exhibit the Atlantic and global networks that the smallest of the New England colonies was situated in. These two different sets of concerns, the political and economic, sometimes clashed and at other times combined as politicians, merchants, sailors, soldiers, and citizens participated in the dual conflicts. The War of Jenkins' Ear and King George's War may have been imperial in origin, but personal and colonial interests were paramount to regional New England and imperial British concerns.

The engagement of these questions and the ensuing study of Rhode Island society at war between the years of 1739 and 1748 are worthy of consideration because of the

numerous broader issues they touch upon. Firstly, it illuminates the response of an individual colony to an imperial war. From the mid seventeenth century up until the 1760s, Britain's mainland North American colonies were pulled into a series of wars, imperial in origin, which presented the colonies with a variety of economic and security problems. Secondly, this study of a society at war highlights the importance of examining the role of violence in the history of colonial America. As one scholar has aptly put it: "colonial North American history was not created in peace and interrupted by wars; wars, rumors of war, and costs of war affected every generation of Amerindians and colonists."⁴ For Rhode Island, the violence of the dual conflicts presented its self in the form constant rumors of raid and invasion, only materializing in the shape of roving privateers off of the coast and far-flung expeditions to French Canada the Spanish West Indies. Despite the seemingly intangible nature of this sort of violence, government institutions, armed forces, and society as a whole still experienced and responded to the demands and impacts of nearly a decade of war. Thirdly, this study provides an interesting case study, providing a glimpse of a colony and region in flux. No longer a series of scattered settlements based upon religious motives, Rhode Island of the mid-eighteenth century was developing into a "Yankee" society, characterized by urban centers and expanding commerce. Lastly, the subject matter its self, Rhode Island and the overlapping conflicts of the War of Jenkins' Ear and King George's War, have received little to no coverage in recent publications and research. These areas deserve attention in order to form a clearer and more complete picture of colonial society and the wars and violence that shaped it.

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⁴ Ian K. Steele, *Warpaths: Invasions of North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), i.

An examination of Rhode Island at war during this period of time draws upon two different historiographies: that of the study of colonial Rhode Island and the other concerned with colonial warfare. The body of literature concerned with the colony is relatively small, perhaps not totally surprising given the consistent focus upon the Massachusetts Bay Colony by historians of colonial America. All too often the history of Massachusetts has been conflated with the history of New England. This has created what Connecticut historian Walter Woodward has dubbed “blind spots,” holes in the historiography of early New England that have failed to take into account occurrences of inter-colonial conflict, among other issues.⁵ Furthermore, many of the histories of the Rhode Island colony cover the early period of settlement and establishment with an emphasis on the colony’s founder, Roger Williams, and themes of religion and community.⁶ Given the colony’s unique policy of religious toleration, the focus on such topics at the expense of others can hardly be considered surprising.

However, there have been several works dealing with the colony during the time period in question, the mid-eighteenth century, the most comprehensive of which is Sydney V. James’ magisterial *Colonial Rhode Island: A History*.⁷ James provides a thorough history of the colony spanning from the early foundations up until the independence of what became known as the United States. He covers a variety of topics

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⁵ Walter S. Woodward, *Prospero’s America: John Winthrop, Jr., Alchemy, and the Creation of New England Culture, 1606-1676* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 91.

⁶ For some examples of studies in this area see: Sydney V. James, *John Clarke and his Legacies: Religion and Law in Colonial Rhode Island, 1368-1750*, ed. Theodore Dwight Bozeman (University Park, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999); Carl Bridenbaugh, *Fat, Mutton and Liberty of Conscience: Society in Rhode Island, 1636-1690* (Providence: Brown University Press, 1974); Edmund S. Morgan, *Roger Williams: The Church and the State* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2007); Edwin S. Gaustad, *Liberty of Conscience: Roger Williams in America* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1999); Alison G. Olson, “Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and the Question of Religious Diversity in Colonial New England,” *The New England Quarterly* 65, No. 1 (March 1992), 93-116.

⁷ Sydney V. James, *Colonial Rhode Island: A History* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1975). Sydney V. James was a historian at the University of Iowa and was the preeminent scholar of colonial Rhode Island. Some of his works were later edited and published after his death in 1993.

such as religion, politics, society, and imperial war. In regards to the imperial wars, and King George's War in particular, James argues that these conflicts served to draw the colony into a closer orbit around the imperial metropole while bringing about the deleterious issues of death, loss of commerce, tarnished reputation, debt, and political division.⁸

Only two monographs have been published in the last twenty-five years that directly deal with the social history of the colony in the 1740s: Lynne Withey's *Urban Growth in Colonial Rhode Island* and James' posthumously published *The Colonial Metamorphoses in Colonial Rhode Island: A Study of Institutions in Change*.⁹ Mention of war and the military is conspicuously absent from both studies. In her examination of urban growth and change in colonial Newport and Providence, Withey argues that the two cities provide a valuable case study in which to examine the relationship between economic expansion and society, the dynamics of urban growth and decline, and the effects of the American Revolution on two different cities. She illuminates the impact of economic development and urbanization upon society, paying special attention to issues of poverty/transients, ethnic diversity, the dominance of mercantile elites, and Rhode Island's commercial ties with the West Indies and Britain. James' study of changing institutions focuses on both local and colonial government, ecclesiastical organizations, and nongovernmental entities such as lotteries and colleges. He concludes that Rhode Island evolved from a delicate collection of settlements concerned with religion to a society whose institutions were fully shaped by a colonial government largely free of

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⁸ Ibid, 274-5, 293.

⁹ Sydney V. James, *The Colonial Metamorphoses in Colonial Rhode Island: A Study of Institutions in Change*, eds. Sheila Skemp and Bruce Daniels (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2000).

British interference and characterized by the consent of the governed, eventually achieving its “own tradition” by 1776.¹⁰

The second historiography in question, dealing with the colonial wars, is much more thoroughly fleshed out than the recent studies of Rhode Island have been. Influenced by the post-Second World War rise of “the new military history,” the expansion of martial studies to include social factors, a variety of works and research have studied the relationship between war and society in early America. In addition to studying the impact of wars on a given society, scholars have also shed light on the characteristics of participant societies by way of examining how war was waged. Although the bulk of these works have been concerned with the experience of the American Revolution¹¹, a significant number have looked at the colonies, with much attention directed toward New England in particular. Fred Anderson’s *A People’s Army: Massachusetts Soldiers and Society in the Seven Years’ War*¹² is an excellent example of the application of the war and society methodology. He is concerned with the impact of a shared event, service in the French and Indian War, upon a large group of ordinary men. By focusing on the wartime experience, assessment by British officers, makeup of armies, and accounts of common soldiers, Anderson is able to discern the morals, discipline, religion, and provincial worldview of these troops.

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¹⁰ Ibid, 242-6, 255.

¹¹ For examples of war and society histories regarding the American Revolution, see Charles Neimeyer, *America Goes to War: A Social History of the Continental Army* (New York: New York University Press, 1997); Carol Berkin, *Founding Mothers: Women in the Struggle for America’s Independence* (New York: Vintage, 2006); John Resch and Walter Sargent, Eds., *War and Society in the American Revolution: Mobilization and Home Fronts* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2006); Jacqueline Barber Carr, *After the Siege: A Social History of Boston, 1775-1800* (Lebanon, NH: Northeastern University Press, 2004).

¹² Fred Anderson, *A People’s Army: Massachusetts Soldiers and Society in the Seven Years’ War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984).

Other studies have been in the same vein but utilized different temporal and geographic spans. Richard Melvoin used a single community, Deerfield, Massachusetts, as a case study spanning from 1670 until 1729 to chronicle the impact of nearly constant threat and war upon the development of frontier society.¹³ Harold Selesky's *War & Society in Colonial Connecticut* is even more ambitious, examining the experience and makeup of that colony's armies while also looking at how the colonial government dealt with the problem of war from the seventeenth century up until the eve of the Revolution.¹⁴ He concludes that war was the most "difficult and expensive" problem faced by Connecticut, despite its relative safety and stability as the New England frontier moved toward the north and west. As war became less about the survival of the colony and more about proving imperial allegiance, fighting as a collective concern gave way to economic enterprise in which self-interest and professional soldiering replaced impressments and universal militias.¹⁵ As will be discussed in the ensuing study, this trend was certainly at work in Rhode Island, perhaps to an even greater extent. The most recent addition to this body of literature is Kyle Zelner's *A Rabble in Arms: Massachusetts Towns and Militiamen during King Philip's War*, a work that gains insight into the society of late seventeenth century Essex county by examining who was chosen to be impressed into service and why.¹⁶ He argues against the historical myth that the New England soldiers in the colonial wars were representative cross-sections of society. Instead, militia committees selected those on the margins of their towns, men who were

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¹³ Richard I. Melvoin, *New England Outpost: War and Society in Colonial Deerfield* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1989).

¹⁴ Harold E. Selesky, *War & Society in Colonial Connecticut* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 242-3.

¹⁶ Kyle F. Zelner, *A Rabble in Arms: Massachusetts Towns and Militiamen during King Philip's War* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

almost always unmarried, landless, loosely employed, and sometimes criminals. By mandating that certain types of men go off to war, militia committees that were made up of town notables tried to reinforce stability, piety, and family.¹⁷

In addition to the historiography concerned with war and culture is a related, much more conventional branch of study interested in the ways in which the waging of colonial war developed over time. Some of these works provide insight into the conflicts in question by providing a context for the soldiers and sailors of Rhode Island. In order to fully understand a particular conflict, it is important to be aware of particulars such as the types of forces, tactics, and hardships involved. Ian K. Steele's *Warpaths: Invasion of North America* is a highly influential study that chronicles the interaction and conflict between North American colonists and Native Americans over a nearly two hundred year period of time. In regards to the conflicts of the 1740s, Steele depicts them as being the last in a long series of inconclusive colonial showdowns between Britain and France. The indecisive nature of King George's War is the result of *European* British forces being largely absent from operations such as the Louisbourg expedition. Instead, he posits that this period was a sort of highpoint for *colonial* arms, during which time war empowered colonial legislatures and was largely commercial in nature, appealing to material self-interest in the shape of bounties, plunder rights, and supplies.¹⁸ In the case of Rhode Island, the government eagerly appealed to such monetary concerns in order to staff forts, man the colony sloop, and fill out and later reinforce expeditionary infantry companies. Guy Chet provides a much more critical appraisal of colonial martial performance. By treating each war as a separate case and analyzing the successes and

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¹⁷ Ibid, 9.

¹⁸ Steele, *Warpaths*, 135-6. For the argument that the Louisbourg expedition was a "pinnacle" of colonial arms, see also, Selesky, *War & Society in Colonial Connecticut*, 74-96.

failures of provincial arms, he argues that the American colonists were most successful when employing European tactics. In doing so, he attacks the myths that European-style warfare was ineffective in North America, colonial innovations were a departure from European doctrines, and warfare alienated the colonies from the metropole.¹⁹

After considering these historiographies it becomes apparent that significant holes exist in each one. In the case of the most recent body of scholarship specifically interested in the society of Rhode Island in the eighteenth century, there is a deficiency in the coverage given to the incessant colonial wars.²⁰ Likewise, the colony of Rhode Island is almost always absent from the historiography of colonial war and society.²¹ This study will contribute to these bodies of literature by articulating the often overlooked and misunderstood role of Rhode Island, the wars of 1739-1748, and their relationship to society. Rhode Island may not have contributed quantitatively to the military expeditions in the same way Massachusetts, Connecticut or even New Hampshire did, but it was not for want of trying. It should be noted that its participation far exceeded that of the much larger middle and southern colonies such as Pennsylvania, Virginia, Maryland, and the Carolinas. While wars of survival such as King Philip's War or massive imperial endeavors like the French and Indian War more clearly mobilized larger New England

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¹⁹ Guy Chet, *Conquering the American Wilderness: The Triumph of European Warfare in the Northeast* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003). The issue of whether or not colonial warfare was European or uniquely Americanized has been contested by a number of scholars. For a recent rebuttal to the argument of the triumph of European warfare, see John Grenier, *The First Way of War: American War Making on the Frontier, 1604-1814* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

²⁰ For the lone book-length work directly concerned with Rhode Island and King George's War, see Howard M. Chapin, *Rhode Island Privateers in King George's War, 1739-1748* (Providence: the Rhode Island Historical Society, 1926). Chapin provides a thoroughly researched narrative and history of a multitude of privateering vessels.

²¹ When Rhode Island does receive mention it is usually in a negative way, for instance Chet points out what he perceives as the lack of participation of the colony during the Louisbourg expedition: "some colonies-Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and, of course, Rhode Island-did not deliver the men and material that they had promised..." Chet, *Conquering the American Wilderness*, 103. His overview of the siege leaves out Rhode Island's belated contribution the garrison and the pivotal role of the colony sloop in the initial invasion convoy.

populations and affected society, the seemingly heavily commercialized warfare of King George's War and the War of Jenkins' Ear is just as worthy of study for what it can tell us about the years between tentative settlement and more established society in New England. Moreover, upon further examination the commercial nature of warfare, which relied on incentives such as privateering and bounties, certainly has its explanatory limits. It does not fully illuminate the manner in which Rhode Islanders considered the wars. Commercial warfare not only failed in many instances to fill the colony's troop quotas but it is only one component of the self-interest displayed by the colony and colonists. What the historiographies colonial Rhode Island and colonial American warfare leave out is that Rhode Islanders felt legitimately threatened by the prospect of French raids or invasion and therefore handled the war just as much, if not more, in terms of self-defense than as a means of imperial participation.

In order to explore the commercial and provincial interest of a society at war, I will be examining different segments of that society in order to show how far a seemingly minor pair of wars permeated. In order to analyze colonial vulnerability, government actions and concerns, the makeup and experience of Rhode Island's infantry companies, the role of privateering, and the impact on the non-combatant population, I will be utilizing a variety of primary sources. In terms of the interests and motivations of the colonial government, I draw heavily from published collections of assembly records and the various governors' correspondence. I also incorporate unpublished archival materials such as petitions to the provincial legislature and the records of the war councils. In order to gain an understanding of how this period of warfare impacted society, it is important to examine the makeup and experience of the companies of troops that were

sent on the expeditions to Cuba and South America and later Louisbourg in French Atlantic Canada. Like scholars of colonial warfare and society such as Anderson, Zelner, and Selesky, I have attempted to piece together portraits of the leadership and common soldiery by identifying these men on published muster rolls and lists and then investigating their pre and post-war lives. The last part of my argument will move beyond the government and combatants and examine the larger society as a whole. While perhaps the most difficult correlation to ascertain, much can be gleaned from religious records, colonial laws, and the government's issuance of payments to individuals.

My argument will be arranged by paying attention to each one of the above-mentioned segments of society. I will start with an overview of the state of the Colony of Rhode Island at this time, showing the ways in which it had grown, developed, and stabilized from its initial tenuous settlement and founding. By the middle part of the eighteenth century, the colony was connected to Europe, the West Indies, Africa, and the Atlantic seaboard through a multitude of trade connections and imperial loyalties. However I will also highlight the territorial, political, social, and military instability of New England's smallest colony. By 1739 Rhode Island could still be considered a frontier, albeit an exposed maritime one. Given the colony's heavy involvement in maritime commerce, small land mass, and exposure to the sea, this frontier could be every bit as dangerous and disconcerting as those more conventional frontiers in northern and western New England. From there I will turn to the colonial government, namely the Assembly and governorship, detailing both their personal and institutional perceptions of these vulnerabilities and the ways in which they handled the problem of the wars. Of particular note is the ongoing border struggle with Massachusetts and how wartime

policy was aimed just as much at that struggle as the one taking place on Cape Breton Island. Next I will consider the actual fighting forces of Rhode Island, looking at not only the imperial expeditions and freebooting privateers, but also the war effort at home that included the construction of a colony sloop and manning of a fortress in Newport, Fort George. While the former two forces were heavily involved in monetary rewards, the latter two elements were wrapped up in a very different sort of self-interest concerned with territorial and maritime security. The last section will deal with the relationship between war and the general, non-combatant Rhode Island society. Whether dealing with prisoners, impressing soldiers and sailors, providing provisions, billeting troops, observing curfew, or constructing military structures, a large number of Rhode Islanders were touched by war during this time.

Chapter 1: Growth and Vulnerability: The State of Colonial Rhode Island in the Mid-Eighteenth Century

In order to identify and fully appreciate the different forms of self-interest that characterized Rhode Island's participation in the dual conflicts it is necessary to depict the state of the colony as it was at the eve of war in 1739. Economically and demographically, the portrait of Rhode Island is one characterized by growth and expansion, a society heavily commercial and on the move. However, beneath this seemingly robust surface there were several vulnerabilities, causes for concern in regards to security, both political and territorial. These exposures to not only France and Spain, but also neighboring Massachusetts and the imperial metropole, would come to the forefront as the colony was thrust into two conflicts as the result of machinations taking place far across the Atlantic.

Growth in Mid-Century Rhode Island

By 1739, the merchants of Rhode Island had found a profitable niche for themselves in the lucrative transatlantic trade system that connected the continents of North America, Europe, and Africa. The bulk of the colony's trade was with the West Indies; in 1739 roughly two-thirds of all Rhode Island merchant shipping traded in the Caribbean. This trade had become routine during the early years of the eighteenth century and by 1742, Newport eclipsed Boston in terms of commerce with the West Indies. Initially, Rhode Island merchants concentrated on providing provisions for plantation colonies such as Jamaica and Barbados. As trade expanded and Rhode Island's limited agricultural output could not keep up with demand, the colony's merchants began procuring foodstuffs and exportable commodities, such as lumber and fish, from other

continental colonies. Merchants engaged in a diverse coastal trade, purchasing items like fish from Newfoundland, flour from Baltimore, and grains from Long Island and Connecticut, positioning themselves as middlemen. During the 1720s, ships hailing from Newport, and to a lesser degree Providence, became more and more tied to the slave trade, transporting slaves from sub-Saharan Africa to the plantation colonies in the West Indies and southern North America. These slaves were purchased with rum that was distilled in Rhode Island from West Indian sugar and sold to slave traders who highly prized the commodity. During the 1740s, Rhode Islanders made over fifty slave voyages to African ports, carrying back almost six thousand slaves, mostly destined for the plantation colonies in the West Indies and southern North America. The Caribbean provisions and slave trade was dominated by a group of elite mercantile families, such as the Wantons, Malbones, Ayraults, and Redwoods. It was also during this time that trade with Britain began to become more routine and prosperous. Finished manufacture and luxuries were imported from the metropole in exchange for goods and cash obtained from exchanges with other colonies, such as Nantucket whale oil, Carolina tobacco, and Caribbean sugar.²²

It should be noted that a significant portion of the West Indian trade operated outside the law, circumventing laws such as the Molasses Act and various Navigation Acts, which attempted to confine colonial trade to only British controlled ports with only British/Anglo-American ships and cargoes. Shrewd Rhode Island merchants recognized the opportunities that existed to trade with off-limits French and Spanish Caribbean

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²² Withey, *Urban Growth in Colonial Rhode Island*, 20-3, 28-9; James A. Rawley and Stephen D. Behrendt, *The Transatlantic Slave Trade: a History* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 311-2. Rum distilled in Rhode Island was of a higher proof than competing varieties from the Americas and Europe and therefore was preferred by white and black slave traders, Joseph A. Conforti, *Saints and Strangers: New England in British North America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 158.

islands, where foodstuffs, provisions, and sugar could all be exchanged outside Britain's poorly enforced mercantile system.²³ This illegal commerce would persist during times of war, with the colony's merchants clandestinely trading with the French and Spanish sugar islands during the conflict, complicating the loyalty between colony and metropole. Politically, smuggling would become a major source of tension between Britain and the colonial merchants at the end of the Seven Years War with France in 1763. As policymakers in London began a concentrated campaign against illegal trade, Rhode Island led the way in protesting invigorated enforcement, reacting violently to the Sugar Act of 1764 and burning the customs schooner *Gaspee* in 1772. Smuggling was largely responsible for creating an affluent class of colonial merchants that was equipped with a substantial merchant marine. Their extralegal economic activities and interests were congruent with the calls for political independence that characterized the turbulent years between the last great imperial war and the American Revolution.²⁴ As one legal scholar has remarked, "in Rhode Island, notably, commerce and politics were so inextricably mingled that rum and liberty were but different liquors from the same still."²⁵

Their lack of qualms about illicit trade, paired with their ability to procure trade goods throughout British North America, allowed Rhode Island's merchants to play a major roll in the West Indian provisioning trade and outright dominate the American slave trade. By the mid-eighteenth century Rhode Island merchants "out-Yankeed"

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²³ James, *Colonial Rhode Island*, 270-2.

²⁴ Nathan Rosenberg and L.E. Birdzell, Jr., *How the West Grew Rich: The Economic Transformation of the Industrial World* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), 92-3.

²⁵ Frederick Bernays Wiener, "The Rhode Island Merchants and the Sugar Act," *The New England Quarterly* 3, No. 3 (Jul., 1930), 464.

competing colonial merchants in Massachusetts and beyond, more than making up for their colony's relatively meager resources and hinterland.²⁶

The urbanization that characterized Rhode Island in the mid 1700s was the result of the colony's emergence as a major trade hub. The mostly urban nature of the relatively small colony significantly differentiated it from its New England neighbors; Connecticut was principally agrarian and rural with only a few small port towns, whereas Massachusetts contained one major city, Boston, and a large hinterland dotted with towns such as Marblehead and Pittsfield, while mountainous and rustic New Hampshire contained no real urban center. By 1748, the population of the colony was around 32,000, having doubled in a mere eighteen years. Of this total, some 13,000 people lived in the cities of Newport and Providence, meaning that almost half of the colony's inhabitants dwelled within these two urban centers. This urban population was split almost evenly between Newport and Providence, with the former containing a little less than a thousand more inhabitants than the latter.²⁷ During the period in question, Newport and Providence were interdependent yet competing for commercial and political dominance of the colony. In the 1740s, Newport still reigned supreme but was in the midst of slowly but surely being overtaken by its rival on the northern edge of the Narragansett Bay, an usurpation that would play out over the next two decades.²⁸ During the conflicts of 1739-1748, Newport was still the fifth largest town in British North America. The port town seems to have made a favorable impression upon the illustrious traveler, Doctor

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²⁶ Conforti, *Saints and Strangers*, 158.

²⁷ Withey, *Urban Growth in Colonial Rhode Island*, 115. Withey uses an adjusted population for Providence, including several bordering towns that were broken off but still very much entwined with their originating city.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 31-2.

Alexander Hamilton, who noted its scenic harbor and countryside, “handsome” Colony House, impressive merchant mansions, and remarkably “pretty women.”²⁹

Providence, which lay further up the Narragansett Bay, was at this time “a [relatively] small but long town, situated close upon the water, upon rocky ground.”³⁰ Despite its smaller population and subordination to Newport, Providence was an important regional economic and political center with its own port and community of merchants. Providence was heavily involved in the inter-colonial trade but was dependent upon Newport for most foreign imports.³¹

Despite Rhode Island’s preponderance of city and large-town dwellers, there existed a small but noteworthy pastoral section of the colony in Kings County and the western portions of Providence and Newport counties. Portions of the Narragansett country were also dedicated to agriculture. Towns such as Westerly, Scituate, Kingston, Exeter, and Warwick were home to a mixture of small farms and miniature plantations. These small plantations would usually employ less than fifty slaves, allowing a small minority of elite white families to live a lifestyle similar to that of a Virginia planter; they were usually Anglican, pursued “rustic amusements,” such as hunting and fishing, and partook in a culture of hospitality and socializing.³² The Narragansett country was home to over 800 slaves, making it the “largest pocket of bound labor” in the whole of New England. Rhode Island agriculture benefited from favorable climate and soil, nurturing grains, wood products, cattle, and horses that went to market in Newport, Providence, and

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²⁹ Alexander Hamilton, *Hamilton's Itinerarium; being a narrative of a journey from Annapolis, Maryland, through Delaware, Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts and New Hampshire, from May to September, 1744*, ed. Albert Bushnell Hart (St. Louis: W.K. Bixby, 1907), 345-6, 500.

³⁰ Ibid, 487.

³¹ Withey, *Urban Growth in Colonial Rhode Island*, 14.

³² James, *Colonial Rhode Island*, 252.

abroad.³³ Rural Rhode Island was also home to a significant Narragansett Indian population. It numbered over 500 people and was mostly located near Charlestown and the southwest of the colony. A “prince,” an inherited position that was often wracked with corruption, headed this community. Likewise, the surviving Indians of Rhode Island were often plagued by servitude and poverty, engaged in a futile cycle of debt and indentured labor in order to settle debts owed to whites.³⁴

For the colony as a whole, the period leading up to and including the dual conflicts was one of growth. This expansion of population and commerce can be seen in the variety and number of infrastructure projects that were approved by the colony’s legislature, the General Assembly. For instance, “sundry” petitioners pressured the government to lengthen a “highway” that went from Providence to Warwick in 1742. In 1740, the freemen of North Kingstown successfully petitioned to have their town’s country road widened so that two carts would be able to pass each other at the same time. Furthermore, a new highway was constructed between that town and East Greenwich to accommodate traffic between the two locales.³⁵ Colonists were also easing their travel by constructing several new bridges as growth led to more and more instances of taming geographical barriers. Among these new structures was the Pawtucket Bridge in Providence, constructed in 1741, the Point Bridge in Newport which was ordered to be completed in 1736, and a lottery funded bridge over the Weybosset river in 1745.³⁶ The demand for increased mobility also extended to the colony’s numerous waterways as an

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³³ Stephen J. Hornsby, *British Atlantic, American Frontier: Spaces of Power in Early Modern British America* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2005), 137-6, 133-4.

³⁴ Conforti, *Saints and Strangers*, 152-3; James, *Colonial Rhode Island*, 256.

³⁵ Many instances of road construction and expansion are present within the colony’s published records. I draw these specific examples from John Russell Bartlett, ed., *Records of the Colony of Rhode Island, 1707-1740*, Vol. 4 (Providence: Knowles, Anthony & Co., 1860), 583, 590-1 (hereafter cited as RCRI, followed by volume number); RCRI V, 37, 52.

³⁶ RCRI IV, 524, RCRI V, 36, 100.

increasing amount of commerce and population needed to access the multitude of islands within Narragansett Bay and the colony's mainland. The bottleneck at South Kingstown (on the mainland) serves an example of the need for more ferries. The pre-existing boats and ferries that were used to access Jamestown (on an island in the Bay) were deemed "insufficient" to cope with the recent increase in "inhabitants, trade, and commerce"; they were often "crowded with men, women, children, horses, hogs, sheep, and cattle," creating an "intolerable inconvenience, annoyance, and delay of men and business." As a result, the General Assembly allowed for the creation of a new ferry, as it had done time and time again throughout the watery byways of the colony.³⁷

Population growth in the late 1730s and 1740s also led to the creation of new towns from older ones that had grown too unwieldy and decentralized. In 1738, the town of Westerly in the southwest corner of the colony was divided, resulting in the creation of Charlestown. Likewise, West Greenwich was created from the western portion of East Greenwich in the spring of 1741, Coventry from the western part of Warwick, and the division of the western section of North Kingstown in March of 1742 established Exeter.³⁸ The locations of these new polities indicate the movement and growth of populations in a westward direction. New towns were needed away from the immediate shores of Narragansett Bay, the location of the colony's earliest settlements, as colonists spread to once rural areas in search of more land and new commercial opportunities. The incorporation of these new towns also resulted in the creation of new political openings. Positions such as justices of the peace, militia officers, and legislators, were often opportunities for advancement for men who had been excluded or stymied in their

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³⁷ Ibid, 242.

³⁸ RCRI IV, 69-70; RCRI V, 14-5, 26-7, 57-8

original towns. For instance, Robert Greene, of Warwick, was a relatively obscure citizen in 1740. However, as Robert Greene of Coventry, he became a lieutenant of militia, justice of the peace, and deputy in the General Assembly, all within a five-year span of the creation of his new town.³⁹

Rhode Island's Vulnerabilities

Commercial, political, and demographic growth was not without its downsides; not everyone could be a Robert Greene. As the population climbed and Newport and Providence urbanized, poverty and the presence of transients also increased. The number of poor relief cases climbed in both Providence and Newport during the 1730s and 1740s. The rise in poverty in Newport was the most dramatic. While there were only fourteen instances of poor relief in the 1730s, there were over one hundred such cases in the following decade. Poor relief was usually administered to resident dependents such as widows, single women, and children, and took the form of boarding, payment of expenses, and apprenticeships.⁴⁰ The transient poor were also a major concern. Although the lure of commercial opportunities in Newport and Providence for laborers, sailors, and artisans sometimes delivered jobs, other times these chances proved to be hollow. Not everyone could share in the colony's prosperity and those with limited means were less likely to multiply their wealth in comparison to already relatively secure merchants. As a result, the numbers of transient poor in the colony's two urban centers rose dramatically

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³⁹ An excellent source for tracing the trajectory of individual politicians and officers in the colony is Joseph Jencks Smith, ed., *Civil and Military List of Rhode Island, 1647-1800* (Providence: Preston and Rounds Co., 1900).

⁴⁰ Withey, *Urban Growth in Colonial Rhode Island*, 55, 133-4. The dramatic rise in poor relief cases in Newport during the 1740s is probably related to the very high casualty rates experienced during the three expeditions abroad to the West Indies, Louisbourg, and Canada.

after the 1720s. Providence, which only identified ten such cases between 1721 and 1730, dealt with sixty-four transients in the 1730s alone. Transients were usually ordered to leave town after the town council had determined their non-resident status. Sometimes they were allowed to stay if someone else was able to pay a bond that would go toward their financial assistance in the future if it were needed.⁴¹

Rhode Island's vulnerabilities went beyond the presence of transient and resident poor, which required government supervision and represented an unstable element of society. It also extended to the territorial and political security of the colony. The colony's strong orientation toward the sea, both geographically and economically, was both a boon and a liability. This littoral characterization of a large part of the colony acted as a permeable frontier for some and a border of separation from the unknown to others. A theorist of the littoral, Michael Pearson, has argued that shore societies should be considered dissimilar from their inland counterparts, as they are distinctly amphibious, operating between the land and sea on a regular basis.⁴² This notion held true for the colony's merchants, sailors, ship captains, and other maritime denizens; shores were the site of smuggling, transportation, and the movement of cargoes, both material and human. On the other hand, the littoral was the cause for a great deal of fear. Culturally, the sea and shore were often depicted as perilous, loaded with the potential dangers of storms, pirates, navigational hazards, and raids. Puritan ministers, who were certainly present in Rhode Island's sectarian jumble, depicted the ocean as a moral, and worldly threat to both morality and social order.⁴³ In this sense, the coast could be considered to be what

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⁴¹ Ibid, 51-3, 134-5.

⁴² Michael N. Pearson, "Littoral Society: The Concept and the Problem," *Journal of World History* 17, no. 4 (2006): 353-72.

⁴³ Conforti, *Saints and Strangers*, 74, 76.

maritime historian Greg Denning has theorized: “frontiers and boundaries” that partition between “good and bad, familiar and strange.”⁴⁴ As a result, Rhode Island should be considered part of a highly vulnerable New England frontier that stretched from the Long Island Sound, around Cape Code and the nearby islands, and up the coasts of New Hampshire and Maine. Militarily, and by extension politically, this frontier is often overlooked in the context of the imperial wars of colonial America.

The colony of Rhode Island in particular, contemporarily known as the “ocean colony,” perhaps had the most to lose in such geography. The most exposed point of the colony was certainly Block Island, measuring less than ten square miles in size and thirteen miles off the coast of Rhode Island. In the 1740s, it was home to roughly 300 inhabitants⁴⁵, a collection of small farms, and a shaky pier. Some fifty years earlier, during King William’s War, the island had been a site of much fear and violence. French ships held inhabitants as captives, raiding parties slaughtered cattle and razed farms, and privateers menaced the island’s meagerly protected shores. The need for a “timely defense” would still be fresh in the islanders’ minds in 1739.⁴⁶ The need to protect Block Island would be one of the major demands on the provincial government at the outbreak of war.

In addition, Newport was also in harm’s way. All that stood between the town, its harbor, and the perils of a militarized sea was a small peninsula and Goat Island.

Although this island contained a fortress, Fort George, the structure had fallen into a state

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⁴⁴ Greg Denning, *Islands and Beaches: Discourse on a Silent Land: Marquesas, 1774-1880* (Chicago: Dorsey Press, 1988), 32.

⁴⁵ William Douglass, *A Summary, Historical and Political, of the First Planting, Progressive Improvements, and Present State of the British Settlements in North-America*, Vol. 2. (Boston: New England Press, 1755), 89.

⁴⁶ Samuel T. Livermore, *A History of Block Island* (Hartford, CT: The Case, Lockwood & Brainard Co., 1877), 76-87.

of disrepair between Queen Anne's War and 1739. Dr. Hamilton remarked on the sorry state of the harbor's defenses in 1744:

While I stayed in this place they sent in several valuable prizes, but, notwithstanding this warlike apparatus abroad, they are but very sorrily fortified at home. The rocks in their harbour are the best security; for the fort, which stands upon an island, about a mile from the town, is the futilest thing of that nature ever I saw. It is a building of near 200 feet square, of stone and brick, the wall being about fifteen feet high, with a bastion and watchtower on each corner, but so exposed to cannon shot that it could be battered about their ears in ten minutes. A little distance from this fort is a battery of seventeen or eighteen great guns.⁴⁷

The town's accessibility was both beneficial and problematic. Easy access to the sea meant that navigation was usually possible during inclement weather, allowing the port to thrive as a "trans-shipment center," providing valuable income in the form of docking fees and warehousing. However this unusual geography not only resulted in the lack of a large agricultural hinterland but also a precarious security situation.⁴⁸ This combination of exposed geography and under-preparedness contrasts greatly with the fortifications and more naturally protected harbors of New York City and Boston. Like these cities, Newport was a prosperous seaport, fueled by an "entrepreneurial headquarters effect" that spun off a variety of related urban businesses such as insurance, shipbuilding, finance, and other nautical enterprises.⁴⁹ It is also the gateway to the rest of the Narragansett Bay, leading all the way up to Providence. Britain's declaration of war against imperial Spain and the later entry of France plunged this exposed town, its strategic waterway, and commercial prosperity into nearly a decade of high risk. Like Block Island, the merchants and inhabitants had the most to lose during the dual conflicts.

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⁴⁷ Hamilton, *Itinerarium*, 509.

⁴⁸ Peter J. Coleman, "The Entrepreneurial Spirit in Rhode Island History," *This Business History Review* 37, No. 4 (Winter, 1963), 339.

⁴⁹ Hornsby, *British Atlantic, American Frontier*, 194.

Their petitions and pleas for increased security would weigh heavy upon the ears of provincial government.

Rhode Island's territorial vulnerability went beyond the threats of the obvious enemies of France and Spain. It also included the machinations of its neighbor to the north and east, Massachusetts. Ever since its founding and initial settlement in the first half of the seventeenth century Rhode Island was exposed to the threat of absorption or annexation into either Connecticut or Massachusetts. These threats began with the initial Narragansett Proprietors, a group of landowners composed of men from Boston, Connecticut, and Plymouth who began to buy up lands around the bay beginning in 1658.⁵⁰ Territorial uneasiness would continue as both the Plymouth Colony to the east and Connecticut to the west made claims to lands reserved for Rhode Island in its royal charter. Such border disputes provided a great deal of anxiety for the provincial government and consumed large amounts of time and money.⁵¹ In 1741, a number of provincial elites traveled to the remote forested northwestern corner of Rhode Island to determine if a pile of stones that served as the border marker was still in existence. Upon discovering that it had been removed, they and some twenty other men created a new heap of rocks and carved their initials into a nearby tree to commemorate their presence.

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⁵⁰ James, *Colonial Rhode Island*, 85-6.

⁵¹ The issue of inter-colonial boundary disputes remains relatively unexplored in the historiography of colonial America. James' *Colonial Rhode Island* provides some valuable background to these disputes and Woodward's *Prospero's America* is a recent example of a border dispute, between Connecticut, Massachusetts, and various Indian groups, providing a pivotal context for John Winthrop Jr.'s founding of New London, 93-137. For a rare monograph-length treatment of the issue that takes a personal as well as political approach, see Philip J. Schwarz, *The Jarring Interests: New York's Boundary Makers, 1664-1776* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1979).

They were careful to provide a precise description of this tree, a white pine, so that it could be spotted in case of further issues.⁵²

After the Plymouth colony was merged into Massachusetts in 1691, officials in Boston turned their gaze to the contested boundary they had inherited, struggling to retain control of a strip of land bordering the Narragansett Bay and the Attleboro Gore, which lies east of the Blackstone River. This seemingly diminutive area was home to several towns, such as Tiverton, Bristol, Cumberland, and Little Compton, containing over 4,500 people. Tax revenues from these locales totaled £745 in the year 1747, surpassing the contribution of Providence and almost approaching that of Newport. Furthermore, the Attleboro Gore contained ore deposits that were smelted into pig iron and used to make small cannons, bullets, and other munitions during the dual conflicts.⁵³ Bristol was also a valuable prize due to its active port and involvement in the lucrative slave trade. The events surrounding the long-lasting dispute between the two colonies came to a head in the 1730s and 1740s, coinciding with the War of Jenkins' Ear and King George's War. During the conflicts, Bristol would be a major point of contention between the government of Rhode Island and Massachusetts Governor William Shirley. His efforts to impress soldiers in the volatile borderland resulted in a "riot" in the autumn of 1744 and the subsequent flight of impressed persons, continuing into the following spring. Shirley and his officials were certain that these men absconded to and were being sheltered in Rhode Island, a charge refuted by the Ocean Colony.⁵⁴ Richard Partridge, Rhode Island's tireless advocate in London, was involved in the legal wrangling over the border for

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⁵² "Report upon the Connecticut Boundary" in CCGRI V, 34-5. A more formal stone obelisk was created to mark the line in 1883, a site that can be visited via the Trunkline/Tri-State hiking trail in the protected forest area.

⁵³ Douglass, *A Summary, Historical and Political*, 90, 107, 109.

⁵⁴ For correspondence concerning this episode, see the letters in RCRI V, 107, 134; RCRI I, 283-4, 323.

twelve years, from 1734 until 1746. In 1741, a royal commission composed of representatives from Nova Scotia, New York, and New Jersey, awarded the Gore to Rhode Island and partitioned the disputed eastern Narragansett lands between the colonies. This decision satisfied neither party and led to an appeal by both sides, prolonging the decision for several more years, resulting in a confirmation of the original 1741 decision.⁵⁵ There was also a mercantile dimension to the tension between the two colonial rivals. Thanks to inexpensive bills of credit, Rhode Island traders were able to buy up the products of the Massachusetts hinterland and export them to the West Indies, effectively outmaneuvering Boston merchants for valuable export commodities in their own colony.⁵⁶ As will be discussed later in this study, the simmering feud between Rhode Island and Massachusetts would provide the pivotal context for professions of loyalty and the debate over the smaller colony's war record.

Besides the ongoing border conflict that was mediated by the metropolitan government in Britain, there existed a few other tensions with the home government that caused the Rhode Island's provincial leadership to respond to the years of imperial warfare with a calculated loyalty. One of these concerns was the status of the colony's relatively privileged royal charter that had been in existence since 1663. This charter was so cherished that it would serve as the basis for Rhode Island's government until the adoption of a state constitution in 1842. Like the colony's boundaries, the charter would come under fire throughout Rhode Island's history. The charter granted the colony a

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⁵⁵ Partridge was eventually compensated £300 for his trouble, an amount finally paid in 1750. Gertrude Selwyn Kimball, ed., *The Correspondence of the Colonial Governors of Rhode Island, 1723-1775*, Vol. 1 (New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company: 1902), xx (hereafter cited as CCGRI, followed by volume number).

⁵⁶ Richard L. Bushman, *From Puritan to Yankee: Character and the Social Order in Connecticut, 1690-1764* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), 126-7.

high-degree of self-rule. Freemen from each town, white protestant males that met certain age, property, and wealth qualifications, directly elected legislative deputies to the Assembly, towns being allotted representatives based on their size. The position of governor was also directly elected, a unique situation that only also existed in Connecticut at this time; all other colonial governorships were royally appointed. Church and state were explicitly separated. As a result, the colony developed a political culture based on localism and libertarianism, cultivating arguably “the strongest democratic spirit and practice in Anglo-America.” The disorganization of the colony’s earlier years gave way to a more “reined in” but not erased provincial self-interest in the first quarter of the 1700s. The desire to demonstrate competent self-government was motivated by fears of royal control.⁵⁷ The lobbyist Partridge saw himself as guardian of the colony’s charter privileges, alerting the various governors and General Assembly of any threat to their relatively high degree of autonomy. In terms of the years of the dual conflicts, the most imminent threat to the provincial prerogative was the efforts of the crown to appoint naval officers to oversee the enforcement of the Navigation Acts in 1743. Mercantile interests allied with the General Assembly to fight the nomination of Leonard Lockman as an Admiralty judge for Rhode Island, an effort that was eventually successful.⁵⁸

Another point of tension between the colony and the metropole was the practice of printing paper currency. During the governorship of Samuel Cranston, which began in 1698 and ended in 1727, paper money began to be printed in order to fill a rising demand for currency created by the dramatic rise in commerce.⁵⁹ The crown and British

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⁵⁷ Conforti, *Saints and Strangers*, 95, 136-7. James, *The Colonial Metamorphoses in Colonial Rhode Island*, 7-8.

⁵⁸ CCGRI I, 226-8.

⁵⁹ James, *Colonial Rhode Island*, 168.

parliament eventually began to view this practice as detrimental to the imperial economy, especially since the printing was mostly unregulated, leading to monetary inflation. In a cautionary circular letter that urged the cessation of printing that was sent to the governments of Rhode Island, Maryland, and Connecticut in 1739, Rhode Island was identified as being the worst offender. Similar to the attempt to more strictly enforce the Navigation Acts, the effort to curtail the printing of paper money threatened the smooth operation of the provincial economy. Partridge pleaded with members of Parliament to forgo legislation that would suppress the printing of money in the colonies, arguing that such a ban would be ruinous to the “trade and commerce” of Rhode Island and cause “the ruin of many families.”⁶⁰ Furthermore, the printing of paper currency backed by new taxes was a method that the General Assembly would fall back on time and time again in order to fund the extremely high costs associated with the expeditions and civil defense of the dual conflicts. In 1740, legislation was introduced in London that would effectively end future emissions of paper currency. This law loomed but remained un-passed throughout the 1740s. However, the atmosphere of monetary threat and scrutiny was cited as one of the major reasons why the provincial government hesitated in emitting an even larger sum for the expedition to conquer Louisbourg. There was also an intra-New England element to the debate. “Some of the Massachusetts people,” namely Governor Shirley, were opposed to Rhode Island’s loose monetary policies due to the circulation of bills across colonial borders.⁶¹

Lastly, another legislative threat originating in Britain, the Iron Bill, served as another concern for provincial commercial interests. Like the legislation that would

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⁶⁰ CCGRI I, 120-1, 156.

⁶¹ See letter from Governor Wanton to Partridge, *Ibid*, 367. For Massachusetts’ opposition, see *Ibid*, 208, 213.

curtail the printing of paper money, the Iron Bill would remain an unrealized but never the less ominous prospect throughout the years of war. It sought to prohibit the manufacture of iron goods in the American colonies in order to bolster the economy of the metropole. Although Rhode Island was devoid of any significant iron production, its maritime industries and trade certainly benefited from the proximity of cheaper, American produced ironware. For example, iron was an important component of shipbuilding, an industry that Newport was involved in. Furthermore, the ironworks of the Attleboro Gore would be adversely affected if the colony were to successfully pry the territory away from Massachusetts.

Given this setting of rapid commercial growth juxtaposed with geographic and political vulnerability, this study now moves on to examine the response of the provincial government to imperial warfare of 1739-1748. The conflicts against Spain, France, and Massachusetts tested Rhode Island's provincial self-interests, in terms of both commercial prosperity and territorial security in ways that it had not experienced since the volatile years of the colony's initial founding and would not experience again to such a degree until the outbreak of the American Revolution.

Chapter 2: The Provincial Government at War: Spain, France, and Massachusetts*

The dual conflicts of the War of Jenkins' Ear and King George's were the most pressing, complicated, and expensive problems that the colony of Rhode Island had to deal with between the years of 1739 and 1748. In this regard, the experiences of the colonial government were hardly unique; the prominence of war as the major problem of the period was experienced by the other New England colonies as well. However, Rhode Island's significantly different interests and form of provincial government would shape the unique way in which the smallest of Britain's mainland colonies handled the burdens of involvement in two imperial conflicts. One such interest was the prospect for material gains that the declarations of war against Spain and later France brought for enterprising merchant communities. "Dazzled by gold to be captured in Spanish ships," Newport's merchants hastily outfitted privateer vessels and set sail for the West Indies in hopes of augmenting their existing trades.⁶² The response of the colonial government, although animated by different motivations, was no less enthusiastic. It should be remembered that the colony's government was rather unique among its North American peers in that its charter, which had been held intact since 1663 (with the brief exception of the Dominion of New England), allowed for the direct election of the governor and both chambers of the legislature, making provincial politicians much more beholden to an electorate of local freemen rather than the interests of the British metropolitan government.

For the governor, his council of assistants, and the deputies of the legislature, the dual conflicts presented threats to the safety and security of the colony while providing a

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* An earlier, abbreviated version of this chapter was presented at *The Ruptures of War: A Conference on War, Culture and Society, Second Annual Graduate Student Conference*, Claremont Graduate University, April 2010.

⁶² James, *Colonial Rhode Island*, 268.

means to express imperial loyalty. Both of these concerns have not been fully explored and analyzed by the past historiography of Rhode Island during the mid-eighteenth century. For instance, works interested in King George's War have either considered threats to the New England frontier in a very terrestrial way, focusing on the borderlands between New France and the colonies of New York, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire or only examined threats and actions at sea in terms of the Louisbourg siege.⁶³ Given Rhode Island's exposed coastal geography and heavy involvement in trade, it should be considered to be part of an equally threatened *maritime* frontier. The actions taken by the colonial government over the nine years of conflict reflect this sense of vulnerability, depicting institutions that were both responsive to the fears of colonists and genuinely concerned in their own right, while at the same time able to significantly increase the scope of their power and authority. Paired with the perils of the maritime frontier was the desire to prove imperial loyalty and patriotism in a context of political liability. Although the most recent definitive history on colonial Rhode Island has alluded to the connection between the enthusiastic participation in war and the desire to maintain the privileges enjoyed under the royal charter, the most concrete concern of the provincial government during this time was the ongoing legal battle for the possession of a series of towns in a disputed area on the eastern border with Massachusetts. It is within the terms of this inter-colonial quarrel that the actions of Rhode Island's leadership can be better understood.

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⁶³ Chet, *Conquering the American Wilderness*, 96; Selesky, *War & Society in Colonial Connecticut*, 76-7; Steele acknowledges the threat of the failed French invasion fleet to New England in 1746 but does mention threats to the southern New England coast during the War of Jenkins' Ear, Steele, *Warpaths: Invasions of North America*, 172.

The Institutional Response: Defense Acts, Committees, Charters, and Councils of War

Britain officially declared war against Spain on October 23, 1739. It was not until the following spring that the declaration publicly posted in Rhode Island. At eleven o'clock on April 22, the declaration of war was officially posted at a ceremony at the Union Flag Inn, a waterside tavern in Newport. The selection of such a site, with its affiliation with the comings and goings of the port city, speaks of the maritime orientation that characterized much of the colony's war effort during the dual conflicts. The captains of Newport's militia companies were in attendance as well as drummers, sergeants bearing halberds, and ensigns carrying the flags of the represented militia units. In Newport harbor, ships displayed their colors and fired off their guns along with the cannons at Fort George located on Goat Island.⁶⁴ Despite this formal proclamation, the legislature had been somewhat involved with the simmering hostilities with the Spanish months earlier. For instance, in August of 1739, months before Britain had officially announced hostilities, the legislature "loaned" a number of small arms, such as swords and pistols, to the eager owners of privateering vessels.⁶⁵ When considering the government response to war it is important to keep in mind that not only were the merchants of the colony highly influential in government affairs but were often times members of government institutions themselves. Men such as Godfrey Malbone, Walter Chalonier, Jonathan Tillinghast, and John Channing, were not only prominent merchants and ship owners, but also held elected positions as deputies or were part of the governor's council. Mercantile interests were further conflated with those of the government by the

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⁶⁴ Governor and Council Records, vol. I, 146-7, Rhode Island State Archives, Providence (hereafter cited as GCR I); Chapin, *Rhode Island Privateers*, 7.

⁶⁵ RCRI IV, 560-1.

fact that three of the four governors during the period of conflict in question happened to be major Newport merchants, John Wanton, Gideon Wanton and Richard Ward.

Besides the early assistance to some privateers, the institutional response of the government took the form of defense acts, the formation of numerous committees, charters, and councils of war. The General Assembly, composed of the governor's assistants and deputies proportionally representing each town, passed three major comprehensive defense acts. The first of these acts was passed on February 26, 1740. The act for the "preservation of the government...in case of an invasion," manned Fort George, dispatched soldiers from the mainland to Block Island for a six month stint, ordered the construction of eight new watch houses and five new beacon fire sites on strategic coastal positions such as Point Judith and Jamestown, and called for the construction of a colony sloop, the ship that would be known as the *Tartar*.⁶⁶

This legislation was augmented almost a year later by a second defense act in January of 1741, created to put the colony "at a better posture of defense." A new powder magazine was built in Newport, the Newport militia was re-organized to include two new companies, and the defenses at Fort George continued to be worked upon. In addition to these measures, the 1741 act took considerable steps towards increasing the powers of the provincial government and militarizing Rhode Island society. The power of freemen and soldiers to elect their company's militia officers was nullified and all current officers were ordered to step down by the next May. Instead, the Assembly would annually elect the officers of each militia company. Also, militia officers were empowered to add supplementary days of training to the minimum four days a year previously mandated by

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⁶⁶ RCRI IV, 566-8. The beacons and watch houses were built at the expense of the towns they were located in. The *Tartar* was named after a British warship constructed in 1702 that had visited Newport harbor.

law in order to “discipline the militia and make them expert in the use of their arms.” Fines were also raised for those absent from drill or not present during the raising of an alarm.⁶⁷ This act also ended the exemption of the Quaker population from the toils of war and defense. The Quakers, who had always been excused from military service due to their pacifism, were now required to act as scouts, messengers, or watchmen, remove the sick, women, and children from danger, and assist in putting out fires, in the case of an alarm. Those refusing were to be fined forty schillings.⁶⁸ Almost a century of exclusion from mandatory service was ended with the stroke of a pen, as the Assembly feared that even the assistance of conscientious objectors might be needed on the vulnerable coastal frontier.

The General Assembly enacted a third and final defense act in June of 1744 when the French entered the war on the side of their Spanish allies. An additional ten men were to be enlisted at Fort George, impressed if necessary, if not enough were recruited after ten days. Barrels of gunpowder were distributed among the fort, Block Island, the *Tartar*, and the county militias. The *Tartar* was ordered to embark on a defensive coast guard action, patrolling from Martha’s Vineyard to the eastern tip of Long Island, a route that covered the approach to Rhode Island and skirted the shores of Block Island.⁶⁹ Such defensive cruises were usually undertaken in cooperation with Connecticut’s sloop, the *Defense*.

In addition to these defense acts, the General Assembly created a plethora of committees that dealt with a variety of aspects of the war effort. Committees were made to handle the influx of prisoners taken by the colony’s privateer fleet, audit the expenses

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⁶⁷ RCRI V, 4-5.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 5.

⁶⁹ RCRI V, 88-91.

of expeditions, procure gunpowder and other supplies from Britain, reorganize militia companies, and repair Fort George. These tasks are in no way a complete listing of the undertakings of the wartime committees but provide a sampling of the diverse activities legislators were involved in. An examination of a preserved written report of a committee to the Assembly sheds some light on just what these committees did and who was a part of them. On June 19, 1740, the “Committee to Consider what is necessary further to be done in Relation to the enlisting of Soldiers for the Expedition against the Spaniards and the charge arising thereon” suggested that enlistment cease for the expedition so that billeting expenses may be saved. They also recommended that enlistment begin anew by the governor and his council if it should seem “necessary for the honour and interest of [the] government” in the absence of General Assembly if “fresh advice” were received from “Europe or elsewhere.” The committee goes on to suggest that billeting costs may be further defrayed by employing the surplus recruits aboard the *Tartar*. In addition to monetary concerns, the committee members were also probably concerned with the dissent that the long-term quartering of soldiers could potentially generate as billeting was a strain on hosting households. Like most of the legislative committees, it was composed of a few men, Colonel John Cranston, Peter Bours, and Thomas Fry, Jr.⁷⁰ Fry was a deputy from East Greenwich and a ship’s captain who would go on to command two different privateers during the course of the war. Bours was a prominent politician and member of the governor’s council that served in a multitude of different committees throughout the war. Colonel Cranston, the most notable of the trio, was a veteran officer of Queen Anne’s War, commander at times of both Fort George and the *Tartar*, and a

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⁷⁰ Committee Report, MSS 231, box 3, folder 6, Rhode Island State Records, Rhode Island Historical Society Library, Providence.

deputy representing Newport.⁷¹ The involvement of such high-profile colonial elites in the seemingly mundane matters of a succession of military committees speaks of the seriousness in which the General Assembly went about tackling the tasks of war. After all, it was elite men such as these that had the most at stake, in terms of both rewards and losses, during the years of the dual conflicts.

Besides legislation and committee action, the legislature also took the opportunity to issue its first ever charter to a semi-private organization. In 1741 the Assembly bestowed a charter to the Newport Artillery Company, granting it a wide range of privileges, including the ability to elect its own officers and exempting its members from militia service. The group was composed of Newport elites and its function during the dual conflicts appears to have been more ceremonial and social than militaristic. The charter “bestowed a traditional sort of favor on members of the ruling element.” The granting of such a charter, which went beyond what the petitioning artillerymen had originally asked for, also set a precedent that soon allowed for the establishment of an identical company in Providence, lotteries, and the establishment of the Redwood Library in 1747.⁷² Previously, the power to grant charters had been limited to royal colonies and the British parliament; war provided an opportunity for the colony to test the limits of its provincial power.

The Governors and their council assistants did not stand idly by and were also involved in the preparation of defenses. Councils of war were established that consisted of the governor, his council, and the officers of the various militia companies. Like the

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⁷¹ For career backgrounds I rely on Joseph Jencks Smith, ed., *Civil and Military List of Rhode Island, 1647-1800*, the lists of deputies, councilman, and committee members in RCRI IV and V, and Howard M. Chapin, *Rhode Island in the Colonial Wars: A List of Rhode Island Soldiers & Sailors in King George's War, 1740-1748* (Providence: Rhode Island Historical Society, 1920).

⁷² Sydney V. James, *The Colonial Metamorphoses in Colonial Rhode Island*, 214-6.

Assembly, they arranged for and regulated the defense of the colony. For instance, on April 21, 1741, armed watches were established in the exposed coastal communities of Newport, Jamestown, and Portsmouth, and continuously adjusted in ensuing sessions. The councils also voted on the approval of officers of the various expeditions during the war, commissioned the captains of the *Tartar*, nominated recruiters, and sometimes gave direct orders to the *Tartar*, concerning the conflicting needs of convoy duties and privateer defense.⁷³ The power of the governor was further boosted in February of 1745 when the Assembly voted to grant the power of embargo on any and all outgoing ships in the case of “any emergent occasion,”⁷⁴ a major augmentation of power given the colony’s commercial maritime orientation.

Petitions and Threats: The Need for Local Defenses

The actions of Rhode Island’s colonial government were not purely motivated by the self-interests of the elites that composed the governorship, council, and legislative deputies, but instead took place in a broader context of constant threat and petitions for protection. The specter of invasion and raid was fueled by a stream of rumors and sightings that occurred throughout the duration of the dual conflicts. On July 2, 1740, the governor and his council considered intelligence they had received regarding the expected presence of a Spanish ship off of the coast of the colony.⁷⁵ Reports of a possible Spanish invasion or raid continued during the summer of the next year. In June of 1741, a false alarm was raised when throngs of men were observed lighting fires near the town of Rockaway on Long Island in the colony of New York. It turned out that these were

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⁷³ See various entries during the period in question in GCR I.

⁷⁴ RCRI V, 101-2.

⁷⁵ GCR I, 150.

privateers hailing from New York and Rhode Island that had made landfall to carouse, act “rather roughly,” and light bonfires that had burned out of control. Later in the same month, the two privateering ships that had been involved in the Long Island incident were cruising off of Block Island and sighted a vessel thought to be a Spanish raider. After chase was given it was discovered that the ship was actually an American merchant vessel.⁷⁶

The entry of the French into the war in 1744 ignited a whole new series of rumors and threats that were even more pressing. French Canada was located relatively close to the shores and waters of the colony, just past the frontier of Maine, while the nearest Spanish outpost was over a thousand miles to the south in Florida. The largest and most material of these French threats was the massive fleet assembled by the Duc D’Anville that set sail in the autumn of 1746 from France in order to re-conquer Louisbourg and ravage the eastern seaboard of occupied Canada and New England. The fleet, consisting of 45 transport ships, 3,500 soldiers, over 5,000 sailors, and 15 warships, was believed to be headed for Boston before it was devastated by disease and storms.⁷⁷ The governor of Massachusetts, William Shirley, wrote to Governor William Greene of Rhode Island, warning him of the threat and encouraging him to dispatch the *Tartar* to aid in locating the fleet. Citing Rhode Island’s interest, he stated, “this we expect not only as a duty your government owe[s] to his Majesty, but also from a principle of self-preservation; for if this province should fall into the enemy’s hand, the neighboring provinces shall soon

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⁷⁶ Chapin, *Rhode Island Privateers*, 8.

⁷⁷ For a relatively recent academic account of the failed French fleet, see James S. Pritchard, *Anatomy of a Naval Disaster: The 1746 French Naval Expedition to North America* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1995).

follow.”⁷⁸ Threats persisted even after D’Anville’s disaster. For instance, on May 21, 1747, a French privateering schooner posing as a prisoner exchange ship was sighted off of Block Island. It was soon chased away and captured as a prize by the *Tartar*.⁷⁹ In addition to these specific threats and rumors, the colony was especially vulnerable due to Newport being an extremely active privateer base. A French spy is reported to have written home about the troublesome port city: “perhaps we had better burn it, as a pernicious hole, from the number of privateers there fitted out, as dangerous in peace as in war...”⁸⁰ Even Governor Shirley, usually quick to demean his neighbor to the south, recognized the colony as a possible target, albeit in terms of his own agenda aimed at capturing Louisbourg. Writing to Governor Greene in January of 1745 he remarked, “the exposed situation of your colony by sea, and the resentment of the enemy against it, on account of the activeness of your privateers, make it particularly probable that you may have a sudden visit from the French, this summer, if Cape Breton is not reduced.”⁸¹ Rhode Island’s heavily mercantile and highly mobile maritime society translated into offensive efforts during the wars. Ironically, enterprising attacks on enemy shipping that originated from the Narragansett Bay put the entire colony at risk; privateering proved to be as much of a liability as it was a boon.

In addition to threats and rumors, the provincial government was urged into action by the pleas and petitions of its citizenry. These demands for better protection came chiefly from two sources: the inhabitants of Block Island and the merchants of Newport. That Block Island, the most isolated and vulnerable part of Rhode Island, should petition

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⁷⁸ CCGRI II, 12-3.

⁷⁹ Chapin, *Rhode Island Privateers*, 197.

⁸⁰ Quoted in *ibid*, 11.

⁸¹ RCRI V, 74.

the Assembly on three different occasions during the years of the dual conflicts should hardly be surprising. Before war was officially proclaimed in the colony, some of the people of the island pleaded for “a sufficient number of armed men” to be sent to the island in order to supplement their relatively small pre-existing militia. Extra protection was desired because it was feared, and rightfully predicted, that the war would eventually involve the forces of France.⁸² Although the Assembly heeded this call, the deployment of the additional twenty men only lasted for six months. Again, in May of 1741, the inhabitants of the exposed island petitioned their government for the return of the additional soldiers. They related how the settlement was “in the greatest consternation and fear” because they were “plant[ed] on the frontier,” open to an attack by a “cruel and barbarous enemy.”⁸³ Despite the sporadic manning of the island by additional troops for the duration of the war, the inhabitants and the militia captain of Block Island continued to request more soldiers, composing petitions again in March of 1745 and May of 1746.⁸⁴ Fears of raids or invasion clearly outweighed any burden that the billeting of additional troops may have placed on the small community.

The merchants of Newport were also active in lobbying their government for increased protection and defense measures. Less isolated than their fellow colonists on Block Island, Newport’s business class felt equally vulnerable, fearing that their precious harbor and lucrative trade and privateering could be disrupted by a Spanish or French incursion. The idea of constructing watch houses on the “frontier” of the colony was first raised in a petition to the Assembly dated February 1740. The petitioners, John Gardner

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⁸² Petitions to the Rhode Island General Assembly, vol. 4, petition 47, Rhode Island State Archives, Providence (hereafter abbreviated PRIG, followed by volume number).

⁸³ Ibid, petition 108.

⁸⁴ See PRIG V, petition 3, and PRIG IV, petition 26.

and Hezekiah Carpenter, both high-ranking officers in the Newport militia, also called for the fulltime manning of Fort George, as well as repairs to be made to the structure. Efforts were stepped up a year later with the “Petition for the Better Defense of Newport,” which was signed by 27 merchants, some of them members of the government, such as Colonel Cranston and Samuel Wickham.⁸⁵ In 1744, it was requested that more batteries of cannon be added to the defenses of Newport harbor because the security and prosperity of the whole colony were at stake.⁸⁶ In June of 1745, over forty merchants signed a petition emphasizing that Newport still lacked proper fortifications and cannons. It was suggested that the thickness of Fort George’s walls be expanded by an additional four feet because it was reckoned that the fort would be unable to withstand two or three broadsides from a ship of 40 or 50 guns. It was also urged that the fort’s gunners be sufficiently trained in the “art of gunnery” or else they would be rather useless against any enemy.⁸⁷ These efforts usually paid off as the General Assembly voted time and time again add to the defenses of the port city: new watch houses were built, additions and repairs were made to Fort George, and approval was given for more ordinance and guns.

However these measures were not without resistance. When the Assembly approved £2,120 worth of additions to Fort George, four deputies were opposed enough to enter into the record their dissent: Stephen Hopkins, Job Randall, Walter Phetteplace, and George Brown. These deputies argued that Newport already had a significant fortification against attack by a privateer; the new additions and repairs would do little or nothing to impede an attack by “the fleets of any sovereign prince.” Furthermore it was

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⁸⁵Ibid, petition A.

⁸⁶PRIG VI, petition 30.

⁸⁷ PRIG V, petition 89.

pointed out that the expense was an unreasonable burden upon the treasury and the money would better serve the defense of the colony by remaining unspent.⁸⁸ It should be pointed out that Hopkins, Randall, Phetteplace, and Brown were not from Newport but represented areas relatively far from the maritime frontier: Providence, Scituate, and Glocester. Their protest shows that politicians from outside of Newport were beginning to resent the free spending toward safeguarding that city and harbor. Their complaint carries special weight because one of the dissenters, Stephen Hopkins, was a respected military officer that had been instrumental in recruiting for the expedition against the Spanish West Indies earlier in the decade and had been a member of a number of war-related committees. It also brings to light the existence of a degree of regionalism in such a small colony, between Newport and the southern coast, which was heavily bound to the interests of its port and the littoral, and Providence and the hinterland, which were more interested in agriculture and other largely land-based pursuits. This intra-colonial regionalism further complicates the notion of a coherent American or New England colonial identity and corresponding set of interests.

The Problem of Imperial and Provincial Expeditions

The domestic defense of the colony was not the only fiscal and administrative task that the government of Rhode Island faced. In opposition to these provincial interests were the burdens of several expeditions that placed demands for manpower, ships, and money. Three of these four episodes, the expedition to the Spanish West Indies, the manning of the *Vigilant*, and the proposed invasion of New France, were imperial enterprises originating in and overseen by Britain. The expedition to siege, capture, and

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⁸⁸ RCRI V, 190.

later garrison Louisbourg, on the other hand, was the brainchild of Massachusetts' governor William Shirley. How Rhode Island's politicians dealt with these challenges brings to light the methods used to raise troops, the relationship between imperial participation and political favor, and ultimately how the colony's wartime service was a focal point of tension between Rhode Island and Massachusetts, specifically in regard to the ongoing border dispute.

The Duke of Newcastle, Thomas Pelham-Holles, who served as the Secretary of State for the Southern Department⁸⁹, issued the first call for Rhode Islanders to serve abroad in early 1740. Following the success of the capture of Porto Bello in Spanish Panama in November of 1739, a follow up expedition was planned for the capture of Cartagena, a heavily fortified port town on the Caribbean coast of South America that was a key point for the loading of galleons with gold and silver. In a letter to Governor Ward, Newcastle detailed a plan in which colonial forces would be paired with British regulars under the command of a British general and a British admiral. Newcastle's letter is loaded with language that urges the colony to appeal to the monetary self-interest of possible recruits: a "share of any booty" was to be promised to recruits and "proper encouragement" in the form of compensation, arms, and clothing is mentioned as the best way to facilitate enlistment. It is only at the very end of his communiqué that the "violence and depredations of the Spaniards" is mentioned as an additional "motive." Rhode Island was to procure additional supplies and transport, as well as commission

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⁸⁹ The office of Secretary of State for the Southern Department was responsible for relations with the British American colonies until 1768.

officers to oversee its companies. Newcastle and King George II assured the colonies that such expenses would eventually be repaid by the metropole.⁹⁰

The governor and General Assembly responded enthusiastically to the call by authorizing enlistment bounties and professing their loyalty to the Empire. In May of 1740, the General Assembly, expounding upon the suggested appeals to self-interest, passed an act providing an additional £3 bounty for recruits in addition to the clothes and arms promised by the Crown. Furthermore, recruits were exempted for three years from any and all military service upon their return. The Assembly ordered that the officers of the colony's militias call together their companies in order to assist in the enlistment of troops for Cartagena.⁹¹ Letters from Governor Ward to Newcastle and Colonel Blackeney, a British officer dispatched to the North American mainland colonies to coordinate the expedition, extolled his own colony's efforts, specifically in comparison to Massachusetts. Ward wrote to Blackeney that even though Rhode Island had raised more than its proportional fair share of soldiers (compared to its "neighbors"), he wished to be informed of "what further may be done on our parts, whereby we may distinguish our selves to his Majesty on this occasion and merit your approbation which this colony will be very proud of."⁹² This sentiment was repeated in a dispatch he wrote to Newcastle on June 24, 1741, recounting the colony's efforts so far:

"His Majesty's orders for levying a number of men on an expedition against the Spaniards came safe to hand the latter end of April and was laid before the Assembly the first Wednesday of May [1740] who readily and cheerfully complied there with and showed their zeal for his Majesty's service in their giving a bounty to each person enlisting some considerable time before any of the other governments, which forwarded us so much more than our neighbors that we soon filled up two companies of one hundred men each pursuant to his Majesty's

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⁹⁰ CCGRI I, 127-131, 146-7.

⁹¹ RCRI IV, 573-4.

⁹² CCGRI I, 168.

direction before the [*sic*] Massachusetts though they are ten times as numerous as we...”⁹³

Such professions of provincial loyalty, conveyed in terms of opposition to their political rival, Massachusetts, would continue and intensify as the dual conflicts dragged on.

The next opportunity for the colony to prove its devotion to the imperial war effort came in the spring of 1745. During the colonial campaign to capture Louisbourg, a 64-gun ship, the *Vigilant*, which was carrying men and supplies from France with the intention of reinforcing the besieged settlement, was captured and put into the service of the Royal Navy. In order to crew the vessel, Governor Shirley requested the service of sailors from Rhode Island in addition to those he was attempting to recruit or impress from his own colony and Connecticut.⁹⁴ While the Rhode Island government usually did not respond favorably or eagerly to the sometimes cajoling and other times bullying demands of Shirley, it recognized that this particular request was ultimately in regard to a ship of his Majesty’s service.

On June 18, the General Assembly developed a two-pronged approach to providing soldiers and sailors that utilized both coercion and a good deal of monetary compensation. For those that voluntarily enlisted for service aboard the *Vigilant*, a £17 bounty was offered as well an exemption from any civil arrests. This sum far outweighed the mere £3 offered for the same service by Massachusetts.⁹⁵ If this enticement failed to lure the two hundred men the colony thought appropriate, impressment would provide the rest. A warrant was issued for the immediate impressment of forty men. From June 19

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⁹³ Ibid, 199.

⁹⁴ See the letters from Shirley to Governor Wanton and Governor Jonathan Law (Connecticut) in Charles H. Lincoln, ed., *Correspondence of William Shirley: Governor of Massachusetts and Military Commander in America, 1731-1760*, Vol. I (New York: Macmillan Company, 1912), 227-30.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 227; RCRI V, 117.

until June 26, ferries, “boatmen,” and all others were strictly prohibited from transporting any sailors off of the islands Aquidneck (where Newport is located) and Conanicut, the two principal islands of Narragansett Bay. A £20 fine for those found guilty of its violation backed this prohibition on the movement of seamen. This roundup of sailors was aided by the closure of Newport harbor to all outgoing shipping until June 26, an embargo to be enforced by the guns of Fort George. Only vessels possessing a special license from the governor were free to leave. Those impressed were to be kept either at the fort or within the Newport jail. These draconian measures were somewhat softened by the fact that if an impressed sailor decided to voluntarily enlist, they would be rewarded the full £17 bounty as if they had willingly signed up in the first place.⁹⁶ Despite this unprecedented impressment effort in Narragansett Bay, only about seventy sailors were obtained for service due to the “scarcity of men.”⁹⁷ This eagerness, on the part of the government, should be seen in the same vein as that exhibited during the Cartagena expedition. With the several provincial political interests on the line, chief among them the border dispute, Rhode Island sought to reaffirm its commitment to the imperial cause, even resorting to impressment, a tactic previously considered but not employed between 1739 and the spring of 1745.

In order to fully understand the colony’s reluctance to use impressment, one must take into account an Atlantic context of maritime trades and upheaval. Unlike Boston, Newport was a harbor heavily involved in privateering. During the dual conflicts, its privateering fleet conducted over one quarter of all yearly privateering cruises and berths, second only to New York in terms of berths and the most prolific in terms of voyages per

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⁹⁶ RCRI V, 117-121.

⁹⁷ See Governor Wanton’s letter to Richard Partridge, RCRI V, 146.

year.⁹⁸ In order to sustain the over one hundred privateering cruises that originated from Newport each year, a large and reliable pool of voluntary sailors needed to be ensured. Men serving aboard privateers were lured by the possibility of generous financial rewards. In contrast, service in the British Royal Navy occurred under significantly worse conditions. Wages were low, discipline was harsh, the food was usually poor, disease was common, and overcrowding below decks was a serious problem.⁹⁹ Any widespread use of impressment could not only endanger the voluntary labor that privateer ships relied upon but could also result in violent revolt. Both New York and Boston, sites of heavy Royal Navy impressment, experienced riots during the dual conflicts. In March of 1741, tensions in the port city of New York boiled over into arson and violence, pressures that were due in part to war-related food shortages and impressment. Similarly, Boston experienced upheaval in 1747 when the impressed crew of the HMS *Lark* fought back against pressgangs, joining forces with over a thousand others to fight back against coerced royal service.¹⁰⁰ In contrast, Rhode Island and Newport served as a sort of haven for those seeking to avoid forced service on land as well as sea. Its relatively liberal impressment policies and the absence of the Royal Navy combined with the enticements of privateering to attract sailors and deserting draftees from Boston and inland Massachusetts, yet another point of contention between the two rivals.¹⁰¹

The resort to coercion for the *Vigilant* stands in stark contrast to the efforts to raise three companies of soldiers for the Louisbourg siege; the attitude toward Shirley's

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⁹⁸ Carl E. Swanson, "American Privateering and Imperial Warfare, 1739-1748," *The William & Mary Quarterly* 42, No. 3 (July 1985), 362.

⁹⁹ Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000), 160-1.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 176-7, 215-6.

¹⁰¹ See letters regarding desertions to Rhode Island in CCGRI I, 134, 325-6. Rhode Island always denied such allegations and was uncooperative in returning any persons to Massachusetts.

proposed expedition was markedly less enthusiastic. In a letter to Rhode Island's Governor Greene on January 29, 1745, Shirley appealed to the "common cause" of New England while at the same time recognizing the smaller colony's maritime vulnerability. He enclosed a memorandum that outlined the plan of attack and urged Rhode Island to supply men and artillery in order to assist in the upcoming siege of the French Canadian stronghold on Cape Breton Island.¹⁰² Greene responded by calling a special session of the General Assembly in February. During this session and a subsequent session held the following month, the Assembly outfitted the *Tartar* to sail with the expedition, created a new tax to fund the Louisbourg operation, and called for the formation of a force consisting of up to 350 men. These soldiers were encouraged with a £6 bounty (in addition to the Massachusetts bounty), rights to any plunder, a free blanket, and exemptions for any non-criminal property seizures.¹⁰³ Despite these enticements, the recruitment effort was languishing two months later. The bar was set lower as the Assembly now only called for three companies of fifty men each. In fact, Rhode Island had quite literally missed the boat; the siege had started in March and reached full pitch by late April, with only the *Tartar* in attendance as the colony's representative force.¹⁰⁴ Impressment was now put on the table as a viable option but was never used specifically for filling out the companies for expedition.¹⁰⁵ The contingent of troops finally arrived at

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¹⁰² CCGRI I, 298-302.

¹⁰³ RCRI V, 102-6.

¹⁰⁴ The *Tartar* served with distinction during the Louisbourg campaign; it was instrumental in fending off attacks on the Connecticut contingent at sea and launched a surprise attack on a group of French and Indians encamped along the Canadian coast. Unlike the expeditionary companies, the crewing of the colony sloop seems to have been relatively easy. Given Rhode Island's maritime culture, volunteers were probably less wary of serving relatively short stints aboard the coast guard vessel compared to expeditionary soldiering and its high casualty rates. The ship's complement usually numbered around one hundred men. Volunteers were raised in Newport each time it set out on patrol or convoy duty, see Chapin, *Rhode Island Privateers*, 186-98.

¹⁰⁵ RCRI V, 107-14.

Louisbourg in the middle of July, a month after the French forces had surrendered on June 16.¹⁰⁶ While the slowness and confusion surrounding Rhode Island's contribution to the expedition may indeed have been due, in part to a scarcity in manpower, the sluggishness was also probably related to the skepticism with which the government viewed Shirley's undertaking. This doubt over the Louisbourg endeavor was laid out in great detail in a letter from Governor Wanton to Richard Partridge, the colony's agent in London. These concerns will be explored later in this chapter in relation to the search for vindication.

Rhode Island would face its final expeditionary challenge a year later in the spring of 1746. The Duke of Newcastle informed then Governor Greene about a British led scheme to dispatch a large number of regular troops from Europe under the command of Scottish Lieutenant General James St. Clair. A contingent of colonial troops was to be raised in the New England colonies; Newcastle insisted that Greene "use the utmost expedition in the raising of as many men as possible" to rendezvous with St. Clair at Louisbourg. Once at Louisbourg, the combined force would sail up the St. Lawrence River and siege Quebec. This plan was nothing novel, resembling a failed bid for the capital of New France that occurred during Queen Anne's War some thirty plus years before. Once enlisted, soldiers were to be under "his Majesty's pay," while Rhode Island would cover the expenses of sea transport and supplies, which far outweighed the salaries of enlisted men and officers.¹⁰⁷ The General Assembly responded with all the alacrity it

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¹⁰⁶ There is a good deal of confusion surrounding the actual arrival date of the three Rhode Island companies. Letters from Captain Daniel Fones and General William Pepperell to Governor Wanton place the arrival in mid-July, RCRI V 140-1. The editor of *The Correspondence of the Colonial Governors of Rhode Island*, Gertrude Kimball, states that they arrived in April of 1745. Governor Wanton adds to the confusion by writing that the companies for the expedition were initially disbanded in the spring of 1745 and only reformed at the urging of Admiral Peter Warren, CCGRI I, 368. Sydney James places the arrival in July, stating that the companies were formed after some "initial confusion," which is probably the premature disbandment that Wanton mentions, *Colonial Rhode Island*, 274.

¹⁰⁷ See Newcastle's letter to Governor Greene in RCRI V, 162-3.

had displayed when receiving the metropolitan call for manning the *Vigilant*. Legislation passed on June 2 called for the raising of three companies consisting of 100 men each. The colonels of the county militia regiments were ordered to direct their officers to enlist men from their companies as “expeditiously” as possible. To aid in this process, an immense bounty of £50 was offered to recruits as well as the massive sum of £200 for anyone with sufficient knowledge of the St. Lawrence River that was willing to serve as a pilot for the invasion fleet. It was noted that these actions were undertaken by the government to “give all possible evidence of their loyalty and gratitude to His Majesty, and zeal for his service.”¹⁰⁸ Ten days later, on June 12, the Assembly convened once more. Apparently the enticement of bounties had failed to raise the desired 300 men quickly enough so a sweeping set of impressments was authorized for the first time since the crewing of the *Vigilant*. As in 1745, the movement of recruits, this time soldiers instead of sailors, was limited by restricting movement off of Aquidneck Island. Recruits were to be impressed equally from Providence and Newport counties, with King’s County being exempted. This exemption was possibly due to that county’s much lower population and lack of an urban center. The Sheriff of Newport was authorized to impress a number of workmen and sailors in order to outfit and crew the three transport ships intended for Louisbourg. This led to the first and only instance of coerced labor directly related to Rhode Island’s war effort. Adding to the seriousness of the government response was the fact that permission had been granted to impress ships for the

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¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 172-3. It should be noted that Rhode Island was not alone in offering a massive bounty; Connecticut offered between £30 and £40 for the same expedition. Selesky notes that these bounties, while relatively high, should be seen in terms of the inflation taking place during the war, *War & Society in Colonial Connecticut*, 91.

expedition¹⁰⁹; previously transport ships had been leased or hired by the Assembly from Newport merchants.

Despite these enthusiastic efforts, the government of Rhode Island continued to be pressured for its apparent lack of exertion. On July 4, Governor Shirley and Admiral Warren wrote to Governor Greene, in tones more consistent with Shirley than the Admiral, chastising him for the “small proportion of forces the colony under [his] government has contributed towards carrying on this expedition...” The efforts of New Hampshire, a colony also small in population and stature, were deemed to be far superior to those of Rhode Island, although the former’s contribution is only alluded to in the vaguest of terms. Furthermore, the “extraordinary bounty” sanctioned by Rhode Island is criticized because it has drawn men away from neighboring colonies and into the Rhode Island companies, having “dampened” enlistment efforts in New England despite the offering of lower but still “efficient” bounties. From Connecticut alone, ninety men had crossed east into Rhode Island in order to take advantage of the more copious financial inducement.¹¹⁰ These complaints were somewhat echoed in an earlier dispatch to Greene from Admiral Warren that frowned upon the relatively small number of troops being raised by Rhode Island, 300 men being “much fewer than...hoped.”¹¹¹ It would appear that no matter what Rhode Island did, in terms of trying to contribute soldiers for the expedition, it would never be good enough for the ever-critical Shirley. While on the one hand he accused his neighbor to the south of being lackadaisical in its recruitment, on the other its bounty offering was far too zealous and apparently successful enough to have drawn men from beyond Rhode Island’s borders. In the end, the expedition to take

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¹⁰⁹ RCRI V, 175-82.

¹¹⁰ Selesky, *War & Society in Colonial Connecticut*, 90.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, 183, 185-6.

Quebec never moved beyond Louisbourg; the large British force under St. Clair was diverted to coastal raiding activities in France while plans to divert the colonial force amassing at Louisbourg to counter the French fortress at Crown Point on Lake Champlain never came to fruition. As for the Rhode Island contingent, two of the three transports ran aground off of Martha's Vineyard. Ravaged by sickness and desertion, the three companies and their escorting sailors limped home in the winter of 1746-47.

In addition to the three expeditions abroad and the pressing demands of civil defense, the provincial government also had to contend with requests for material aid and military participation from neighboring British colonies. One such plea for mutual defense was the call for commissioners from the northeastern colonies to meet in Albany in the spring of 1744 to discuss frontier defenses against New France and a military alliance with the Iroquois nations of New York. Despite the urgings of New York Governor George Clinton, Colonel Josiah Willard, and Governor Shirley, Rhode Island declined to actively partake in the proceedings, preferring instead to receive any relevant developments from their contacts in Connecticut.¹¹² Likewise, Governor Shirley urged Rhode Island to contribute "proper supplies" to the Iroquois in May of 1747 so that they could be encouraged to make war upon the French and their Indian allies. Once again the leadership of the colony declined to partake in a regional scheme, citing the financial burden it would entail.¹¹³ Rhode Island, with its directly elected governor and General Assembly placed its own local self-interests above the imperial and North American priorities of royally appointed governors and their appointees in colonies such as New York and Massachusetts.

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¹¹² For Shirley's request, see letter in RCRI V, 93-4; For Governor Greene's response, CCGRI I, 262, 269.

¹¹³ RCRI V, 218.

When the colony did cooperate, it was usually with Connecticut, a neighbor that it enjoyed relatively good relations with. In a letter written to Connecticut Governor Jonathan Law at the urging of the General Assembly, Governor Greene assured his neighbor to the west that Rhode Island would “be always ready to lend your government what assistance is in our power upon any invasion or attack...for though the governments are distinct, yet our common interests are inseparable.”¹¹⁴ This sort of rhetoric, as well as the combined operations that occurred, contrast greatly with the government’s attitude towards rival Massachusetts and distant New York. Furthermore, cooperative ventures, such as the *Tartar*’s scouting for D’Anville’s fleet or the joint coastal patrols that sloop conducted with the *Defense*, were pertinent to threats that directly affected the security Rhode Island.

Vindicating the War Record

The antagonism between Rhode Island and Massachusetts throughout the war years in the context of the border dispute caused the leadership of Rhode Island to be hypersensitive on the subject of its contribution to the war. The governors and General Assembly were well aware of the defamations that Governor Shirley and his colleagues were putting forth both at home and in London. Richard Partridge, Rhode Island’s paid representative and lobbyist to the metropole government, voiced such suspicions when writing to a British government minister in regards to the 1745 Louisbourg expedition: “I am ready to think that Commodore Warren...must have been imposed upon and prejudiced by the Massachusetts people respecting the colony of Rhode Island or else he

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¹¹⁴ CCGRI I, 261.

would hardly have wrote home as I understand he did.”¹¹⁵ Governor Wanton was similarly convinced of the conspiracy against his colony, writing to Partridge, “the agent for the province of the Massachusetts Bay has been very liberal in his aspersions against this colony and as we suspect that he will misrepresent our conduct in regard to the Cape Breton expedition.”¹¹⁶

Partridge and the provincial government that employed him took steps in order to counter this slander. In the autumn of 1745, the prominent politician, Peter Bours, was sent to Louisbourg in order to obtain a “certificate” from Major General Roger Wolcott, the Lieutenant Governor of Connecticut and a high ranking officer that had presided over the Louisbourg siege, that would vindicate the colony’s part in the undertaking, specifically in regard to the dramatic part played by the *Tartar* in protecting a troop convoy of Connecticut soldiers and engaging a French encampment that was en route to reinforce the fortress.¹¹⁷ This certificate was later forwarded to Partridge to serve in his various lobbying efforts, such as the quest for reimbursement and the border squabble.

In addition to the testimony of Walcott, Governor Wanton penned a letter to Partridge in which he thoroughly explained and defended his colony’s performance over the past half decade of conflict. He highlights the eager response during the Spanish West Indies expedition contrasting it with Shirley’s Louisbourg endeavor. He argues that Shirley’s scheme was unilateral, without the official sanction of the British until after it was underway. Furthermore, it was a highly controversial expedition from the outset; the vote for approval in the Massachusetts House of Representatives had been razor thin, with only one vote separating those in favor from the opposition. He reminds Partridge of

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¹¹⁵ Ibid, 373.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 363.

¹¹⁷ For the full certificate, see RCRI V, 155.

the debacle at Cartagena, using it as part of the basis for Rhode Island's weariness in response to the 1745 mission. Furthermore, the northern fisheries off of Nova Scotia were characterized as being much more of a provincial concern for New Hampshire and Massachusetts than for Rhode Island. Besides this skepticism there was also the practical consideration of manpower. He asserts that the colony was exhausted of men due to the earlier enlistment for the West Indies and the service of a great deal of men aboard privateers. Whereas neighboring Connecticut was able to raise 400 men for the 1746 expedition without resorting to coercion¹¹⁸, Rhode Island struggled to fill quotas less than half that amount. He recounts how the efforts to utilize high monetary bounties fell somewhat short of enlistment goals, forcing the government to turn to impressment, emphasizing its use as a desperate last resort. He concludes his letter by reiterating the record of the *Tartar*, mentioning his coast's vulnerability to attack, and stating that Rhode Island's efforts far outweighed those of all the non-New England colonies combined, none of them having given "so much and such effectual assistance as this little Colony and the merchants of the town of Newport cheerfully afforded."¹¹⁹ In a different version of a similar letter, Wanton goes as far as to declare Massachusetts as being "*our avowed enemies* [emphasis added]...whereby they imagine they may prejudice us, and gain their point, concerning the boundaries."¹²⁰ Clearly the conflicts of 1739-1748 should be understood in a context that transcends vague notions of imperial loyalty and rivalry as put forth by Sydney James. The issue at the forefront was clearly the border dispute and Massachusetts proved to be as much (if not more) of a territorial threat to the colony as either France or Spain. It should be remembered that Shirley had represented

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¹¹⁸ Selesky, *War & Society in Colonial Connecticut*, 91.

¹¹⁹ CCGRI I, 363-70.

¹²⁰ See letter in RCRI V, 145-8.

Massachusetts in the border dispute before becoming governor of that colony, predisposing him to an antagonistic view of Rhode Island even before rising to the office of governor.

Conclusions

By the end of hostilities in 1748, Rhode Island's government could look back at the years of the dual conflicts as being bittersweet. The colony's territorial integrity had been preserved and expanded. Neither French nor Spanish had landed at Newport or Block Island and Newport's privateers and the *Tartar* had swiftly dealt with privateering threats on the maritime frontier. The government was informed of the favorable ruling regarding its eastern border with Massachusetts during the summer of 1746, the actual decision having finally been handed down that April. Governor Greene highlighted the military dimension of the controversy, stating that the people in the territory previously in question will rejoice because the region had been heavily affected by Massachusetts' impressment efforts. Many were conscientious objectors who had been held against their will, being extorted for "great sums of money" in order to buy their own release.¹²¹ In January of 1747, the General Assembly went to work carefully marking the exact lines of the new boundary. Literally no stone was left unturned; the report of the colony's border commissioners that surveyed the line mentions individual oak and pine trees and piles of rocks that were setup as demarcation points. Five new towns were incorporated, a new county, Bristol, was created, new freemen were admitted, and elections were held to fill

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¹²¹ CCGRI II, 2.

the new offices.¹²² Tellingly, one of these new towns, Warren, was named in honor of the British Admiral who had taken part in the Louisbourg expedition.

Despite these successes, the financial legacies of the wars were that of debt and new taxes. Massive amounts of money were printed, borrowed, and taken from the treasury to cover war-related expenses. During this nine year period money was spent on a variety of projects and needs: the repairs to Fort George, the hiring of transport vessels, the issuing of bounties, the billeting of troops, the cruises of the *Tartar*, the procurement of gunpowder, and the pay of sentries. It even got to the point that the colony had to borrow £11,000 pounds from a group of Newport merchants in order to pay the officers and soldiers of the failed Canada expedition of 1746.¹²³ The Louisbourg and Canada expeditions alone required the printing of £180,000 worth of additional currency. The practice of printing its self was a point of contention between the colony and metropole, in addition to the new taxes that were created to cover such emissions. To make matters worse, reimbursements, which were promised by the metropole for certain expenses, were either extremely slow in coming or never paid back at all. For instance, the heavy scrutiny of the expenses for the failed Canada expedition resulted in only about half of those expenses being redeemed. It should come as no surprise that Massachusetts Governor Shirley actively sought to prevent disbursements to his New England rival. The financial debacle led to a drawn out and tumultuous investigation of how the colonial government administered financial affairs, which eventually culminated in the total overhaul of the currency.¹²⁴

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¹²² For the acts regarding the acquisition of the five towns and the reports of the surveyors, see RCRI V, 199-201, 205-8

¹²³ This loan is mentioned in a letter in Ibid, 230-1.

¹²⁴ James, *Colonial Rhode Island*, 274-6.

The price of security on the maritime frontier and the costs of professing imperial loyalty were extremely high. The colony of Rhode Island applied not only vast fiscal resources to these goals but also the work and service of soldiers, sailors, and politicians, bought, coerced, and enticed was all funneled toward a war effort permeated with provincial self-interest. This provincial self-interest attempted to rely upon appeals to personal self-interest as much as it could, even at the expense of efficiency. Bounties and other material incentives, while the backbone of the war effort, sometimes fell short as the interests of security, loyalty, region, and commerce competed for the finite resources of the smallest of colonies on the British Atlantic seaboard. Manpower shortages were a reality made worse by the drain of men created by the port of Newport. The colony's heavy maritime orientation siphoned off potential soldiers as they signed on to privateering vessels or sought relatively safe employment in a number of other trades. Whether resources were human or material Rhode Island's dearth stands in stark contrast to the supposed "pinnacle of colonial arms" during this period as advocated by military historians such as Selesky and Steele. These vast expenditures should be understood as strains on the relationship between colony and metropole. While imperial warfare may have sparked a heightened sense of imperial allegiance to some individual officers and politicians, the costs of war at the provincial level certainly dampened sympathies for the imperial cause.

Despite these shortcomings instances of increased government action, whether in the realm of the Quakers, militias, or merchants, expanded the powers of the provincial administration, in symbolic and substantial ways. New prerogatives such as the ability to name militia officers and controls over outgoing ships heightened the authority of

provincial governing institutions. Symbolically, the provincial government and associated elites undertook ceremonies of power, rituals that Max Weber sees as self-justifications of “the truth of their preeminence” and Clifford Geertz recognizes as “the power of grandeur to organize the world.”¹²⁵ Whether their efforts were highly visible, such as the declaration of war ceremonies or border survey walks, or more private, in the form of exclusive artillery companies, increases in elite power transcended the purely political. These instances not only depict the increased vigor of colonial governing bodies, but they can also be seen as an effort by the colony’s elites to reinforce their social hegemony. This expansion of powers and privileges occurred in the context of a highly participatory society in which soldiers, elites, and freemen exercised a relatively high degree of autonomy and choice. Although some of this agency was overridden by legislation, such as the cessation of militia elections, the governor and General Assembly balanced imperial demands with provincial concerns and limits on coercion. Their efforts can be viewed as being successful in that they avoided the riots and upheavals experienced in colonies such as Massachusetts and New York during the same period of time. Unlike these colonies, Rhode Island was much more restrained in its impressment efforts and was free of the heavy-handed imperial presence that existed in ports such as Boston and New York.

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¹²⁵ Richard S. Wortman, *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy from Peter the Great to the Abdication of Nicholas II* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 4-5.

Chapter 3: Recruitment, Monotony, and Debacle: Rhode Island's Soldiers at Home and Abroad

The small amount of scholarship that has examined the role of Rhode Island during the dual conflicts has been overwhelmingly interested in actions occurring on the seas, specifically the exploits of privateers.¹²⁶ This oversight is indeed understandable given the colony's heavy nautical orientation and the relative lack of actual fighting seen by its troops. In fact, soldiers from Rhode Island only actually partook in one campaign, the siege of Cartagena, due to having missed the siege of Louisbourg and the cancellation of the expedition to "reduce Canada" in the latter years of King George's War. This is not to say an examination of these forces is unnecessary or that their experiences were in any way comfortable or privileged. On the contrary, an assessment of the makeup, actions, conditions, and experiences of Rhode Island's land forces is valuable for several reasons. Firstly, by seeing how forces were raised and who led and served in the various companies, one can get an idea of how the colony faced issues of manpower shortages and attempted to appeal to recruits. It also reveals whom they thought suitable for both the expeditions abroad and civil defense at home. Secondly, by understanding the recruitment methods of the mid-eighteenth century, the place of the imperial conflicts becomes clearer within the context of the impressment of the seventeenth century and the large-scale volunteerism that characterized the conflicts of the latter part of the 1700s. Lastly, although most of the men Rhode Island raised were to never see combat, their experiences illustrate the everyday hardships, disciplinary regimen, and monotony of military service in the late early modern period.

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¹²⁶ See Chapin, *Rhode Island Privateers in King George's War, 1739-1748* and *The Tartar: the armed sloop of the colony of Rhode Island, in King George's War* (Providence: Rhode Island Society of Colonial Wars, 1922); Carl E. Swanson, "American Privateering and Imperial Warfare, 1739-1748," *The William & Mary Quarterly* 42, No. 3 (July 1985), 357-382.

Rhode Island raised roughly 600 officers and soldiers for the expeditions of the dual imperial conflicts between 1739 and 1748. For all three instances, units were organized geographically. The two infantry companies raised for the West Indies in 1740 were the “Island” company, recruited from Newport and Narragansett Bay and a “Mainland” company, levied from the remainder of the colony. The three companies of the Louisbourg expedition in 1745 appear to have followed similar lines, each company seeming to correspond with the colony’s three different counties: Providence, Newport, and Kings. The three companies for the proposed Canada campaign of 1746 were composed of one company from Newport county, the second from Providence county, and the third a mixture of the two, Kings county having been excused by the Assembly. The officers of these various companies were from the regions units originated from. Officers were generally appointed by the Assembly and approved and commissioned by the Governor and his Council. Commissions were usually dispatched from the imperial government in Britain but were sometimes provincial in nature until approved by British field officers upon arrival.

Expeditionary Officers

The types of men selected by the government to serve as company captains in the West Indies and Canada depict the seriousness with which the provincial government handled imperial participation. Those selected to serve as junior officers, lieutenants and ensigns, were also usually men of *some* status, freemen at the very least. In addition, service in these expeditions served as experience that was built upon as these officers went on to political and military positions in the years following the conflict. From the

very beginning, the government selected men of high stature or popularity to lead expeditionary companies, a practice certainly not unique to the Ocean Colony. The head of the Island Company in 1740 was Captain Samuel Dunn. Dunn was admitted as a freeman to the colony as a resident of Newport in 1720, had married Ann Clarke of Kingston, Rhode Island in 1718, and was a member of the Second Baptist Church in that town.¹²⁷ He had been elected to the position of the lieutenant of the Newport's second company of militia in 1733 and 1734 and would later go on to be annually elected captain of that unit from 1735 until accepting leadership of the Island Company in 1740, a sign of his popularity among the militiamen of his town. Another sign of his popularity was that he was also chosen to serve as the principal recruiting officer for his expeditionary company.¹²⁸

The second captain, heading up the Mainland Company, was even more distinguished, Captain William Hopkins. Unlike, Dunn, Hopkins came from an established and powerful family. The Hopkins of Providence produced several politicians and officers in the colonial period of Rhode Island. His father had been a military officer, deputy in the legislature, and surveyor for the town of Providence.¹²⁹ His younger brother, Stephen, would go on to serve as a governor of the colony on several occasions in the 1750s and 60s and become a representative at the Continental Congress. His other younger brother, Esek, was a naval officer who would become the first commander of the

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¹²⁷ RCRI IV, 266; "Newport Town Records" in *The Newport Historical Magazine* 1, No. 1 (July 1880), 202; *New England Historical Genealogical Register* 69 (Boston: New England Historic Genealogical Society, 1915). The surname "Dunn" also appears as "Dun" during this period of time, the two being interchangeable.

¹²⁸ For all militia and military ranks and positions, I reference Jencks Smith's *The Civil and Military List of Rhode Island* and Chapin's invaluable *Rhode Island in the Colonial Wars: A List of Rhode Island Soldiers & Sailors in King George's War, 1740-174*.

¹²⁹ *The Early Records of the Town of Providence* 17 (Providence: Snow & Farnham City Printers, 1902); For legislative positions held, I rely on CCRI, volumes four and five.

American navy during the Revolutionary War. William himself was no slouch; in 1721 he was elected ensign of one of Providence's militia companies, rising through the ranks, winning elections to the ranks of lieutenant in 1733 and captain in 1734. Four years later he would become the lieutenant colonel of Providence's militia regiment, becoming the second highest officer in that town's militia. He was also politically active, serving as a legislator from Providence he was on a variety of military committees, and was also a justice of the peace. In 1740, Hopkins, thirty-five years old, resigned from his prestigious post to serve as a second in command of the Mainland Company, a lesser rank, because of his "excitement" for the expedition.¹³⁰ Like Dunn, he also served as recruitment officer for his own unit. When Joseph Sheffield soon resigned his position, Hopkins took command of the company. Ever adventurous, and perhaps a touch acquisitive, he would later go on to serve as the captain of the privateer *Prince Frederick* in 1743, after the completion of the Caribbean expedition.

The presence of men from well-connected and powerful families in the captaincies of expeditionary companies continued during the officer nominations in 1745 and 1746, for Louisbourg and the Canada expeditions respectively. Captain Joshua Champlin came from such a family. The Champlins were based out of the southern part of the colony, specifically Westerly in Kings County. Champlins had served as legislators and justices of the peace for Westerly since the last decade of the seventeenth century, perpetually holding offices into the 1740s and beyond. Joshua himself was selected to be a militia captain for one of Westerly's companies in 1742 and was a relatively newly minted freeman of that town, having achieved that status in 1737. He would later go on to

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¹³⁰ Bruce Campbell MacGunnigle, ed., *Carnage and Cartagena: Captain William Hopkins and his Rhode Island Recruits in the Campaign Against Cartagena and Cuba, 1741* (Providence: Webster Press, 1988), 5.

serve as an officer in both the French and Indian War (at Lake George) and in the American Revolution.¹³¹

Captain Edward Cole, who rose to his rank after the death of Richard Mumford at Louisbourg and served as a company captain in both 1745 and 1746, also came from a background of power and prestige. Although Cole appears to have no previous militia leadership experience before the war and was a tanner by trade, his father, Elisha Cole, was a legislator from Kingstown who advanced to the position of Assistant in the governor's council. The Cole family was one of the earliest to settle Narragansett Bay and was directly descended from Anne Hutchison. After King George's War Edward became a merchant and went on to serve as a lieutenant colonel in the French and Indian War. At the outbreak of the Revolution, he was a firm loyalist and raised soldiers to fight the rebellion. He lived out his final days, in exile, having settled in New Brunswick, Canada, after the confiscation of all of his property in Rhode Island.¹³²

Captain William Rice was from a family that occupied important provincial positions, serving as militia officers, sheriffs, and judge in Warwick and Providence County. He married Phebe Tripp in 1730 and became a freeman of the colony in 1732. A man of "some property and a good deal of...influence," William carried on the family tradition of office holding, serving as a justice of the peace for Warwick between 1739 and 1742, a deputy in the legislature from 1743 until 1746, and on the governor's council in 1744-45. Like Cole, Rice had minimal military experience, serving a brief stint in the Providence county Light Horse over ten years prior to his appointment by the General

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¹³¹ Cuyler Reynolds, ed., *Hudson-Mohawk Genealogical and Family Memoirs 2* (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1911), 514.

¹³² George Champlin Mason, *Annals of Trinity Church, Newport, Rhode Island* (Newport: George C. Mason, 1890), 97-8, 115.

Assembly. His journal kept during the calamitous voyage of 1746 that floundered off of Martha's Vineyard, is an extremely rare and therefore valuable first hand account of Rhode Island service during the time.¹³³

While the abovementioned captains (which includes nearly all that held that rank) often came from powerful families and were popular and prestigious before their service, lower officers, the lieutenants and ensigns that were the second and third in command of the various expeditionary companies, sometimes rose to prominence after their experiences. For these men, appointments to lower officer positions served as stepping-stones to future prominence. Lieutenant Walter Chaloner, who served in the Island Company of the West Indies expedition, seems to have come from relatively obscure roots and had no previous militia leadership experience. However, after returning from the Caribbean, Chaloner would go on to be the captain of Fort George in 1745, a deputy representing Newport, a member of several military committees in the General Assembly, and an active leader in Newport's Anglican Trinity Church. Later in life he would serve as a sheriff for Newport County. Like Cole, Chaloner sided with the Crown during the American Revolution and was exiled to New Brunswick where he died in 1796.¹³⁴ Nathan Carpenter, a newly minted freeman of Newport in 1744, was named a militia officer for that county and then soon placed in William Rice's company. After the death of Rice in January 1747, Carpenter completed a rise from freeman to military captain in a mere three years. Lieutenant Robert Sterry, appointed to be a militia officer in Providence by the General Assembly and appointed to one of the companies intended for Canada in 1746, would later rise to the rank of captain, leading one of Rhode Island's

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¹³³ *Nine Muster Rolls of Rhode Island Troops Enlisted During the Old French War to which is added the Journal of Captain William Rice in the Expedition of 1746* (Providence: Standard Printing Co, 1915).

¹³⁴ Mason, *Annals of Trinity Church*, 78.

infantry companies during the French and Indian War. Ensign Samuel Nichols, also of the failed Canada expedition of 1746, rose to the rank of lieutenant during the French and Indian War, partaking in the same campaign at Crown Point that Sterry did.

Some of the officers of Rhode Island made very favorable impressions upon high ranking British and colonial leaders in the field. General Pepperell, the colonial commander at Louisbourg, promoted Lieutenant Richard Hoyle to the rank of captain, giving him command of a Massachusetts company.¹³⁵ Ensign William Smith, of Providence, served with distinction in the West Indies and was promoted to the rank of lieutenant by the British Major General Wentworth, noting his “good character.” Wentworth also felt highly of Captain Hopkins, recognizing his good service by putting him to work as a recruiter of reinforcements in New York and Rhode Island.¹³⁶

Patterns of officer commissions had a curious exception in the form of Edward Kinnicutt. Kinnicutt was given charge of the Rhode Island regiment intended for the 1746 invasion of French Canada. He appears to have had no prior militia or governmental leadership experience but instead was a wealthy Providence merchant.¹³⁷ Despite his relative obscurity, he was given the rank of Lieutenant Colonel, the second highest to be awarded by the General Assembly during the war years. His nomination was almost certainly the result of nepotism, perhaps motivated by political favoritism of the current legislature or his connection to the powerful Tillinghast family through marriage.

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¹³⁵ “The Pepperell Papers” in *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 6th series, vol. 10 (Boston: University Press, 1899), 499.

¹³⁶ E. Alfred Jones, “The American Regiment in the Carthage Expedition,” *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 30 (1922): 15.

¹³⁷ Kinnicutt left behind an estate valued at over £15,000 pounds at the time of his death in 1755, William B. Weed, *Early Rhode Island: A Social History of the People* (New York: Grafton Press, 1910), 261.

Whatever the reason, he is a glaring deviation from the networks from which the majority of officers emerged. Company captains and other senior officers were almost always among the most prominent of Rhode Island's provincial elites. Their backgrounds were usually a blend of respected family names, experience as a colonial officeholder, and militia captaincies. Junior officers, on the other hand, were more likely to be newly minted freemen; men of modest means and property, acquired either through inheritance, marriage, or burgeoning careers. Oftentimes service during the dual conflicts was a step toward prominence in the wars and politics of the second half of the century. Meritocracy and preferential patronage existed side by side as these men served together yet competed for advancement in perhaps the most mobile of America's colonial societies.

Expeditionary Soldiers

While it is relatively easy to discern the backgrounds, means, and careers of the colony's expeditionary officers, the backgrounds and characteristics of the much more numerous ordinary soldiers are far more difficult to determine. Despite the obscurity of those who enlisted, examining muster rolls and cross-referencing them with the records of the colony can glean clues about the makeup of the bulk of the companies. Further information can be surmised by "reading between the lines" of documents such as Rice's journal, provincial legislation, and high-level correspondence. What emerges is a group of men that is overwhelmingly transient, at least somewhat ethnically diverse, and more often than not on the margins of society.

The transitory nature of the large majority of Rhode Island's contingents sent abroad is revealed by the fact that most were not (and would never become) freemen of

the colony. Of 63 soldiers mentioned by name for the expedition to the Spanish West Indies, only about six could possibly have been freemen.¹³⁸ The later expeditions to Canada reveal a similar deficiency in freemen. A careful examination of the company recruited in and around Providence for Louisbourg yields only 3 potential freemen out of 37 non-officers. Likewise, there are only 20 potential freemen out of 97 men in the Providence company for the 1746 expedition. One would suspect even lower percentages for the companies originating from Newport, given that it is a highly mobile port town. The non-local character of many of these soldiers is also revealed by the need to billet large numbers of men at the homes of expeditionary and militia officers and private citizens. For the Cartagena expedition alone, soldiers were billeted at the homes of Captain Hopkins, Ensign Smith, and others, in Providence, Kings County, and Newport.¹³⁹ It also should be mentioned that a number of recruits did not originate from Rhode Island or its seafaring population at all but instead came from neighboring colonies in order to seek the colony's more ample bounties, instances of which raised the ire of Massachusetts Governor Shirley.¹⁴⁰ This unsettled character is also illustrated by the presence of a large number of bachelors. Two of the three company lists of men stationed at Louisbourg mention whether or not someone had family, meaning a wife and or children. Over two-thirds of the soldiers and non-commissioned officers (sergeants and

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¹³⁸ MacGunnigle, ed., *Carnage and Cartagena*, 10. I rely on the list of billeted soldiers provided in this collection of documents in place of muster rolls for the two Cartagena companies because of my inability to find them. Some of the names of soldiers are so common that it is nearly impossible to distinguish them from others that may or may not be the same person mentioned in multiple documents and lists.

¹³⁹ For details about billeting of troops in this expedition, see MacGunnigle, ed., *Carnage and Cartagena* and RCRI V, 48-9.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 186.

corporals) in both the Providence and Kings County companies were bachelors.¹⁴¹ Again, one would suspect that the Newport company would have an even higher proportion.

A number of the soldiers that served in Rhode Island's expeditionary companies were non-whites. Howard Chapin's list of Rhode Island soldiers serving during the dual conflicts, which is by no means complete, lists nine men confirmed to be Indians that took part in the imperial campaigns. An additional six men of the 1746 expedition had surnames, such as Tyken and Mew, that were only associated with Indians in Rhode Island's 1774 census.¹⁴² Furthermore, the journal of William Rice kept during the same expedition names two different Indians that deserted when the convoy was stopped at Martha's Vineyard, one of them, Michael Smiry, was a Nantucket Indian that Rice had enlisted the night before.¹⁴³ One can also infer with some certainty that several others were also of Indian heritage by the presence of surnames such as Wamogg and Tonquot that appear on occasion throughout the various muster rolls. At the absolute least, 20 out of the total 600 or so men raised by Rhode Island were Indians. In reality this proportion is probably much higher if one were able to discern the ethnicity of those who took Anglicized names, a common practice among the Indian population of southern New England during this time. By 1748, Rhode Island had roughly 1,000 Indians settled within its borders¹⁴⁴, most living either on Indian lands or working as servants for whites. Soldiers were probably drawn not only from the colony's local Narragansett Indian

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¹⁴¹ "The Pepperell Papers," 529-30.

¹⁴² John R. Bartlett, ed., *Census of the Inhabitants of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, 1774* (Providence: Knowles, Anthony & Co., State Printers, 1858). Identifying Indian men by their surname alone is inadequate since some had very Anglicized names such as John Cook or John Thompson.

¹⁴³ Rice, *Journal*, 49.

¹⁴⁴ Douglass, *A Summary, Historical and Political*. I arrive at the number of blacks and Indians by subtracting the additional Indian population gained from the annexation of the disputed border towns from Massachusetts from total supplied in Douglass' population figures.

population but also from Indian populations elsewhere in neighboring colonies (such as Michael Smiry from Nantucket) and the seafaring population of Newport that contained a number of Native American sailors.

The recruitment of Indian soldiers in the armies of New England during the dual conflicts marked a new phase of Native American participation in the colonial wars of the region. Whereas earlier conflicts involved entire bands of Indians aiding efforts against both the French and indigenous enemies¹⁴⁵, their participation in the mid-eighteenth century was on an individual basis, a testament to the contractual nature of enlistment and the declining cohesion of Indian groups in southern New England. Expeditionary armies were just one of the groups competing for contractual Indian manpower in an Atlantic labor market. Losses incurred by the nearly constant colonial wars heightened the demand for farmhands, sailors, and soldiers. Indians sought work aboard whaling vessels and on southern New England farms, usually trapped in a cycle of debt and indentured servitude as they attempted to fully pay off debts to English merchants for goods such as foodstuffs, clothing, and tools.¹⁴⁶

This non-white element was augmented by the presence of blacks in the expeditionary companies. Their presence, which is even more difficult to detect, can be gleaned from examining surnames in the muster rolls and identifying those that appear exclusively with black families in the 1774 census. Unlike Indians, Chapin does not identify any soldiers in his list as being black or of African descent. At least three men of the 1746 expedition and one of the 1740 West Indies campaign were black, having the

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¹⁴⁵ For the often overlooked involvement of Indian military aid to the New England colonies, see Richard Johnson, "The Search of the Useable Indian: An Aspect of the Defense of New England," *The Journal of American History* 64, No. 3 (Dec. 1977), 623-651.

¹⁴⁶ David J. Silverman, "The Impact of Indentured Servitude on the Society and Culture of Southern New England Indians, 1680-1810," *The New England Quarterly* 74, No. 4 (Dec. 2001), 624-6.

surnames of Sambo and Caesar. The names of blacks were very likely to be Anglicized, even more than those of Indians, since many adopted the surnames of previous masters or were assigned names during servitude. To complicate efforts at identification further is the fact that the colony's black and Indian population sometimes interbred, producing "mustee" offspring.¹⁴⁷ It is estimated that Rhode Island had a little under 3,000 blacks, slave and free, in 1748, over a third of which were concentrated in Newport.¹⁴⁸ For the free black population of the colony, military service could prove to be a potentially lucrative occupation, given the wages and bounties that all recruits received. Such employment should be considered particularly valuable to a population that was often limited in terms of available trades and opportunities.

The peripheral nature of the typical Rhode Island recruit becomes clearer upon examining the types of recruitment methods used to lure and coerce potential soldiers to serve abroad. The impressment used to fill the companies headed to Louisbourg was limited in such a way that only marginal men could be coerced into service. Only "transient sea-faring men, and persons who have no certain place of abode, or such as have no visible honest means of getting their living" could be forced into service. A man not fitting these criteria who happened to find himself pressed into one of Rhode Island's expeditionary companies could be discharged once he obtained a certificate from a government official that confirmed his means.¹⁴⁹ Targeted recruitment aimed at those with little means was also evident in a letter written to Governor Wanton from a colonial general. When discussing advances on pay, he notes that "several debtors might be able to clear off or compound with their creditors and many servants might obtain their

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¹⁴⁷ James, *Colonial Rhode Island*, 256.

¹⁴⁸ Douglass, 89.

¹⁴⁹ RCRI V, 114.

masters' leave to enlist."¹⁵⁰ Incentives also targeted the poor and needy, offering to fill basic material needs. Those who enlisted to serve in the West Indies in 1741 were provided with a coat, which one would suspect to be a necessity given the New England winter, while recruits for the aborted Canada expedition of 1746 were provided with a clothing allowance. Also, legislation concerning recruitment for expeditionary service often held a stipulation allowing the exemption of recruits from property seizures and civil arrest.¹⁵¹ While such incentives may seem rather underwhelming, it is important to keep in mind that life for many during the Early Modern period was, in the words of Hobbes, "poor, nasty, brutish, and short." Seemingly basic items, such as coats, clothing, blankets, and tents, were not only coveted but also prized.

Attempts by colonial governments to pull transients and those of little means into the ranks of provincial forces mirrored the efforts of European governments in the Early Modern period.¹⁵² Directing men toward such service strengthened government oversight as control over seemingly unsettled individuals was sought. This is not say that the vast majority of the colony's troops were impoverished. However, the presence of so many single, non-freemen, impressed, and non-white soldiers is a far cry from the myth of the preponderance of "citizen soldiers" that once prevailed in the history of colonial American warfare.

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¹⁵⁰ CCGRI I, 151.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, 31, 117, 175.

¹⁵² Geoffrey Parker, *The Military Revolution: Military Innovation and the Rise of the West, 1500-1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 46-8.

The Expeditionary Experience: Disease, Disorder, and Disaster

The expeditionary experience of Rhode Island's various companies of soldiers was characterized by a good deal of disease, disorder, and disaster. Before troops even embarked aboard transports they were the subjects of supervision in order to curtail desertions. Desertion was a very real problem from the very beginning of the dual conflicts; a good deal of the troops who voluntarily enlisted for the West Indies expedition deserted before leaving the colony. The capture of these men, who presumably collected their bounties and absconded, was encouraged by the enacting of a £10 reward for each deserter brought before the authorities. This manhunt was later tempered by granting amnesty to deserters that turned themselves and their material "damages" over to the colony.¹⁵³ Given this context of desertion, a shift occurred in the way that soldiers waiting to embark their transport ships were housed. Whereas recruits were billeted in private residences before leaving for the West Indies or Louisbourg, troops destined for service in the Canada expedition of 1746 were at first limited to Aquidneck Island and then eventually strictly confined to their transports and Goat Island ("for exercising"), the location of Fort George in Newport Harbor. Preparations for the 1746 campaign were also the first time that the General Assembly established a council of war for the sole purpose of disciplining officers and soldiers until they joined with the main force at their destination.¹⁵⁴ Service in the Rhode Island expeditionary companies was not all hardship and discipline. For instance, the officers leading the Rhode Island contingent to the Caribbean were invited by the Assembly Speaker and Deputy Governor to "dine with the

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¹⁵³ RCRI IV, 578, 582.

¹⁵⁴ RCRI V, 188.

court” before their embarkation while the lower officers and soldiers were given £15 worth of liquor with which to celebrate.¹⁵⁵

Concerns about desertion and discipline did not recede as transport ships left the shores of Rhode Island and entered the Atlantic and other ports of call. General Pepperell, commander of the Louisbourg siege, mentions some Rhode Island soldiers who had deserted in Boston while en route to Cape Breton Island in a letter to Governor Wanton.¹⁵⁶ The journal kept by Captain Rice during the tribulations of the failed Canada expedition provides a remarkable insight into the daily struggle that was waged for order. On November 6, two days after leaving Newport, one of the transport ships, the *Africa*, ran aground close to the island of Martha’s Vineyard. The men aboard the *Africa*, “drenched” and “miserable,” soon became “very mutinous” until they were “reduced to submission” by their officers. On November 8, three soldiers deserted. This breakdown in order continued two days later when two unnamed officers of the contingent were found to be cavorting (or attempting to cavort with) two local women. These “fair damsels” “jilted” the two officers and then turned them in to the superior officers for a “very small reward.” The convoy finally left Martha’s Vineyard only to be grounded on the shallows off of the island of Nantucket on November 12. Two days later, Rice returned from supper and socializing aboard the *Tartar* and transport ship *Neptune* to discover that his men were “very disorderly and generally drunk.” One of his junior officers, again unnamed, had sold a barrel of the ship’s cider to the soldiers for a personal profit, an act that would be repeated some four days later. A second instance of one of Rice’s officers hawking goods to soldiers occurred on November 17 when it was found that the officer

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¹⁵⁵ RCRI IV, 579.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, 143.

had been selling apples to the men for “exorbitant” prices. Rice also frowned on card playing; on two separate occasions decks of cards were confiscated from his soldiers and thrown overboard.¹⁵⁷

The disorder portrayed in the journal culminates on December 7 when it was announced that the floundering expedition, which was still on Nantucket, would still be proceeding on to Nova Scotia instead of returning to Newport as had been hoped. A “great number of...soldiers deserted,” twelve of which were from Rice’s own company, although four were later “recovered by persons employed to apprehend them.” The last entry in the journal, dated Christmas day of 1746, weeks before Rice would succumb to sickness and die, reaffirms his disdain for the conduct of his men: “great troubles arise in adjusting our accounts from an excessive disposition in the people to extortion, knavery, and chicanery.”¹⁵⁸ The breakdown in discipline witnessed by Rice was not restricted to the rabble of the regular soldier but included the greed and “knavery” of his own officers.

Sickness and disease were another, more severe, malefactor that characterized the expedition experience. All three of the expeditions that Rhode Island partook in were ravaged by poor health conditions. The failed attacks on Cartagena and later Santiago, Cuba, experienced not only battle-related deaths but also casualties caused by tropical illness. As a result the death rate was often extremely high. Less than 20 soldiers of Rhode Island’s contingent of 200 returned home and of the 500 Massachusetts soldiers that fought in the West Indies, only 50 returned.¹⁵⁹ Major General Thomas Wentworth, the commander of the British and colonial land forces involved in the expedition, wrote to Governor Ward that some of the Rhode Islanders returning home at the close of the

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¹⁵⁷ Rice, *Journal*, 48-51.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, 53.

¹⁵⁹ CCGRI I, 367; MacGunnigle, ed., *Carnage and Cartagena*, 6.

expedition in the autumn of 1742 would be “feeble and sick.”¹⁶⁰ An examination of the lists of Rhode Island soldiers compiled at Louisbourg during the fall of 1745 provides a snapshot of the poor condition the men were in. Two of the company lists noted whether or not certain soldiers were “sick” or not. In the Newport company, nine out of 40 men were listed as being currently ill with an additional thirteen of the 40 already having died of sickness. Captain Champlin’s Kings County company was in similar poor order. This company had been reduced from its original compliment of 50 men to 27 by the fall of 1745. Of the remaining 27, 10 were listed as being currently sick.¹⁶¹ The contingent from Rhode Island was not alone in this suffering; an examination of several journals kept by soldiers and officers at Louisbourg reveals the daily presence of sickness, death, dying in the months that followed the completion of the siege as the provincial forces awaited British reinforcements from Europe.¹⁶²

The failed expedition to invade French Canada faced similar hardships, even before it left Newport. Captain Rice records that “the bloody flux” (dysentery) broke out during the summer of 1746 while the companies were still assembling. Dysentery, which Rice attributes to “the heat of the season and great rain,” was followed by a “putrid fever” that broke out that October while the soldiers were still waiting to leave the harbor. He later caught ill, like many of the other troops, that November while being stuck at Nantucket, noting on November 20 that “the measles broke out upon me and I became very sick.” By early December, the measles and fever were “universal” among at least two of the three companies and entries of casualties began to mark the passing of each

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¹⁶⁰ RCRI V, 221.

¹⁶¹ “The Pepperell Papers,” 528, 530.

¹⁶² For a published collection of such journals, see Louis E. DeForest, ed., *Louisbourg Journals, 1745* (New York: The Society of Colonial Wars in the State of New York, 1932).

day.¹⁶³ Knowledge of high casualty rates, whether from enemy arms or illness, surely circulated among potential recruits, serving as a major deterrent to the colony's recruitment efforts.

Civil Defense Forces on the Maritime Frontier

The trials and tribulations that characterized service in any one of Rhode Island's expeditionary forces were largely absent from the experiences of those that took up arms at home in the civil defense of the colony between the years of 1739 and 1748. Other than the outbreak of dysentery that occurred at Fort George during the summer of 1746, those serving at the fort, partaking in garrison duty on Block Island, or participating in the nightly watch of Newport and other coastal communities appear to have escaped unscathed from either illness or the enemy. Documentation regarding the experience and makeup of ordinary soldiers serving in Rhode Island is quite sparse.¹⁶⁴ However those that were appointed to be officers were usually quite prominent, much like their counterparts in the expeditionary companies. Even if the appointments were somewhat nepotistic, the high profile nature of officers at home suggests that the defensive effort was considered to be just as serious by the colonial government, highlighting the very real threat felt the colony's elites.

Fort George

The most notable and experienced of Rhode Island's officers was John Cranston, who served as the captain of Fort George from the outbreak of hostilities in 1739 until

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¹⁶³ Rice, *Journal*, 46, 52-3.

¹⁶⁴ Chapin's *List of Rhode Island Soldiers & Sailors* only names men that served on the Newport watch for the year 1746 and at Fort George in 1743. Both listings appear to be incomplete.

1745. Cranston was a direct descendent of one of the colony's founding families and had served as the leader of Rhode Island's contingent of troops at the siege of Port Royal in Nova Scotia during the previous imperial war, Queen Anne's War, some thirty years earlier. By 1739 he held the rank of colonel in the colonial militia, the highest rank awarded to any officer in the colony until the outbreak of the American Revolution. In 1744, the General Assembly added a lieutenancy to the fort's garrison. The three men who served as the junior officer at this post were of little political or military significance at the outbreak of the war. However, one of them, Samuel Freebody, who severed two different stints at Goat Island (his first experience with military leadership), would go on to become a high ranking officer in the Newport county militia during the French and Indian War. Freebody was a socially active merchant who came from an established family; he even hosted a dance at his former post in December of 1752.¹⁶⁵

Service at Fort George was a far cry from the moonlit soiree held at the fort that winter night five years after the war had ended. After the firing of the fort's guns on the day that war was officially proclaimed, life at the fort appears to have been unusually mundane with a few notable exceptions. The fort was instrumental in the impressment efforts of June 1745 when Newport harbor was sealed off and the garrison was tasked with preventing all vessels, whether a canoe or sloop, from leaving.¹⁶⁶ The daily routine was also disrupted by the lodging of troops preparing to embark for Canada in 1745 and 1746, adding over one hundred men and the presence of their transports for weeks or more to an island that was usually inhabited by less than thirty soldiers and officers. Although martial activity was generally subdued, there was no lack of building and repair

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¹⁶⁵ Kate Van Winkle Keller, *Dance and its Music in America, 1528-1789* (Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 2007), 387.

¹⁶⁶ RCRI V, 119.

work taking place in and around the fort. On more than one occasion the General Assembly ordered that the fort be expanded and repaired, making the structure on Goat Island often in a state of renovation. The fort had been neglected in the years since Queen Anne's War. In 1740, the Assembly ordered that the fort's platform be widened, the powder room be given a ceiling, the storehouse floored, and that the barracks house be repaired. In 1741, repairs were carried out of the fort's lower battery. Additional guns were added in June of 1744, another round of repairs was ordered in February of 1746, and seven months later approval for a controversial new battery of cannons was granted.¹⁶⁷

Of the ten men known to have served as ordinary soldiers at Fort George in 1743, little can be inferred. Only one of them, Charles Dyer, was a freeman, having achieved his status in 1734 in Newport. Another, Young Axton, was also a resident of Newport, having been married at the Episcopal church of Newport in 1720.¹⁶⁸ A possible tendency for recruits for the garrison to originate from Newport is given some additional credence by the fact that a majority of the ten surnames are listed under that town in the 1774 census. Each compliment of soldiers stationed at the fort contained a gunner. The gunner was tasked with aiming the artillery and was paid significantly more than the regular sentries for the skilled nature of his assignment. During the war years, the fort was manned year-round. However, the number of soldiers stationed on Goat Island fluctuated throughout the conflict. Initially twelve men were raised by the 1740 defense act. Between 1740 and 1744, an additional eight men were added to the fort's compliment. When France entered the war in 1744, the fort peaked at thirty soldiers. This situation

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¹⁶⁷ Ibid, 4, 89, 158, 189-90; RCRI IV, 566-7.

¹⁶⁸ James N. Arnold, *Vital Record of Rhode Island, 1636-1850*, vol. 10 (Providence: Narragansett Historical Publishing Co., 1898), 472.

would only be temporary as twenty-one troops were dismissed in the fall of that same year. The General Assembly raised the fort's occupation once more in May of 1746, returning the compliment to thirty, where it would remain until the end of hostilities in 1748.¹⁶⁹

The Block Island Garrison

Rhode Island's other standing body of troops was stationed on Block Island, the most vulnerable and isolated location in the whole of the colony. Although Block Island was home to a small company of militia during peacetime, local residents and political leaders deemed their protection insufficient and repeatedly petitioned the provincial government for additional soldiers. The first batch of twenty additional troops was recruited for a six-month stretch, beginning in April of 1740.¹⁷⁰ Another twenty soldiers were recruited from throughout the colony in the spring of the following year and transported to the island where they were placed under the command of Edward Sands.¹⁷¹ Sands was a newly minted militia captain that had been appointed by the Assembly after the suspension of officer elections. He hailed from one of the oldest and most influential families within the small community and also served as deputy in the provincial legislature between 1742 and 1746. The twenty-man garrison lasted until the August of 1744 when the Assembly dismissed the additional soldiers. This hiatus of additional protection would last less than a year as the islanders successfully lobbied for the return

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¹⁶⁹ RCRI IV, 566; RCRI V, 89, 98, 168, 216. The reduction that occurred during the fall of 1744 appears to be motivated by the financial burden of paying the relatively large garrison.

¹⁷⁰ For the initial defense preparations of the island, see RCRI IV, 566.

¹⁷¹ RCRI V, 22.

of the garrison; seven men were recruited from each of the mainland counties and transported to the island in the spring of 1745.¹⁷²

While the arrival of expeditionary troops or the closing of the harbor at least sometimes punctuated the tedium of being stationed at Fort George, service on Block Island appears to have been even more uneventful despite the fear of raid or invasion present throughout the conflict.¹⁷³ The desertion of soldiers from the island aboard outbound ships appears to have depleted the strength of the various garrisons, perhaps as a result of this inaction or spurred by the desire to pursue a potentially more lucrative service. This loss of manpower is mentioned in two different petitions, with the islanders even going so far as to request that a law be enacted to prohibit the boarding of a ship without a “license” from the militia captain.¹⁷⁴ Those that stayed on the island were lodged in private residences and boarded at the expense of the inhabitants of the island. Under their charge were six “great guns” that were remounted on newly constructed gun carriages and positioned around the island in order to fire upon an enemy ship. Despite the presence of some enemy privateers around the island, it appears as if these guns were never fired in anger during the course of the dual conflicts.

Watch & Ward

The third component of the colony’s self defense scheme were the watch and wards that were established in Newport, Portsmouth, and Jamestown, three principal communities located on the shores of the Narragansett Bay. While the defense of Block

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¹⁷² Ibid, 107.

¹⁷³ This sentiment is expressed in all of the petitions to the General Assembly that originated from Block Island; see PRIG IV, petitions 47 and 108, PRIG V, petition 111, and PRIG VI, 26.

¹⁷⁴ PRIG IV, petition 108.

Island and Fort George were handled by the General Assembly, the governor, his council, and the various local militia officers were instrumental in creating and regulating the watch. The watches were first established on April 21, 1740 during the council of war session that marked the official commencement of the War of Jenkins' Ear in the colony.¹⁷⁵ Watches occurred every night in the three towns. Newport was allotted twelve sentinels, stationed at high points and peninsulas around the town. In addition, four "good men" were to ward each day. The Portsmouth night watch involved three men while guard duty in Jamestown only made use of two guards. These soldiers were given arms and ammunition and not only charged with providing the appropriate signals and alarm in case of an emergency, but also with preserving the "peace" and cracking down on "disorderly" persons. They were under the direct supervision of local militia officers.

In mid-December of 1741 the governor's committee tasked with regulating the watch and ward in Newport thought it necessary to enact a series of regulations over the patrols. Those participating in this duty were only to be "good and substantial" persons. Night duty would begin at nine at night and only end at sunrise. Beats were to be walked at least twice a night and those disturbing the peace were to be reported to the militia officers at the end of a shift. These officers were now reminded to inspect their sentries and make sure order was kept and their duty done. For those stepping out of line, a wooden horse was created, the riding of which would serve as punishment for the negligent.¹⁷⁶ Such shirking of duty seems to have persisted into 1743, when a fine was added to the punishment for falling asleep on duty or otherwise neglecting one's post.

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¹⁷⁵ For the records regarding the establishment and regulation of the watches, see GCR I, 146-9, 158-60, 163-4.

¹⁷⁶ "Riding the wooden horse" was a popular punishment in the armies of colonial America, dating back to the seventeenth century.

Sentries were ordered to be on the lookout for buildings that were kept lit after eleven o'clock at night; they were to "enquire the reason" and not depart until a "satisfactory" answer had been received. Such a stringent curfew must surely not have sat well with the denizens of the vibrant port community. The direct interaction between the men on guard duty, responsible for maintaining the nighttime "peace," and Newport's public evidently provoked confrontations; in 1743 sentries were empowered to bring anyone who had insulted or assaulted them before a justice of the peace the next morning.

Newport's watch and ward persisted until at least 1746. A sampling of the names of individuals who served as nightly guards in that year reveals an overwhelming number of local elites. Virtually every one of them was a Newport freeman and most either held a political office or were prominent merchants. Notables included members of the rich and powerful Tillinghast family, several justices of the peace, sheriffs, and a judicial clerk. Even the men of lower status held relatively high positions, with a few having also served as masters and quartermasters aboard privateering ships.¹⁷⁷ The Newport watch and ward, at least by 1746, was a way for the town's elite to participate in the war effort, albeit in a part-time capacity. It was such elites, especially the merchants among them, who had petitioned their provincial government on more than one occasion to improve the defenses of the vulnerable town. More than a few of these prominent citizens of Newport transcended the pleas put to paper by actively taking part in the defense of the home of their families and livelihoods. Such service went beyond the confines of patrolling for French or Spanish interlopers, as these men were also actively involved with policing the domestic sphere.

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¹⁷⁷ I draw on Chapin's *A List of Rhode Island Soldiers & Sailors* for the names of those that served as guards at Newport. He does not specify whether or not individuals were on the night watch or daytime ward.

Elites also participated in martial culture by joining artillery companies. As noted in the previous chapter, the function of these companies was largely ceremonial yet its members were exempted from mandatory militia service. After Newport's artillery company had been chartered by the provincial legislature in 1741, Providence followed suit a few years later. These organizations were intended to be a "nursery of skillful officers" that would not only assist in case of an invasion but also "render the whole militia more useful and effectual."¹⁷⁸ However, like the Newport night watch and displays of power by the provincial government, artillery companies also served as a reassertion of elite prestige, clearly defining a "special niche" in the form of a martial "gentlemen's club."¹⁷⁹

Recruitment: Lures and Coercion

Whether attempting to raise soldiers for an expedition abroad or for service at home, the Rhode Island's provincial government used similar strategies. Voluntary service was consistently preferred over impressment but coercion was an option that was always kept in reserve as a viable alternative. Military historians of colonial America such as Ian K. Steele have rightly characterized the mid-eighteenth century as a period of commercial warfare where appeals to personal material self-interest ruled supreme;¹⁸⁰ however this characterization must include the caveat that the option of impressment was still alive and well and sometimes resorted to. Like the other British North American colonies, Rhode Island attempted to use the lure of bounties and prize privileges. From the very first expedition to the West Indies in 1740, the language of acquisition prevailed.

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¹⁷⁸ Quoted in James, *The Colonial Metamorphoses in Colonial Rhode Island*, 214.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, 215-6.

¹⁸⁰ Steele, *Warpaths*, 135-6.

For instance, General Alexander Spotswood, a colonial officer from Virginia, assured Rhode Island governor Wanton that he would be a “strenuous stickler,” ensuring that the colony’s troops would receive “their due share of the booty.”¹⁸¹ This expedition and the two later ones against French Canada also utilized generous signing bounties for all soldiers that volunteered. In fact, Rhode Island’s bounties were constantly higher and generally offered earlier than in the other New England colonies.¹⁸² Bounties were never offered for service at Block Island or Fort George where the colonial government relied upon the inducement of wages instead. Volunteers stationed on Block Island were paid £3 for each month of service, while soldiers posted to Fort George were paid £4 per month with the gunner making £6. In 1744, the pay of those at Fort George was increased significantly, with regular soldiers receiving £8 and the gunner £10.¹⁸³ These wages were certainly competitive given the fact that a soldier stationed at any one of the forts or blockhouses on Massachusetts’ much more isolated and volatile interior frontier was paid £40 a year.¹⁸⁴

Despite the prevalence of these relatively high monetary incentives, Rhode Island’s recruitment efforts for both service at home and abroad were usually sluggish. Captain Rice of the 1746 expedition wrote of “the great fatigue and slavery of recruiting” for his company while Governor Wanton bemoaned the “exhaust[ion] of men to an uncommon degree” when defending the colony’s difficulty in filling the ranks of its

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¹⁸¹ CCGRI I, 141.

¹⁸² Governor Ward points out his colony’s distinction as being the first to offer a bounty for the West Indies expedition in a letter to the Duke of New Castle, CCGRI I, 199. Likewise, Governor Wanton boasts that their bounty for the Louisbourg campaign was higher than that of Massachusetts, CCGRI I, 368. Rhode Island’s £50 bounty for the 1746 was higher than all of the other New England bounties, the next highest being Connecticut’s offer of £30, Selesky, *War & Society*, 91.

¹⁸³ For Block Island pay, see RCRI IV, 567; RCRI V, 107. For Fort George, RCRI IV, 566, and their pay raise, RCRI V, 89.

¹⁸⁴ Michael Coe, *The Line of Forts: Historical Archaeology on the Colonial Frontier of Massachusetts* (Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England, 2006), 117-8.

companies for the Louisbourg campaign.¹⁸⁵ As noted earlier, this shortage stood in stark contrast to the relative ease in recruiting experienced by a colony like Connecticut that was able to induce the service of several hundred men for the proposed 1746 expedition in a relatively short amount of time. There was also difficulty in procuring soldiers for Fort George after awhile. In June of 1742, the fort's commander, John Cranston, pleaded for a pay raise from the initial £4 per month, citing how hard it was at the current rate to "procure" troops.¹⁸⁶

These shortages were due not only to the high casualty rate experienced during the West Indies expedition but also because of the strain on manpower that resulted from Newport being a thriving privateer base. An examination of privateer ships certified at Newport between 1745 and 1748 reveals that crew sizes could range anywhere from 25 to 130 men, averaging around 80 per vessel. In 1746, Governor Greene estimated that there were around 3,000 Rhode Islanders involved in the war effort, the vast majority of which were serving aboard privateers.¹⁸⁷ A single average sized privateer could employ almost as many men as one entire company of infantry and three or four times as many than were required at Fort George or Block Island.

In the face of this perceived dire shortage of potential soldiers, the General Assembly enacted recruitment legislation that kept the use of impressment on the table in case quotas of troops could not be filled in a timely manner. Acts regarding the three expeditions, Fort George, and Block Island named impressment as an option. In contrast, neighboring Connecticut only considered impressment for the failed Canada expedition

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¹⁸⁵ Rice, *Journal*, 46; CCGRI I, 367.

¹⁸⁶ PRIG IV, petition 118.

¹⁸⁷ For the crew numbers, see the privateering certificates in Maritime Papers: Colonial Wars, 1723-1760, Rhode Island State Archives, Providence; Greene's estimate is in CCGRI I, 430.

in the latter part of the war, and never actually had to implement it.¹⁸⁸ Rhode Island on the other hand, constantly considered the use of coercion for land forces and actually implemented the coercion of troops on two different occasions: for Louisbourg in 1745 and Canada in 1746. The colony's difficulty in enlisting soldiers highlights an enthusiasm gap that existed between the politicians wishing to display their imperial loyalty, the merchants of Newport who feared for the safety of their commerce, and the frightened inhabitants of Block Island, on one side, and the local militiamen and transient commoners who were often reluctant to be pried from their homes or trades. Provincial self-interest, composed of concerns for territorial integrity in terms of both the border dispute with Massachusetts and the threat of invasion from France or Spain, created a demand for soldiers in Rhode Island. The search for recruits to fulfill these provincial interests was largely undertaken in terms of appeals to the material interest of individuals.

The Land versus the Sea

The language and actions of commercialized warfare were only so successful on the land. It is at sea that the lure of wealth was significantly more successful. The few thousand men that served as crewmen, officers, surgeons, gunners, and other specialists aboard the colony's numerous privateering vessels did not receive regular wages but instead were paid shares of captured prizes. Prizes, which were adjudicated by Admiralty Courts, were paid directly to the officers and crews of vessels after customs and the King's "tenth" were deducted. These shares were usually quite lucrative; it is estimated that the average privateer sailor made more than double the monthly wage offered by merchant shipping and about six times more than the monthly rate paid to sailors serving

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¹⁸⁸ Selesky, *War & Society*, 90-1.

in the Royal Navy.¹⁸⁹ Compared to the often clumsy recruiting of the colony's land forces, privateers hailing from the Narragansett appear to have had little if any trouble in procuring adequate crews. "Skilled and responsible" sea captains, their reputations made by years of service in the merchant marine, were able to draw large numbers of men who sought substantial material rewards. As on the land, personal factors such as charisma and standing were essential characteristics of officers in terms of attracting recruits. The divergent results however lay in the potential to satisfy self-interests. While imperial expeditions could only offer bounties and a vague promise of plunder, privateering captains could point to a much more promising chance of earning substantial rewards. Manpower demands were also satisfied by push factors originating in Massachusetts, specifically Boston. Hundreds of seamen, seeking to avoid impressment gangs that tried to fill crews for the Royal Navy, the Louisbourg expedition, and Massachusetts' coast guard vessels, headed to Rhode Island to serve aboard privateering ships.¹⁹⁰

The colony's efforts at sea were also much more successful in terms of damages to the enemy. Rhode Island soldiers struggled to reach Louisbourg in time for the siege, were annihilated by death and disease in the Caribbean, and ran aground off of Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket on their way to partake in the aborted Canada expedition. Privateers on the other hand seriously hindered the commerce of France and Spain. It is estimated that American-based privateers captured £7,531,000 worth of cargo from the French alone, about 30 percent of France's total trade between 1739 and 1748. Rhode Island's contribution to this effort was significant; about one quarter of all prize-capturing ships hailed from Newport. As a result, it is in terms of privateering that the American

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¹⁸⁹ Swanson, "American Privateering and Imperial Warfare," 382.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, 363, 367; Chapin, *Rhode Island Privateers in King George's War*, 5.

colonies made their most significant contribution to the dual conflicts.¹⁹¹ Although New Englanders had successfully captured and held Louisbourg, it was returned to the French in the treaty that ended hostilities between the imperial powers. The same could not be said of the massive amounts of wealth garnered from French and Spanish shipping, much of which found its way into the pockets of Rhode Island customs officials, ship owners, officers, and sailors alike.

Despite the vastly different amount of success in recruiting between privateer sailors and the colony's land soldiers, the provincial government always favored appeals to individual self-interest, employing the high bounties and other material benefits to those that were willing to risk their lives for imperial expeditions and civil defense. Coercion, in the form of impressment, was certainly alive and well in the middle of the eighteenth century, but the commercial-minded elites that made up the colony's governing institutions only employed it as a last resort. As for those who served, the patterns of corresponding military rank and socioeconomic status evident in Rhode Island during the dual conflicts are not without precedent. Selesky's research regarding the backgrounds of both officers and enlisted soldiers in the colony of Connecticut reveals a fairly similar correlation.¹⁹² However the composition of the Ocean Colony's contingents reflects a heavier maritime orientation, as seen by the participation of blacks, Indians, and more transient bachelors. The experience of the vast majority of officers and soldiers alike was far from exciting and glorious. Service in Rhode Island's expeditionary companies usually involved a good deal of organizational disorder and death while

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¹⁹¹ Swanson, "American Privateering and Imperial Warfare," 359, 377-9.

¹⁹² Selesky, *War & Society in Colonial Connecticut*, 68-73.

garrison and night watch service was relatively safe and mundane. Nevertheless, an examination of their experiences reveals that the Ocean Colony was heavily invested in the dangers and politics of the dual conflicts. Rhode Island had a maritime frontier to defend and an imperial allegiance to prove.

Chapter 4: War and Society: Privateering Prisoners, Work, and the “Babel on the Narragansett”

The dual conflicts that occurred between 1739 and 1748 affected and involved Rhode Islanders in a number of ways, many beyond the traditionally studied and more visible realms of colonial government and soldiering. These experiences have often been overlooked and range from the integration of war into the everyday rhythms of life and work in the colony to the sometimes-surprising ways that a seemingly imperial conflict made its presence known. In particular, this section will focus on the presence of French and Spanish prisoners who were hosted and held within Newport, the labor and commerce related to the colony’s participation in the two wars, and the sectarian religious dimension. All of these areas illustrate the involvement of people who were neither politicians, soldiers, officers, nor sailors, thereby highlighting the ways that violence and warfare were felt far beyond the immediate sites of battle in colonial America in the mid-eighteenth century.

Privateering Captives: Human Prizes

When Dr. Alexander Hamilton visited Newport, a town “famous for privateering,” in the middle of July of 1744, he made note of a captured Spanish ship lying in the harbor with its bowsprit “shot off.”¹⁹³ In addition to such material prizes there was a corresponding influx of captured people. Unlike the wealth and glory brought by privateering plunder, prisoners, which included officers, crews and a ship’s passengers proved to be rather burdensome to those tasked with their supervision, boarding, and care. The problem of prisoners was experienced in Rhode Island at an unprecedented

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¹⁹³ Hamilton, *Itinerarium*; 345.

scale for the colony, as Newport had been a much smaller privateering base during the last imperial conflict, Queen Anne's War. The experience of French and Spanish prisoners being held captive in colonial American ports has been largely ignored by secondary literature. Works concerned with privateering have either been overwhelmingly interested in actions at sea or have investigated the material wealth captured during such engagements. Although several recent works have addressed the hardships and meaning of captivity in colonial North America, they have focused primarily on the British, Anglo-Americans, and Indians.¹⁹⁴

Captives taken by privateers from either captured vessels or during the course of shore raids proved to be a burden to their captors as well; prisoners required not only control but also food, water, and space, which could be at a premium aboard crowded ships. Privateers usually held unusually large crews as to be able to man captured prize vessels. As a result, it was not unusual for prisoners to be set free before privateers set sail for their voyages back to their home ports. However, captured officers and crew were sometimes brought to Admiralty courts where they were called upon as witnesses to determine the division of plunder. The commissions privateers received from the colonial governors heavily regulated their conduct and the treatment of prisoners was no exception. Captured persons were prohibited from being killed in "cold blood," tortured, hurt, or otherwise "inhumanely treated." Furthermore, any "abuse" of women being held

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¹⁹⁴ For examples of such secondary works, see Linda Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire and the World, 1600-1850* (New York: Anchor Books, 2002), 137-227; Pauline Turner Strong, *Captive Selves, Captivating Others: The Politics and Poetics of Colonial American Captivity Narratives* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000); Teresa Toulouse, *The Captive's Position: Female Narrative, Male Identity, and Royal Authority in Colonial New England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

captive was taken seriously. Offenders would be immediately denied their share of prizes and a disciplinary committee could issue further reprimands.¹⁹⁵

Once back in Newport, prisoners could expect to either be held in the town's jail, aboard ships or to be boarded at private residences. While most officers, women, and children were placed in private households, ordinary crewmen, captured slaves," and some "gentlemen" were placed in His Majesty's prison or slept aboard ships in the harbor.¹⁹⁶ In addition to James Davis, the Newport jailer, several other men played host to Spanish and French prisoners. John Potter served as the sheriff for Newport County until his death in 1744. Daniel Goddard was a carpenter, a maker of both houses and furniture. Isaac Anthony was also an artisan. Trained as a goldsmith in Boston, Anthony was a Quaker that kept a public house in Newport and was involved in several private lottery schemes. All were freemen of the colony; a relatively high social footing that matched the status of their guests. Perhaps these men were lured by the supplemental income that could be earned by boarding officers and gentlemen until their exchange or return was worked out.

Perhaps the most notable of those held at Newport was the infamous Spanish privateering captain, Francisco Loranço, who had been captured by the Rhode Island-based *Revenge* off of the north coast of Cuba in 1741. While many hosted prisoners were either captured ship captains or other such "gentlemen," hosts also were given charge of women and children. For instance Goddard hosted a French couple and their two

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¹⁹⁵ The interrogation of captured persons was encouraged by the instructions and regulations issued to privateer captains and merchants bearing a letter of marque, for instance see "Instructions to be observed by Captain James Allen, commander of the sloop *Revenge* of Newport..." MSS 1118, folder 2, Rhode Island Historical Society Library, Providence; Chapin, *Rhode Island Privateers*, 57-8.

¹⁹⁶ Dr. Hamilton recounts meeting with a French "gentleman" prisoner at the Newport jail, Hamilton, *Itinerarium*, 505; Some Spanish prisoners that were involved in the failed escape plot stayed aboard a Rhode Island privateer ship berthed at Newport harbor, Chapin, *Rhode Island Privateers*, 9.

children and another married French pair. The durations of stay for these types of prisoners could last anywhere from several weeks to several months. In addition to the burden of providing room and board, many of the French and Spanish that ended up in Newport households required additional care. Like the battered Spanish ship observed by Dr. Hamilton, some prisoners were wounded and or sick. Sheriff Potter, who had been directed to host Captain Loranzo by the governor, reported that the privateer was a “great trouble” because of the “infirm” state of his health. Likewise French prisoners kept by the jailer, James Davis, were very sick and needed assistance walking. The trouble of caring for such ailing prisoners was more than the General Assembly had anticipated; it was not uncommon for hosts to petition the legislature for additional funds to cover expenses that went above and beyond initial compensation. Besides being a burden to individual hosts and their families, these prisoners were yet another financial cost of the dual conflicts that had to be paid from the Rhode Island treasury. Expenses were high as they included not only board, but “washing,” food, firewood, candles, and the cost of hiring ships to transport them back to their respective colonies in either the West Indies or Canada.¹⁹⁷

Hosted prisoners seem to have enjoyed at least some degree of freedom. Dr. Hamilton writes of socializing with both French and Spanish prisoners. One such encounter occurred at a coffee house in Newport where he spoke with several Spanish prisoners.¹⁹⁸ A Spanish captain held for ten weeks during the summer of 1742 was provided with liquor while a group of Spanish officers were provided with “drink” during

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¹⁹⁷ For lengths of stay, descriptions of prisoners and their condition, see “Accounts for keeping Spanish and French Prisoners of war” in *Maritime Papers: Colonial Wars, 1723-1760*, 130, 134-5; PRIG IV, petitions 128 and 155; PRIG V, petition 55; RCRI V, 47-8, 51, 61-2, 68, 122-3.

¹⁹⁸ Hamilton, *Itinerarium*, 506.

their multiple month stay.¹⁹⁹ Despite the needs of prisoners sometimes exceeding the initial expectations of the colonial governments and their hosts, the hospitality of the Rhode Islanders seems to have been duly noted. One of the men that Dr. Hamilton conversed with in Newport, Don Manuel, spoke “very much in praise of [Newport], the civility and humanity of the people, and the charms of the ladies.” In a reversal of roles, a Spanish captain that had been held at Rhode Island earlier in the war ended up capturing a Newport-based privateering ship, the *Lee*. He remarked, “he had received such usage” at Rhode Island “as to induce him to declare that he made a point of treating all Rhode Island seamen with compassion.”²⁰⁰

The experience of ordinary sailors and slaves who were captured by the colony’s privateering fleet seems to have been less pleasant than the socializing and hospitality lavished on French and Spanish officers and gentlemen. There is no evidence of captured sailors being hosted in private households; they appear to have been restricted to prisons or kept aboard ships. Their dissatisfaction is evinced by the fact that a number of Spanish sailors and slaves plotted a failed escape attempt. A privateering ship was to be seized during the night of January 30, 1742 but an irresolute captive that informed his captors of the plot before it could get into motion foiled the plan.²⁰¹ Captured slaves that were aboard seized prize vessels certainly experienced little to no degree of liberty as they were treated as captured cargoes and resold. Even captives who were not nominally slaves could fear being sold into servitude. A captured French Jesuit, who was held aboard the *Prince Charles of Lorraine*, after his mission was ransacked and plundered by that privateering ship, recounted how the ship’s captain, Simeon Potter, related to him

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¹⁹⁹ “Accounts for keeping Spanish and French Prisoners of war” in Maritime Papers, 131, 134.

²⁰⁰ Hamilton, *Itinerarium*, 506; Chapin, *Rhode Island Privateers*, 204.

²⁰¹ Ibid, 9.

how he intended to treat captured indigenous West Indians as slaves.²⁰² Another Rhode Island captain, John Dennis, was caught “making slaves of” twenty-two free black Spanish subjects that had been aboard a captured prize vessel in 1746. These men were brought back to the colony and sold as property, some going as far as Pennsylvania and New York. Once this transgression had been brought to light, the provincial government quickly acted to apprehend the wrongly enslaved individuals and return them to the West Indies. The fear of being sold back into slavery plagued free blacks throughout colonial America. Being a prisoner of war in a strange new country certainly heightened such worries. Writing to the governor of Havana, Rhode Island governor Greene stated, “such acts of violence and injustice through the selfishness of private persons are not among the least calamities of war.”²⁰³

Maritime Trades

Brazen acts of selfishness tied to the handling of prisoners were further evident in the truce ships that were used to dispatch captives back to their homes. In 1748, the Admiralty commissioners located in Boston found that over twenty ships commissioned by Rhode Island during the conflict were engaged in smuggling with the French West Indies. Ships meant to carry redeemed prisoners were also loaded with fish and other “provisions” for sale to the French plantations. The French colonials reciprocated by loading returning vessels and their own truce ships) that were intended to carry English captives) with sugar, molasses, and indigo. Like Greene, the Admiralty officials were

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²⁰² “Letter of Father Fauque” in *Tales of an Old Seaport: a General Sketch of the History of Bristol, Rhode Island*, ed. Wilfred Harold Munro (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1917), 68.

²⁰³ For the episode involving Captain Dennis, see RCRI V, 176; CCGRI I, 425-8.

outraged at the “base prostitution of the King’s commission.”²⁰⁴ This illicit trade with the enemy is just another example of the ways that private self-interest colored the conduct of individuals involved in the nearly decade long span of war. Some merchants were not above providing subsistence to the enemy as they attempted to continue a West Indian trade that had prospered between the colony and the Caribbean before the inconvenient outbreak of hostilities. Imperial boundaries proved to be rather porous in the face of such capitalist trade. For the colonial merchants involved, commercial allegiances forged through business ties surpassed any sense of British imperial loyalty. As for the imperial metropole, they surely must have expected such smuggling. In a 1739 letter to from the Duke of Newcastle to the Governor of Rhode Island that encouraged the use of privateers, Newcastle warned that the provincial government “should be very rigorous and severe in preventing any ammunition or stores of any kind from being carried to the Spaniards.”²⁰⁵ Despite these warnings and the findings made in 1748, the British seems to have taken little if any steps toward punishment.

The adaptation of pre-existing patterns of work to war occurred in a variety of much less insidious and treacherous ways. In terms of the maritime trades, privateering should be seen as a variation of the colony’s shipping industry that prospered before the outbreak of hostilities. It required not only experienced ship captains but also the skills of a savvy merchant class. These professionals utilized large amounts of capital, knowledge of markets, pre-existing facilities, and their ability to attract investors in order to enable the success of high-risk voyages. Clearly privateering was not the pursuit of zealous

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²⁰⁴ RCRI V, 258-9.

²⁰⁵ CCGRI I, 110.

amateurs.²⁰⁶ Nor was it contained to the crews, officers, and investors of the vessels directly involved. Privateering was tied to a plethora of other areas and trades. Shipbuilders, providers of naval stores, dock workers, and suppliers of food and drink were all touched commercially by Rhode Island's role as one of the premier privateering bases in North America. The colony had been engaged in shipbuilding since the seventeenth century. Between 1698 and 1708 alone, over a hundred ships had been built. By 1771, the Ocean Colony would be building over eight percent of all ships constructed in British North America, the third largest producer behind Massachusetts and New Hampshire. These ships tended to be smaller than vessels constructed elsewhere in British America, a mean size of about thirty tons, but their output was much more prolific. These ships were not only used by the Newport and Providence merchant fleets, but were also sold to outside merchant communities.²⁰⁷ Lawyers and others in the legal profession were also closely linked to the industry as prizes were brought before Admiralty courts to be certified, divided, and argued over.²⁰⁸ Doctors were another common feature, with many private ships employing a surgeon. The colony's General Assembly followed suit; the colony sloop, the *Tartar*, also hired a doctor in June of 1746.²⁰⁹

The colony's heavy pre-war involvement in shipping was also drawn upon in the procurement of transport vessels for the three imperial expeditions in which Rhode Island participated. Although the provincial government had reserved the right to impress

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²⁰⁶ Swanson, "American Privateering and Imperial Warfare," 363-5.

²⁰⁷ James, *Colonial Rhode Island*, 159-60; Simeon J. Crowther, "The Shipbuilding Output of the Delaware Valley, 1722-1776," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 117, No. 2 (April 1973), 97.

²⁰⁸ Chapin, *Rhode Island Privateers*, 12.

²⁰⁹ RCRI V, 177.

private ships for military use since 1667,²¹⁰ it seems to have preferred to hire transports on a much more contractual basis. The chartering of ships was one of the expenses that was explicitly not reimbursed by the British metropole and as a result was one of the most costly to the colony. For instance, in 1740 the General Assembly paid over £1,000 for the hiring of a brigantine for the Spanish West Indies expedition from Joseph Whipple, one of the most prominent merchants in Newport. Similarly, the government hired another brigantine, the *Success*, at £380 per month in 1745 as part of the flotilla destined for Louisbourg. It was not until 1746 and the expedition intended for the invasion of French Canada that the General Assembly exercised the impressment of ships. This change in policy was most likely caused by the degree of royal pressure being applied to the provincial government and the important phase of arbitration that the border dispute with Massachusetts had recently entered. Even in this instance the owners of the three transport ships were provided with monetary compensation. It should be noted that this critical juncture of the conflict appears to be the only instance that the government impressed labor; the sheriff of Newport was ordered to impress laborers to repair and outfit the ships.²¹¹

Expeditionary Provisions and Civil Defense Work

Like the colony's privateering industry, the three expeditions created demands for goods that were filled, at least in part, by local merchants, artisans, and farmers. The accounts for the supplies of these expeditions reveal that beef, pork, flour, hammocks, cheese, sheep, iron, salt, sugar, and 335 gallons of rum were required in one such

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²¹⁰ GCRI I, 1.

²¹¹ For the hiring of vessels before 1746, see *Maritime Papers: Colonial Wars*, 31-4, 39; for the impressment of vessels and workers for the Canada expedition, see *RCIR V*, 175, 180-1.

transaction alone.²¹² Beef and cheese were important commodities to the more rural sections of the colony. These areas acted as a hinterland to the ports of Providence and Newport, making the raising of livestock both a serious and profitable endeavor. One such example would be the locally raised cattle, in the proximity of Westerly, that were slaughtered for the Louisbourg expedition in 1745.²¹³ Liquor, specifically rum, was also locally produced but on a much larger scale. Using molasses imported from the West Indies, Rhode Islanders excelled at creating their own rum. It was sold to other British American ports in exchange for currency that was used toward procuring finished goods from Britain. Some was also traded to the Caribbean plantation colonies for sugar and molasses. However the bulk of the colony's liquor went to Africa where it was exchanged for slaves. By the mid 1700s, Newport alone had sixteen distilleries and was exporting around 150,000 gallons of rum annually to the west coast of Africa. Rum production was also tied to illegitimate commerce; the 1733 Molasses Act severely drove up the prices of British-made molasses, causing merchants to smuggle this key ingredient from Britain's imperial rivals in the West Indies.²¹⁴

Expeditions also required muskets for the soldiers who were unable to provide their own arms. By 1746 the colony's supply of these arms seems to have been exhausted as they were forced to purchase them. This procurement was accompanied by the hiring of gunsmiths to repair those muskets that had been deemed "not good."²¹⁵ Also like privateering, the raising of troops required legal services, albeit on a much smaller scale.

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²¹² Maritime Papers: Colonial Wars, 31-4.

²¹³ For Rhode Island livestock, see James, *Colonial Rhode Island*, 252-3; an account of the beef for the government in October of 1745 can be found in PRIG V, 99.

²¹⁴ Conforti, *Saints and Strangers*, 158; James, *Colonial Rhode Island*, 271-2; Withey, *Urban Growth in Colonial Rhode Island*, 34.

²¹⁵ RCRI V, 180.

For instance, a justice of the peace of Providence County was paid the sum of £5 for administering “oaths of allegiance” to the company of soldiers raised in that county for the impending expedition to the West Indies in 1741.²¹⁶

Above all, companies required men, and as the colony always favored inducement over coercion, recruitment materials were a must. For this purpose, the General Assembly relied on Ann Franklin, the official printer of the colony, usually responsible for printing law books and other official documents, to print “proclamations and extracts of letters for encouragement of soldiers and seamen to enlist.” Franklin was the sister-in-law of Benjamin Franklin, had run her husband’s printing business for decades after his illness and subsequent death. She also produced a variety of non-official documents, such as almanacs, mercantile advertisements, sermons, and British literature. In 1758, she began printing a newspaper, *The Newport Mercury*, and would go on to become America’s first female newspaper editor.²¹⁷

In addition to the war effort abroad, the civil defense of the colony also required the services of local workers, both skilled and menial. These efforts centered on Fort George, which was constantly being repaired and added on to. On two different occasions the General Assembly’s committee for the fort hired the service of architects to prepare drafts of the structure and surrounding harbor. The Assembly was so impressed with the “handsome” and “very ingeniously drawn” draft that they received in 1745 that they voted and resolved to give special thanks to the brothers Joseph and Peter Harrison for their service. Peter Harrison, who was hired a second time to reproduce the original draft

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²¹⁶ Ibid, 17.

²¹⁷ Ibid, 122; for background on Ann Franklin, see Paula McDowell, *The Women of Grub Street: Press, Politics, and Gender in the London Literary Marketplace, 1678-1730* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 39.

so that it may be sent to Britain to show the state of the fortification to an ordinance committee,²¹⁸ would go on to be one of the most accomplished architects in New England, designing churches and homes of high profile colonists. The series of repairs of that was made to fort was done by a combination of the paid soldiers already stationed at the fort, soldiers enlisted specifically for construction work, and paid “artificers.”²¹⁹ The fact that all of this work was done on a hired basis contrasts greatly with the contemporary reliance upon slave labor in colonies such as South Carolina or the *corvée* system in New France, which were utilized for fortifications and public works projects.

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Although pre-existing local laborers and professionals took up much of the work generated by the nine years of imperial warfare, the conflicts created several unique new occupational opportunities. Perhaps the most demanding of which was the position of commissary, a salaried post charged with purchasing supplies, distributing the wages of soldiers and officers, tallying stockpiles of arms and goods, and keeping an account of all the war-related expenses incurred by the colony. This position was temporary and only came into being during a state of war. It was a rather prestigious position that blended military service, commerce, and civil responsibility. The legislature awarded the post to both prominent civilians, such as the doctor John Hoyle of Providence and the merchant Jahleel Brenton of Newport, and holders of militia rank, such as Colonel John Gardner. Initially, commissaries were hired specifically for the expedition to the West Indies or for

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²¹⁸ RCRI V, 131, 153. The British ordinance committee required the draft before it would allow the granting of guns to the colony.

²¹⁹ RCRI IV, 566; RCRI V, 189.

²²⁰ Matthew Mulcahy, “‘Melancholy and Fatal Calamities’: Disaster and Society in Eighteenth-Century South Carolina” in *Money, Trade, and Power: The Evolution of Colonial South Carolina’s Plantation Society*, eds. Jack P. Greene, Rosemary Brana-Shute, and Randy J. Sparks (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2001), 291; W.J. Eccles, *The Canadian Frontier, 1534-1760* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1983), 95.

the outfitting of the *Tartar*. This would change by 1744 with the beginning of war with France; a fulltime commissary was now hired by the General Assembly.²²¹ Towards the end of the war, the commissary was charged with closing out the colony's military affairs. Gardner was ordered to place the *Tartar* up for auction in October of 1748 and in June of 1749 a commissary was ordered to round up all of the small arms belonging to the colony and deposit them in the state house.²²² Like the stowed away weapons, Commissaries would remain unused until the outbreak of the French and Indian War.

New tasks and opportunities for income also came to those already holding established positions. When the need for manpower became acute and the lures of wages and bounties proved too weak, sheriffs were ordered to impress men for the Louisbourg and Canada expeditions and for the crewing of the captured French vessel, the *Vigilant*. The General Assembly voted to award Joseph Scott, the sheriff of Newport County, his deputy, William Dyer, and their press gang a financial reward for stopping ferries and impressing soldiers and sailors. Men were also impressed in Providence by a county militia ensign and transported to Newport. The dangerous nature of this undertaking is evident in that a member of one of the pressgangs had "received a desperate wound" that required him to be boarded and attended to for a period of four weeks.²²³ Sometimes when an occupation involved with war did not yet exist, there were people willing to step forward and offer their services to the government in return for compensation. In August of 1746, before the three doomed transports set sail for the equally abortive expedition against Canada, three men took it upon themselves to offer their services as stewards

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²²¹ The various commissaries are named in Smith's *Civil and Military List of Rhode Island*.

²²² RCRI V, 256, 269.

²²³ Ibid, 125-6, 131-2.

aboard the transport ships.²²⁴ In the same vein, a Mr. Joseph Cowley petitioned the Assembly in order to be made a paid Spanish interpreter at Newport because of the “diverse prizes” being brought into the port. He claimed to have known the language for “some years” and offered his services for the Board of Admiralty and anywhere else his services may be needed.²²⁵ Although it is unclear whether or not the government accepted the offers from these individuals, this eagerness along with the above mentioned war-related work, serve as examples of the types of self-interest that were in play as the colony went to war, speaking of the commercial opportunism within Rhode Island’s culture at the middle of the eighteenth-century.

“The Babel on the Narragansett” Goes to War

Participation in the wars, whether through work, administration, or outright soldiering can be viewed through a religious lens as well. Sydney James aptly dubbed the colony’s well-known (and sometimes contemporarily viewed as infamous) religious diversity the “Babel on Narragansett Bay.”²²⁶ In 1739, Babel went to war, and virtually every sect present within the borders of Rhode Island was involved. This should be interpreted not only as an indication that sectarian multiplicity was alive and well but that members of each religious community were able to partake in the trappings, profits, power, and prestige of warfare. Between 1739 and 1748, no single denomination was able to claim a monopoly on either the perquisites or hardships associated with nearly a decade of conflict. Like the officers that were examined earlier in this study, the diversity

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²²⁴ PRIG V, petition 112.

²²⁵ Ibid, petition 88.

²²⁶ This is a chapter title in James’ *Colonial Rhode Island*.

of the colony's religious sects was just as evident among commissaries, politicians, ship owners, and a variety of others engaged in the dual conflicts.

Anglicans were one such group that would appear to be a likely candidate for such dominance during a period of imperial war. The Church of England was *the* imperial religion. It was propagated by elites who desired closer ties to the metropole and leverage over those belonging to other sects. Anglicans caused and benefited from greater integration into the empire.²²⁷ Rhode Island was no exception. In a colony where social distinctions, in the form of groups and their desires, often matched denomination, Anglicans tended to be the rich and powerful. This included the small number of royally appointed officials and a number of lawyers.²²⁸ Largely absent from the early years of settlement, Anglicanism slowly developed in the early eighteenth century. The impressive Trinity Church in Newport was completed in 1726 and congregations existed throughout the colony by mid-century. Several of the officers of the expeditionary companies belonged to the Episcopal churches, including Captain Edward Cole and Lieutenant Philip Wilkinson, as did Walter Chalonier, an officer who served at Fort George and in the Caribbean. As could be expected, they also held important war-related positions within the government. Men such as Peter Bours and Ezbon Sanford, members of Trinity Church, were involved in committees that prepared the colony for war. Further confirmation of the association between Anglicanism and provincial elites is evident in the ownership of privateering vessels. The majority of owners, who were usually merchants, can be identified as belonging to Episcopal churches.²²⁹

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²²⁷ Alan Taylor, *American Colonies: The Settlement of North America* (New York: Penguin, 2001), 340.

²²⁸ James, *Colonial Rhode Island*, 226.

²²⁹ For a fairly comprehensive list of privateering ship owners, see Edward Field, ed., *State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations at the end of the century: A History* (Boston: Mason Publishing Company,

Despite the presence of Anglicans in several key positions, they by no means had a strangle hold or even majority in the top ranks of the military and government. For instance, the Baptists, a major dissenting sect during this period, were also present in the upper echelons. Captain Samuel Dunn had been selected by the legislature to command one of the companies that served in the Spanish West Indies while John Gardner had been chosen to serve as the colony's commissary and was a member of military-related committees. Richard Ward, a member of Seventh Day Baptist Church in Newport, was chosen as governor from 1740 until 1743. Baptists had been a significant presence since the earliest years of settlement and were dispersed throughout Newport, Providence, Block Island and the smaller towns beyond Narragansett Bay.²³⁰

Members of smaller and much more obscure dissenting sects were also involved in the war effort. Dr. John Hoyle, the prominent Providence gentleman who had been selected as the commissary for the West Indies expedition was a Unitarian while another of the commissaries, for Louisbourg, James Angell, was a Gortonist. The Gortonists migrated to the Narragansett country from the Plymouth colony in the latter part of the seventeenth century and believed in a doctrine of "Familism," a "mystical communion with the Holy Spirit" that could potentially result in "a life without sin."²³¹ Even the miniscule yet visible Jewish community was involved. Although denied full citizenship because of their faith, Rhode Island's Jews were one of the rare tolerated and thus noticeable Jewish communities in British North America. Samuel Cohen was a common soldier that died during one of the harsh winters experienced by the Louisbourg garrison.

1902), 2:410-2. Chapin, *Rhode Island Privateers*, is also a rich source of information regarding privateer owners and the individuals that served aboard each vessel.

²³⁰ For Baptists in Rhode Island, see James, *Colonial Rhode Island*, 34-47, 211-6.

²³¹ *Ibid*, 28.

Moses Lopez, a prominent merchant of Newport and part-owner of a privateering vessel, was undoubtedly involved in communications in regards to prisoners and privateering prizes since he had translated Spanish for the provincial government for a number of years during the dual conflicts.²³²

Perhaps the most surprising participants in Rhode Island's war effort, given their usual association with pacifism, were the Quakers. Quaker pacifism had been compromised on an individual basis on several occasions in earlier colonial conflicts. For instance, John Wanton, future governor of the colony, had been instrumental in the capture of a menacing French privateer ship off of the coast of Block Island during Queen Anne's War. Such service on an individual basis was the result of the absence of a distinctive Quaker political bloc. In Rhode Island, the Society of Friends had not experienced the persecution that was common of their sect in the rest of New England, allowing Quakers to be elected to a variety of political positions. The price of this inclusion and participation was the potential for the peace testimony to be challenged by duties and requirements of office.²³³ The role of the Friends was most visible in the office of Governor. The Quakers John and William Wanton were elected to the governorship for roughly half of the years of the wars. Their office challenged the peace testimony by making them commission officers and privateers, organize expeditions and home defenses, and preside over the coercion of impressment. The colony's lobbyist in London, Richard Partridge, was also of the denomination, and was instrumental in defending Rhode Island's war record and requesting armaments. In addition, at least a

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²³² *Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes* 1 (Providence: Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association, 1954), 237; RCRI V, 307

²³³ Arthur J. Worrall, *Quakers in the Colonial Northeast* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1980), 100-2, 128-30

few of the owners of privateering vessels appear to have been Quakers, or at the least from known Quaker families. For instance, Stephen Hopkins, a future signer of the Declaration of Independence and brother of Captain William Hopkins, the (non-Quaker) captain of one of the Caribbean expeditionary companies, was part owner of two different privateering ships. Both were named *Reprisal* and sailed out of Providence.

Participation of Quaker non-elites seems to have been much more limited, involving work rather than soldiering. The accomplished architect, Peter Harrison, who was instrumental in the drafting and planning of the additions to Fort George, was a Friend. It should be noted that Quaker participation in local militias was still exempt during this time; unarmed service was mandated in a defense act by the General Assembly at the beginning of hostilities but the service of Quakers as scouts, lookouts, firemen, and messengers never appears to have gone beyond words on paper. Those that did participate appear to have been done so without sanction from their religious communities.²³⁴ This contrasted sharply with the experience of conscientious objectors in other colonies north and east of Pennsylvania, the Quaker stronghold in British America. In these colonies, where they were largely excluded from provincial governments, they were often coerced into service during the dual conflicts. In New Hampshire they were not exempt from compulsory militia service, their peace testimony directly violated. Friends in the Hudson Valley region of New York faced similar requirements. In Massachusetts, pacifists in Barnstable and Bristol, the latter town being in the midst of

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²³⁴ Although there was formal criticism leveled against Governor John Wanton, it was temporary and was likely due to the “evening of an old score” by a rival, *Ibid*, 129-30.

the border dispute with Rhode Island, were forced to serve; those that refused were imprisoned or held until they paid a considerable ransom.²³⁵

Whether coordinating the war effort from the Colony House in Newport, selling provisions for an impending expedition, serving aboard a privateer, repairing Fort George, or enlisting as a soldier at home or abroad, King George's War and the War of Jenkins' Ear produced ripples that were felt in virtually every corner of Rhode Island society. Those that participated either directly or indirectly represented a cross-section of society. Not only did the Babel on the Narragansett go to war but people within the highest ranks of the elite, such as the merchants and politicians, in the middling classes of printers and artisans, and the lower classes of sailors and transient workers, were engaged in both civil defense and expeditions abroad, motivated by self-interests ranging from the monetary to political. The relationship between war and society at this time also highlights the Atlantic context in which Rhode Island was heavily integrated into. Maritime trades, the hosting of captives, the competition for manpower, and smuggling were features of the colony's orientation toward the sea and the wider world. The self-interests of all levels of colonial society were certainly provincial in that individuals and institutions were based in colonial towns, ports, and hinterlands, but their concerns reached far beyond the borders and shores of the Ocean Colony, connecting them not only to distant enemies, but far-flung trading partners, customers, religious communities, and governing bodies.

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²³⁵ Ibid, 133-5; CCGRI II, 2.

Conclusion

This study has attempted to identify and dissect the various self-interests involved in the colony of Rhode Island as it was thrust into nearly a decade of imperial warfare. Provincially, the colonial government, was largely concerned with both territorial security at home and its own particular mercantile interests. It was vying with Massachusetts for a small yet commercially important strip of land that included the port of Bristol and the Attleboro Gore. Political vulnerabilities also existed with the metropole in the shape of pending legislation that threatened the colony's monetary policies, charter privileges, and commercial well-being. Added to this atmosphere of threat were the very real possibilities of raids and even invasion, made real by a geography that left points such as Block Island and the southern coastal towns, particularly Newport, exposed to the Spanish and French. As a result, the government had to conduct a complex balancing act that addressed civil defense, political pressures, and limited resources, monetary as well as human. Rhode Island wanted to display its imperial loyalty, but in a way that advanced its own self-interests and did not neglect its own insecurities. In handling the affairs of war, provincial elites were able to expand and display their powers. For instance, the power to select militia officers had been appropriated by the legislature and the Assembly had granted charters for the first time. This expansion of provincial power appears to have either been unnoticed or ignored by the British metropole. Throughout the dual conflicts, the Royal Navy remained absent from Newport and Providence and the colony's charter remained fully intact.

The many individuals involved with the war effort were also concerned with their own self-interests. Many men who became officers were able to advance their own

careers by creating a martial element to their repertoire or expounding upon their military backgrounds. Merchants, shippers, tradesmen, interpreters, sheriffs, and hosts of prisoners were tied to war by monetary inducements, a component of work that touched a wide cross-section of society. This cross-section displayed the cosmopolitan diversity of the ocean colony, as whites, blacks, Indians, Quakers, Anglicans, and Jews were all participating in the dual conflicts. In analyzing the interests in play, this study has not only touched upon military history, but has also highlighted political and social components.

In terms of military history, this work has provided a much needed, yet only partial, insight into the narrative of the wars of 1739-1748. Whereas the current historiography glosses over, neglects, or demeans the complicated involvement of Rhode Island, this study has tried to offer a more nuanced explanation in regards to its apparent lack of participation. Rhode Island did play a significant role, both close to home as it favored Newport over Louisbourg, and on the high seas, contributing a plethora of ships and thousands of men to privateering. As Carl Swanson reminds us, privateering was the most important contribution that the American colonies offered during this period. Privateering, with its large drain on manpower and use of volunteer labor, hindered and shaped the ways that war was waged. Land forces were much more scarce, causing the colony to resort to offering the highest bounties in New England to fill out companies, and the use of impressment was reserved and sometimes used as a viable alternative. While military scholars such as Kyle Zelner place the use of coercion squarely in the seventeenth century, the practice was still alive and well, both on paper and sometimes in practice, throughout mid eighteenth-century Rhode Island. This shows that this period

was one of fluctuation between the impressments of a conflict such as King Philip's War and the largely volunteer nature of the armies of the French and Indian War and American Revolution. Deficiencies were not limited to manpower but also extended to provincially owned vessels, fortifications, and available funding (that had already been printed). Consequently, it would be incorrect to label this period as being the "pinnacle of colonial arms," as Ian K. Steele and Howard Selesky have done.²³⁶ Commercial warfare certainly had its limits; politics, imperial and provincial, created demands that could not always be met by offering financial incentives. As a result, the waging of war proved to be a major dilemma for at least one of the New England colonies.

Light has also been shed on the issue of colonial militia. One of the most pre-eminent scholars of colonial American warfare, John Shy, reminds us that militias should not be viewed as being static institutions. He urges that they be viewed in terms of specific threat types and particular places. For Rhode Island, facing the twin challenges of a maritime frontier and imperial expeditions, militias were used rather indirectly. Officers in coastal areas were used to supervise garrisons and nightly watches, while expeditionary companies attempted to use militias as sources of manpower. In this latter instance, the findings from the section on the colony's ground forces coincide with Shy's suggestion that New England companies sent abroad were largely composed of single, relatively lower-class men, who may also be black or American Indian.²³⁷

Politically, this thesis has sought to highlight the importance of intra-colonial conflict. For the governor, General Assembly, and colonial agent, Massachusetts was just

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²³⁶ Selesky, *War & Society in Colonial Connecticut*, 74-96; Steele, *Warpaths: Invasions of North America*, 135-6.

²³⁷ John Shy, "A New Look at Colonial Militia." *The William and Mary Quarterly* 20, no. 2 (April 1963): 176-185.

as much if not more of an enemy as France and Spain ever were. That colony's governor, the imperial-minded William Shirley, surfaced again and again as Rhode Island's primary antagonist as he sought to belittle the colony's contribution and curtail its printing of money. His ire was motivated not only the boundary dispute, but also his belief, whether real or imagined, that Rhode Island was sheltering deserters from Bristol and seamen from Boston. Whereas orthodox Congregationalist New England had viewed the colony with contempt for being a haven for religious rogues, this reputation still held up in a military context in the middle of the seventeenth century.

Rhode Island's contest with Massachusetts and its other self-interests led many to identify with the provincial rather than the North American or imperial. After all it was the General Assembly in Newport that was looking after the welfare of local merchants and inhabitants in places such as Block Island, not London or Boston. The place of provincial political actions and allegiance deserves more attention in the framework of imperial and Atlantic war. Fred Anderson argues that the everyday, mundane experiences of Massachusetts' troops during the French and Indian War served to unite colonials while fostering a deterioration of loyalty to the British.²³⁸ While such personal interactions between Rhode Island's forces and British regulars were limited and usually positive, a similar process of shared provincial identity and imperial tension at the level of colonial government took place. These findings contrast greatly with recent assertions made by Ann M. Little, a scholar of the colonial wars in New England. She asserts that participation by New Englanders fostered imperial pride and British nationalism and was

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²³⁸ Anderson, *A People's Army*, 223.

motivated in part by anti-Catholic rhetoric.²³⁹ Certainly Rhode Islanders were more integrated into the empire due to the dual conflicts, but perhaps the phrase used by Sydney James, “imperial vortex,” is more apt; for better or worse, the colony and its colonists were dragged into the conflicts. Their participation seems to have had very little to do with religious motivations (given the colony’s religious plurality, this is not surprising) or a nascent British nationalism. Although some men who served as officers went on to be loyalists during the Revolution, the dual conflicts were largely understood and dealt with in a provincial context.

The colony’s larger society responded in much the same way that its political leaders did, participating in self-interested ways. For many, war meant work, and the most mercantile of colonies responded by supplying provisions, chartering ships, and so on. This commercial warfare was especially vigorous in Rhode Island because the interests of those in power and those trying to make a living were often congruent. As a result, there was very little pressure between elites and the rest of society. Individual agency flourished for the most part, perhaps more so in the ocean colony than in the rest of New England. This is because Rhode Island was “Yankee” long before its neighbors to the north and east. While colonies such as Connecticut experienced a “conflict between [personal] ambition and traditional authority” during the transition from “Puritan to Yankee” in the eighteenth century,²⁴⁰ Rhode Island followed a different development since it had never had an established church. Its social order was already orientated toward individual objectives, both religiously and economically. Fantastically successful merchants and transient laborers responded in similar ways, whether they were launching

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²³⁹ Ann M. Little, *Abraham in Arms: War and Gender in Colonial New England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007.), 183-93, 207.

²⁴⁰ Bushman, *From Puritan to Yankee*, 267.

privateer cruises or signing up to receive a generous bounty for service in Canada or the West Indies. Risks were taken in the name of the pound. In addition, this study serves as a reminder that a topic seemingly militaristic in topic can also be examined socially. Even conflicts such as the War of Jenkins' Ear and King George's War created ripples that were felt beyond the shores of South America and Atlantic Canada, as even imperial warfare affected the day-to-day lives and livelihoods of those back at home.

Despite these much needed glimpses into the military, political, and social aspects of Rhode Island's participation in the dual conflicts, a few areas warranting further study are brought to the forefront. Perhaps most in need of further study is the existence of the highly volatile maritime frontier that existed along coastal colonial North America.

Historians interested in the wars of the colonial period have focused almost exclusively on the interior borderland regions, such as the frontier between New England and New France. The stretches of coast between Long Island and Maine and beyond provide an equally dangerous and exposed region, one ripe for further synthesis and an analysis. A frontier, as defined by Gregory H. Nobles, "is a region in which no culture, group, or government can claim effective control or hegemony over others," in which "contact often involves conflict."²⁴¹ The coasts of Rhode Island certainly fall under this category.

It was a frontier where peninsulas and points were home to warning fires and watch houses, ports had watch patrols and forts, and a sparsely settled island begged for a protective garrison. The provincial government and merchant community were in constant fear of invasion or raid from its Spanish and French foes, resulting in a constant effort to maintain security and control while enjoying the material benefits of trade and

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²⁴¹ Gregory H. Nobles, *American Frontiers: Cultural Encounters and Continental Conquest* (Macmillan: New York, 1998), xii.

smuggling and playing host to a large body of privateering prisoners. A thorough study of such a dynamic region could transcend provincial and imperial lines to touch on areas such as littoral societies, civil defense, and a coastal culture that may have more in common with other coastal societies than their inland counterparts, as advocated by Michael Pearson.

A second area of study that could be expounded upon is the relationship between Rhode Island's brand of warfare and gender. Little's study of masculinity is overwhelmingly concerned with the (inland) northeastern borderlands.²⁴² Did maritime mercantile interests in Rhode Island mirror the developments she covers? If so how were they the same or different? I suggest that the ocean colony was less interested in the nationalist and religious components of the imperial conflicts, but it is still possible that the methodologies of historians of gender and sexuality could be applied to the colony in question. Lastly, the subaltern elements of imperial warfare warrant further scholarship. Although some attention has been paid to the men involved in the various expeditionary companies, further archival work could be done to further explore the experience of soldiers dispatched well beyond the North American mainland colonies. In addition, the experiences of the women and children they sometimes left behind needs to be integrated into the narrative of imperial colonial warfare. Likewise, the experiences of subaltern prisoners, such as sailors and captured slaves, held in the English colonies are an area of work ripe for historical study.

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²⁴² Little only mentions the colony of Rhode Island a few times throughout her text, and only in passing. Likewise, privateers and privateering, which were one of the most important American contributions to the wars of colonial New England, are completely absent. As a result, her study of the "northeastern borderlands" is overwhelmingly terrestrial, focusing on the contested frontier between New England, New France, and Indian country.

After specifically considering Rhode Island's response to the wars of 1739-1748, how useful is the colony as a case study for broader themes? After all, the colony was quite unique in regards to its religion, relatively free government, small size, and heavily urban-commercial character. Despite such exceptionalism, this study has highlighted several areas that are applicable to other New England, British, and North American locations. For instance, Rhode Island was not alone in its hosting of large-scale privateering operations. Ports such as Philadelphia, New York, and Charleston were also major privateering bases. The existence of these bases certainly affected how provincial governments conducted war, well beyond the mere acts of privateers themselves. Likewise, the interaction between mercantile interests and the demands of the wars were obviously not limited to Rhode Island but are exemplified by its study. Merchant concerns and involvement were factors in virtually every colony; colonies that largely existed for trade in the first place. Broad issues of different kinds of self-interest must have been relevant to war efforts up and down the eastern seaboard during the dual conflicts. For instance, border disputes were fairly common during the colonial era. New Hampshire and Massachusetts were also engaged in a dispute over land around the Merrimack River, a dispute that was settled in 1741. Other such issues of provincial, personal, and commercial self-interest can certainly be identified in the other colonies that were plunged into nearly a decade of conflict, coloring the ways that they responded both at home and abroad.²⁴³ Rhode Island's various self-interests that shaped its waging of war were certainly unique, but their existence was part of a much larger trend that

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²⁴³ Selesky briefly suggests that Connecticut was self-consciously trying to improve its reputation via imperial military participation during the period in question. That colony had experienced significant tension with the metropole in terms of controversies surrounding Indian land claims, inheritance law, and (like Rhode Island) the printing of currency, *War & Society in Colonial Connecticut*, 69.

characterized Britain's Atlantic empire, one that needs to be more fully explored in order to understand empire and its conflicts. The dual conflicts may have been imperial in origin, but they had clear implications for provincial societies that were called upon to sacrifice materials, wealth, and people.

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