

Hall, Richard: *Atlantic Politics, Military Strategy and the French and Indian War*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2016. ISBN: 978-3-319-30664-3; XVIII, 266 S.

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For a book that focuses on the defeat in July 1755 of General Edward Braddock near the banks of the Monongahela, Richard Hall's study seems at first glance to have a rather grandiloquent title. But it soon becomes apparent that the capacious claims of the title are fully justified. Hall places the battle in a broad context, not only relating Braddock's attempt to force the French out of the Ohio valley to simultaneous British military efforts in upper New York and Nova Scotia, but more importantly, seeking to tease out the connections between Braddock's defeat and the great fracturing of the Anglo-world that we know as the American Revolution. Based on extensive research (though mainly in printed sources), *Atlantic Politics, Military Strategy and the French and Indian War* is a valuable addition to the existing literature both on Braddock's expedition and on the Seven Years War in North America more generally.

Hall engages thoroughly with the established scholarship on Braddock's defeat. He rightly points out that historians of earlier generations latched onto the vanquishing of Braddock's regular troops as evidence of the failings of a hide-bound British army, which embodied all the ills of an aristocratic and hierarchical British society. In the older literature (and still, it has to be said, in some of the more modern), the battle near the banks of the Monongahela is depicted as a British defeat. Redcoats in linear formation fired at a largely unseen enemy, and suffered appalling casualties before they finally broke and ran. The colonists who served alongside Braddock's regulars, by contrast, are seen as much better suited to the conditions of warfare in North America, and as possessing distinctly American qualities, which sprang from a strong commitment to rights and liberties that was characteristic of an essentially egalitarian colonial society. As Hall points out, this image of two very different political and so-

cial cultures is part of the myth making that historians in the United States used to help to create the idea of American exceptionalism.

Hall sees many flaws in this interpretation and brings them to our attention. In particular, he goes to some lengths to rescue the reputation of Braddock, the regular troops that he commanded, and the mid-eighteenth-century British army as an institution. He sees Braddock's defeat, and the limited success of British arms in North America until 1758, not as symptoms of British military failings, but rather as signs of a fundamental structural problem in the British Atlantic empire. Braddock, given sweeping powers by the government in London, found himself unable to overcome what he saw as colonial obstruction. He, like his successor the Earl of Loudoun, fumed at the reluctance of the provincial assemblies to provide the men and resources that he needed to complete his campaign successfully, and bemoaned the lack of executive authority in the British colonies. Hall sees Braddock's fate as an almost inevitable consequence of a growing divergence between metropolitan and colonial perceptions of political and military rights and responsibilities. Hence his claims for the battle of the Monongahela as an important step on the road to the Revolution. Braddock's defeat, in Hall's account, encapsulated and furthered the divergence that was eventually to lead first to post-war constitutional disputes, then to armed clashes between colonists and the British army, and finally to American Independence.

He readily acknowledges that in the second phase of the Seven Years War in America, when British arms were generally successful, the tensions between colonial and metropolitan ideas of rights and responsibilities greatly diminished. Hall recognizes that at the point of victory, Americans gloried in the role of vanquishers of the French, and demonstrated effusive loyalty to the British crown in addresses and loyal memorials. But he interprets this merely as a passing moment, before in the years after 1763, the divergence between British and Americans perspectives again became very apparent. His argument, then, in many ways breathes new life into the work of those historians of yesteryear who

claimed that the experience of the Seven Years War convinced Americans of their distinctiveness from Britons. Indeed, Hall detects an emerging American consciousness during the war, which he sees as inevitably set on a collision course with metropolitan authority.

Much of this is difficult to deny. But we do not have to revert to a traditional emphasis on the Revolution as a consequence of an emerging sense of an American nation. The American nation emerged after the Revolution, not before. The division that Hall identifies between metropolitan and colonial ideas of political authority was in truth a clash between two versions of what it was to be British, or perhaps English. To the colonists, to be English was to live in broadly self-governing communities, led by local elites, linked by common allegiance to the same monarch. Their ideas reflected the colonies' seventeenth-century foundations, when Parliament at Westminster was more of an occasional event than an entrenched institution. To mid-eighteenth-century British politicians, on the other hand, Britons everywhere had to show loyalty to all the central institutions of the British state, not just the crown, but also the Westminster Parliament, which now shared sovereign authority with the king.

At the end of 1757, William Pitt, the secretary of state responsible for the running of the war in America, offered the colonists a settlement that made significant concessions to their sensitivities. Colonial military officers were to be given an enhanced status in relation to British regulars, and the colonial assemblies were encouraged to raise more provincial troops by the promise that much of their extra spending would be covered by parliamentary subsidies. Pitt's settlement helped to mobilize the colonies from 1758 in a great British effort to defeat the French. It underpinned American assumptions in 1760, when New France finally surrendered, that victory had come through a partnership of metropolitan and colonial Britons fighting alongside each other against the hereditary enemy.

If British governments after 1763 had been able to sustain the partnership, the American Revolution would have been far from inevitable. But the expansion of empire that came with victory – not just in North Amer-

ica, but also the West Indies, West Africa, and India – made it very difficult for British politicians to return to the levels of autonomy that the colonists had enjoyed before the Seven Years War. If that conflict is to be seen as the vital prerequisite of the Revolution, then we need to focus rather less on how it changed the outlook of colonists and rather more on how it changed the views of metropolitan political elites.

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