



## 5.2 THE WESTERN PROBLEM AND THE ORIGINS OF NATIONAL CHARACTER

<b>THE WESTERN PROBLEM</b>	<p>After the French and Indian War, Great Britain had to confront the WESTERN PROBLEM OF ORDERLY EXPANSION involving the following issues: (1) Administering a vast new territory, (2) Dealing with hostile Indians.</p>
<b>George Grenville</b>	<p>Orderly expansion was going to cost money and the task of raising that money fell to George III's Chancellor of the Exchequer GEORGE GRENVILLE who was already worried about how to pay off the war debt. If he raised the already high taxes in England, he would incur the displeasure of the landed gentry who were already complaining about high taxes. If he were to place more duties on trade, the merchants and shippers would turn against him. Since these were the most powerful groups in the House of Commons, he would be committing political suicide by increasing taxes or duties at home.</p> <p>The obvious solution would be to MAKE THE COLONIES SHARE IN THE FUTURE COSTS of their administration and defense. His reasoning was this: Since American colonists were part of the empire, they should now be called upon to contribute their share to the imperial financial burden. This was only fair because the series of wars just ended had been fought for the immediate defense of the colonies to eliminate foreign threats. In addition, the danger was still present from Indian attacks and from the conquered French territories. Furthermore, to make the proposal more palatable to the colonies, all money raised in America would be spent in America.</p>
<b>The Proclamation of 1763</b>	<p>The first step in dealing with the western problem of orderly expansion was to pass the PROCLAMATION ACT OF 1763 temporarily prohibiting settlement west of the Appalachians.</p> <p>Then Grenville announced that he was going to introduce specific measures to insure that the colonies pay their FAIR SHARE OF THE IMPERIAL FINANCIAL BURDEN. The plan was FAVORABLY RECEIVED IN ENGLAND. But no one considered the possibility of COLONIAL OPPOSITION. (The sources of such opposition had been quietly developing for a long time.)</p>
<b>OPPOSITION TO IMPERIAL POLICY</b>	<p>In order to understand the underlying reasons for the opposition to the new imperial policy, it is essential to realize that the colonists were undergoing a change. In 1763, they were on the threshold of BECOMING AMERICANS. This was no sudden development, but the result of factors long at work.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ English settlers had left the mother country largely because of DISSATISFACTION with English persecution – political, religious, and economic.</li> <li>■ During the century and a half since the establishment of Jamestown, they and their descendants had been permitted to develop their OWN WAYS OF LIFE, with much less supervision, regulation, and control than is normally believed.</li> <li>■ They had achieved a large degree of SELF CONFIDENCE that enabled them to create new frontiers and work out a fairly common destiny.</li> <li>■ The arrival of Germans, French Huguenots, Scots-Irish, and other non-English groups, together with the blending in of the Dutch in the middle colonies, gradually formed a new stock with a greatly WEAKENED ATTACHMENT TO ENGLAND.</li> </ul> <p>It appears then that by 1763, the colonists had developed a culture quite distinct from their European heritage. They had begun to develop a NATIONAL CHARACTER. If this is true, we have got to look at what that national character was and what brought about the change.</p>

<p><b>THE ORIGINS OF NATIONAL CHARACTER</b></p> <p><b>Frederick Jackson Turner’s “The Significance of the Frontier in American History”</b></p>	<p>The problem of national character has always interested historians and many have undertaken the task of describing and accounting for it. Here are three concepts of national character proposed by American historians:</p> <p>FREDERICK JACKSON TURNER in <i>THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE FRONTIER IN AMERICAN HISTORY</i> (1892) proposed the FRONTIER HYPOTHESIS of American history. Drawing his inspiration from the announcement of the superintendent of the census that a frontier line no longer existed, Turner noted the end of an historical epoch. “Up to our own day,” he wrote, “American history has been in a large degree the history of the colonization of the Great West. The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American development.” This was because “the peculiarity of American institutions is the fact that they have been compelled to adapt themselves to the changes of an expanding people.”</p> <p>Each move westward meant “A RETURN TO PRIMITIVE CONDITIONS on a continually advancing frontier line, a continual beginning over again in the process of social evolution.” First the wilderness mastered the colonist, stripping off the garments of civilization and returning him to a state of near savagery. Then came the climb back toward social maturity, but a different maturity than that known in the past. The “bonds of custom” had been broken. In the repeated rebirth of civilization an Americanization of men and institutions had occurred.</p> <p>The result, Turner believed, was A NEW SOCIETY based on borrowings from the old, but markedly different. One significant result was the “formation of A COMPOSITE NATIONALITY” as immigrants were Americanized in the “CRUCIBLE OF THE FRONTIER.” Another was the “PROMOTION OF DEMOCRACY here and in Europe” as frontiersmen rebelled against external controls or responded to the individualizing influence of cheap land and abundant resources.”</p> <p>“To the frontier,” Turner went on, “the American intellect owes its striking characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ That coarseness and strength combined with acuteness and inquisitiveness</li> <li>■ That practical inventive turn of mind, quick to find expedients</li> <li>■ That masterful grasp of material things, lacking in the artistic but powerful to effect great ends</li> <li>■ That restless, nervous energy</li> <li>■ That dominant individualism, working for good and for evil</li> <li>■ And withal that buoyancy and exuberance which comes with freedom.”</li> </ul>
<p><b>David M. Potter’s <i>People of Plenty</i></b></p> <p><b>Louis Hartz’ <i>The Liberal Tradition in America</i></b></p>	<p>DAVID M. POTTER in <i>PEOPLE OF PLENTY</i> (1954) makes a connection between ECONOMIC ABUNDANCE and the American character.</p> <p>LOUIS HARTZ in <i>THE LIBERAL TRADITION IN AMERICA</i> (1955) focuses on the ORDERLY TRANSFER OF POWER that characterizes American politics.</p>
<p><b>DISCUSSION QUESTIONS</b></p>	<p>What does it mean to be an American?</p> <p>What characteristics distinguish Americans from other national groups?</p> <p>Which historian (Frederick Jackson Turner, David M. Potter, or Louis Hartz) best describes the American national character today?</p>

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