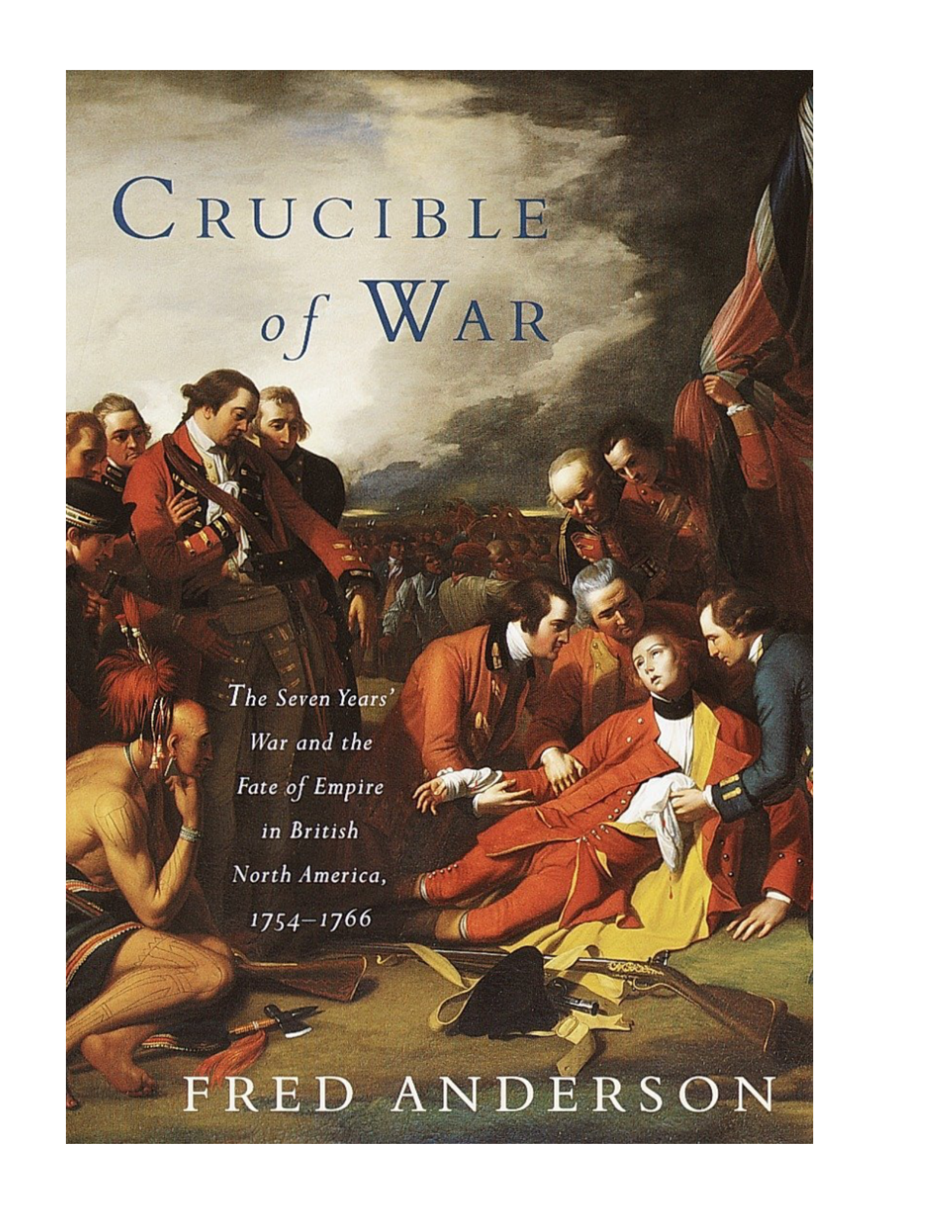


Author's Response



CRUCIBLE
of WAR

*The Seven Years'
War and the
Fate of Empire
in British
North America,
1754–1766*

FRED ANDERSON

First let me say thanks to all four of you. I had hardly dared hope that *Crucible of War* would get a close reading on such comparatively short notice, but I've just heard four extremely thoughtful responses, each one of which engaged the form, content, and argument of the book with care and insight. I'm deeply grateful to you all for taking my work so seriously—and even for pointing out the ways in which I could have written a better book.

So what were those ways? Let me try to summarize what each of the panelists, in turn, wanted that I didn't give them, and why; then I'll try to figure out something to say in reply. As I understood him, Brian wants more Indians in the story, on more equal terms with the white actors—that is, Indians acting as individuals, not just as members of cultural groups; Paul would like more attention paid to Spain as a factor in the origins of the conflict, and as an influence on the war itself; Lige would have more systematic notice taken of British political culture and of the complexity of the British empire as a multicultural entity; and David wants me to expand the scope of the narrative to take in, well, the world—or at least to give more equal treatment to the parts of this globe-encircling war that my account pushes into the background.

Why do they want all this from me? Because, of course, *Crucible of War* is both imperfect in form, and incomplete—with respect to the scholarship it seeks to synthesize, no less than to the immensity of the event it tries to capture. This comes as no surprise, least of all to me. Hard as I tried to write a book that would be both comprehensive and accessible, I knew from very early on that it would fall short. Now, looking back, it's interesting to think about the specifics of its shortcomings, and to speculate on their significance. Let me take them in order.

Brian's objections cannot be answered by the old authorial ruse of maintaining that "that wasn't the book I wanted to write," because—as he clearly saw—I did intend to make the Indians' story central to the larger narrative, and wanted to treat the actions of Indian characters as coequal in consequence to the actions of Europeans and Euro-Americans. He's absolutely right as to the reasons why, in the end, individual Indians do not appear as the equals of European and Euro-American actors: with only a couple of exceptions, I didn't have the material at hand to make the same kinds of three-dimensional portraits of Indian characters that I did of Washington or Pitt or Loudoun. But there's more to it than that. I found it harder to perform the necessary imaginative exercise of placing myself in the Indians' world; indeed, it was all but impossible for me, for example, to imagine the mental state of Tanaghrisson at the moment he plunged his hands into Ensign Jumonville's brain. In contrast, while I found it difficult to put myself in the position of George Washington as he witnessed the act, it was quite possible for me to imagine his desperation as he tried to explain what happened without making himself look like an incompetent, or an accessory to murder. This is no more than to confess the biases and limits of my imagination; but it wasn't for the want of trying that I failed to transcend those limits. Let me make that more concrete with an example.

Perhaps the one figure I most nearly rendered fully among the Indian actors was Teedyuscung, a man who seemed to me an utterly compelling, admirable, deeply flawed figure. I could do that because I had Anthony Wallace's wonderful book, *King of the Delawares*, to guide me. Whatever the limits of this pioneering effort at cross-cultural psychobiography, Wallace made Teedyuscung immediate to the reader, and I hope I was able to convey some of that immediacy and complexity to my own readers. I could not have done it without Wallace's book. So it was not just, as Brian rightly suspects, that I was a captive of my narrative strategy, but rather that I was also captive to the synthesizer's dilemma, which is to be bound by the biographies and monographs that made up the bricks and mortar of the narrative structure.

To do what Brian wants, in effect, I would have had to wait for another scholarly generation to come to maturity—Brian's generation, the one that will build on the works of Jim Merrell, Dan Richter, Greg Dowd, Tom Hatley, Richard White, and the rest—and finally write biographical accounts of Indians that are as fully realized as those of European figures. I hope to be around to see that day, but even if I am I probably won't be able to incorporate those accounts into some future edition, because those still-to-be written studies will require more than cosmetic changes in a narrative conceived, ultimately, within the limits of a European worldview. When that day comes, some new synthesizer will be able to write a far better, more inclusive book than *Crucible of War*, because she or he will begin with real Indian people, imagining Europeans and Euro-Americans from their perspective, rather than the other way around. But that will be a different book, constructed in another way, according to a different set of narrative principles.

The views of the other three respondents are in some ways easier to reply to, because what they address has less to do with the imperfect quality of the narrative than with its incompleteness; that is, it would in principle be possible to incorporate all their suggestions by adding to, rather than fundamentally reconceptualizing or restructuring, the narrative. The practical problems of adding any words at all to a 320,000-word book, of course, make it unlikely that I will be doing much expanding in anticipation of a second edition. Despite David's kind suggestion (exceeding Dr. Johnson's appreciation of Milton's limitations in its charitableness toward my own) that he might have been willing to wish for an even longer book, it would be a monstrous act to add a single word, without making some compensatory cut elsewhere.

That said, I must confess that it would give me pleasure to incorporate all their suggestions, if I could. Should there ever be a future edition, I will in fact do everything I can to incorporate Paul's insights about Spain and its significance, because that would greatly enrich the account of Spain's belated entry into the war, and would add a dimension I had not imagined to the significance of the double conquest of Havana and Manila in 1762. Of course, in order for me to have that pleasure Paul will first have to finish his doctoral dissertation, because he is the only person who has dug through the French and Spanish diplomatic correspondence carefully enough to put that part of the

picture together. If he does, I solemnly swear that I will do whatever is necessary to make that addition—even if it means finding something, somewhere, to cut.

But while Lige's and David's criticisms are equally valuable, and would also make this hypothetical second-edition revision a more comprehensive book than the present one, I'm not sure I would be equally able to incorporate them. Unlike the addition of the perspective on Spain, which might be integrated into the existing framework in a few pages, following either Lige's and David's suggestions would shift the center of narrative gravity outside of North America—where, for better or worse, *Crucible of War* must remain anchored. This doubtlessly reflects of my own provincialism—I am an Americanist, after all, not a historian of Britain or (heaven forbid) the world—but it is not solely a function of that. Rather it has to do with the scale I chose in writing the book, and my belated understanding of what that choice would mean to the shape of the narrative.

Now by “scale” I merely mean the human dimension of the story I hoped to tell, by analogy to the scale of a map. As everyone knows, a one-meter-interval topographical map will disclose much more information about a given location than a 1:100,000 scale rendering, but only the large-scale map can show where the locality sits with respect to everything else in the region. To pursue the analogy, it's clear that I could have chosen a larger scale, and that had I done so groups and institutions and impersonal forces would have taken center stage in the narrative, not people. In that case I might have zoomed in from time to time to sketch individuals or take some account of their actions, but they would have effectively disappeared as actors (along with the problems of character and volition and intention they pose), becoming instead emblems or illustrations of larger factors and forces. That would have answered Brian's objection, because the Indians and the Europeans would have appeared on exactly the same footing; it would also have made the story less contingent, more abstract, and (as I think of it) less surprising than it is. I might be able to answer Lige's and David's concerns by doing this; but if I did, that would make it a very different book—a book about the character of the British empire and its interactions with the rest of the European and non-European world, rather than a book about colonists and Europeans and Indians in eastern North America and what I call the “fate” of empire (i.e., the consequences of imperial warfare and a decisive victory) in that setting.

Why I wrote at the scale I did—one in which the actions of individuals carry the action forward within a frame of possibility governed by large social, economic, and strategic factors—had less to do with a conscious decision than with an instinct that the story worked better that way. In part it was sheer accident. I knew, for example, that the argument I wanted to make would require me to explain in some detail what happened at Jumonville's Glen in 1754, but I did not realize until much later that the role George Washington played in that account in effect secured for him a privileged part in the narrative as a whole. Indeed, Washington ultimately surprised me more than any other

character, especially insofar as he affected the emotional quality of the story whenever he appeared at center stage. But then again, many of the characters surprised me, and took places I had not anticipated when I first introduced them into the story. Teedyuscung, as I have said, became quite real to me; and so, through the varying quality of their interactions with him, did Sir William Johnson, John Forbes, Christian Frederick Post, Pisquetomen, and Israel Pemberton. A variety of secondary figures also became more significant to me (thus to the story's shape) than I would have thought possible at the outset. George Croghan, for example, introduced an element of surprise and an antic quality I could not have anticipated; so, in their ways, did Cadwallader Colden and Rufus Putnam and John Bradstreet.

Sometimes, indeed, it seemed to me that by having chosen the starting point that I did, and the scale that I did, I had surrendered more control over the story and its characters than a prudent author would have chosen to do. For in fact the limits—the start and end points of the story—also changed over the course of the writing, and with them the nature of the story itself. Initially (before I had come to understand what the choice of scale would mean) I had thought my story would encompass the whole period from 1754 through 1794. Thus composed it would have been a tale that would run from empire through war to imperial dissolution, and from a renewal of war through revolution and the reestablishment of an imperial order on new terms. It was probably only after I had written seven hundred pages that I understood I would either have to go back and rewrite it all at a different level of generalization, or split up the narrative and write it as what I imagined would be a two-volume work, with the first volume ending as Washington assumed command of the Continental Army. That would have been a story of another sort, incorporating essentially half of the larger narrative I had initially intended to write. [1]

By the time I hit twelve hundred pages and had only reached the eve of the Boston Massacre, I knew that even this first half of the whole story would be impossible to complete; for every new page I wrote, I would have to cut an equivalent amount from the previous text. At that point, unable to think of another ending for my story, I found I could write no more. I was not precisely blocked, because I could still write (indeed, it was all too easy to write), but rather frozen, because I knew that to continue would require me to alter the scale, and thus change the fundamental character of the narrative. Luckily for me, my editor, Jane Garrett, was able to see what I could not. She suggested that the story of the Seven Years' War and its aftermath might stop with the end of Pontiac's War and the resolution of the Stamp Act crisis, and that such a narrative would still, while long, be publishable.

Only then, after a decade of work, did I come to see that if I adopted another endpoint, there was in fact a book lurking within that dispiriting heap of manuscript pages. Instead of a story of how one empire led to the creation of another (as in my first understanding) or how empire led to revolution (as in my second), this one described how a great war and a phenomenal victory had created what I now could see as a "hollow" yet potentially durable imperium,

based on voluntary allegiance. However seemingly fragile, that imperial structure could only be seriously threatened by metropolitan efforts to exert direct rule over colonists. In this way it finally became possible for me to understand the impact of the war on colonists whose experiences had encouraged them to think of themselves as partners in, rather than subjects of, the empire; on metropolitan authorities desperate to solve the problems of finance and control that were, in their minds, inescapable consequences of William Pitt's prodigal victory; and on the native peoples who had been crucial to its outcome, and who would, in turn, prove critical to the empire's survival.

In this entirely unsystematic way I came to understand narrative history as a form with great potential to serve the purposes of scholarly synthesis, and also with strict limits. Its limitations can be understood, as I have said, as functions of the scale and the chronological dimensions of the story; but they also seem, in a hard-to-describe way, to be controlled by the very actors who come to populate the tale. Having chosen my story's beginning, I found that its characters had as much to say about its ending as I did; that while I could have told the story more comprehensively, to change the argument in any way beyond mere elaboration would have been to create a different story, with another plot, and a different ending.

And since every comment, like every story, must end at some point, I would seem to have found an excuse to end this one, with thanks to you all for listening to me with so much courtesy and attention, and with particular gratitude to Professor Ulrich and the Charles Warren Center for making this occasion possible.

Notes

1. I actually wrote the conclusion to that book at the point I decided to make the larger project a two-volume work with its breaking point at 1775. I thought, somehow, that the process of writing might be a more disciplined one if I were in effect filling in a long blank between where I was then (at the end of the fighting in North America, in 1760) and the outbreak of the War of Independence. Of course I was wrong. Eventually, however, I did manage to publish a somewhat elaborated version of that supposed-to-be final chapter on its own, as "The Hinge of Revolution: George Washington Confronts a People's Army, July 3, 1775," *Massachusetts Historical Review*, 1 (1999): 20-48.

This article originally appeared in issue 1.1 (September, 2000).

Fred Anderson is Associate Professor of History at the University of Colorado, Boulder. He is the author of *A People's Army: Massachusetts Soldiers and*

Society in the Seven Years' War (1984), as well as articles, essays, and reviews.