

Agents of Empire

To understand the foundations of American political institutions, it's necessary to understand the rationale for British colonial institutions that survived the empire. Political institutions in England's American colonies were neither direct imports from England nor home-grown creations of autonomous colonists. Instead, they emerged from efforts of the English Crown to assert control over their colonies amid limited English state and military capacity. *Agents of Empire* explores the strategic dilemmas facing a constrained crown in its attempts to assert control. The study argues that colonial institutions emerged from the crown's management of authority delegated to agents – first companies and proprietors establishing colonies; then imperial officials governing the polities they created. The institutions remaining from these strategic dynamics form the building blocks of federalism, legislative power, separation of powers, judicial review, and other institutions that comprise the American polity today.

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*English Imperial Governance and the Making
of American Political Institutions*

SEAN GILMARD

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CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-009-31689-7 — Agents of Empire
Sean Gailmaid
Frontmatter
[More Information](#)



Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom
One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA
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Cambridge University Press is part of Cambridge University Press & Assessment,
a department of the University of Cambridge.

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education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781009316897

DOI: 10.1017/9781009316934

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First published 2024

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

*A Cataloging-in-Publication data record for this book is available from the
Library of Congress*

ISBN 978-1-009-31689-7 Hardback

ISBN 978-1-009-31692-7 Paperback

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*To Lindsey,
for making it happen, and making it all good*

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Acknowledgments

This book has had a long gestation. The first vague thought I had about the topic was in graduate school, when I supposed there must be some kind of principal–agent logic to American colonial institutions under English government. I took a stab at a model, long since lost (for my own good), and moved on to other work. My enthusiasm was renewed in 2014 when I met some longtime friends of my wife’s family. They knew a lot about their family’s history; we discovered we were ninth cousins through a family of eighteenth-century French colonial fur traders in the Mississippi River valley. We talked about how those traders worked on the boundary of multiple colonial empires, and I started wondering again about the institutions of those empires. Looking at the political economy literature on this topic, I found some very significant, indeed field-changing work. But, true to my own interests, I wanted to look more into strategic and historical aspects of their administration. That resulted in a few papers and, finally, this book.

A number of colleagues were kind enough to provide essential feedback and conversations about various parts of the book. Avi Acharya, Dan Carpenter, Tiberiu Dragu, Lindsey Gailmard, Rod Kiewiet, John Patty, and Emily Sellars read early drafts of the entire manuscript (or large parts of it) and improved it very significantly with their comments. Tony Bertelli, Ruth Bloch Rubin, Ruth Collier, Alexandra Chinchilla, Gary Cox, John Dearborn, Valentin Figueroa, Sandy Gordon, Ryan Hübert, Dan Lee, Gabriel Leon-Ablan, Dave Lewis, Rob Mickey, Austin Mitchell, Jack Paine, Bob Powell, Eric Schickler, David Stasavage, Mike Ting, Jan Vogler, David Waldner, and Barry Weingast read chapter drafts and provided immensely helpful feedback. I am also grateful for engagement from

seminar participants at Bocconi, Caltech, Chicago, Harvard, New York University Law School, Princeton, Stanford, University of California, Davis, University of California, San Diego, the University of Michigan, the University of Wisconsin, and Yale. Jeff Jenkins organized a book talk for me at the University of Southern California Political Institutions and Political Economy Symposium on the political economy of empires. None of these generous colleagues deserve what I inflicted on them (and no blame for the end product); I thank them for making the result better.

I am thankful to my family, especially my children and my parents: William, Abby, Collin, Reed, Sophie, Dad, Sue, Lesley, and Mom. They were all very supportive and interested to hear about the project. Everyone politely ignored that I said it would be done in six months, for four consecutive six-month periods.

My greatest debt and greatest thanks are to my wife Lindsey. Her enthusiasm to hear about the project was often the major reason I continued writing it. Her commitment to the project was the main reason I had time to write it – mostly during a pandemic with five children at home. Her feedback on every part of the manuscript made it better. Lindsey made this book exist, and I dedicate it to her.