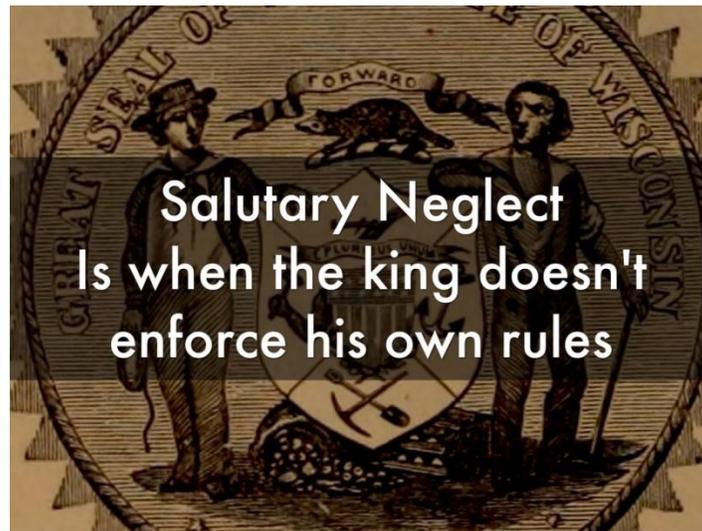


## Salutary Neglect



Salutary Neglect  
Is when the king doesn't  
enforce his own rules

**Context:** Between 1625 and 1775, the colonial population grew from roughly 2,000 to over 2.5 million, often displacing American Indians. In the 18th century, the British government operated its colonies under a policy of mercantilism, for the economic benefit of the mother country. In addition, Slavery was introduced during the colonial period.

The Thirteen Colonies had a high degree of self-governance and active local elections, and they resisted London's demands for more control. For example, Rhode Island and Connecticut had always elected their own governors. Before the fighting started in 1775 the majority Whigs and the minority Tories in England, who both favored the connection with the Mother Country and were Loyal to the Crown, and were opposed to Parliamentary interference in local affairs within the Thirteen Colonies.

**Salutary neglect** is an American history term that refers to the 17th and 18th century British Crown policy of avoiding strict enforcement of parliamentary laws meant to keep British colonies obedient to England. The term comes from Edmund Burke's "Speech on Conciliation with America" given in the House of Commons March 22, 1775.

*When I know that the colonies in general owe little or nothing to any care of ours, and that they are not squeezed into this happy form by the constraints of watchful and suspicious government, but that, through a wise and **salutary neglect**, a generous nature has been suffered to take her own way to perfection; when I reflect upon these effects, when I see how profitable they have been to us, I feel all the pride of power sink, and all presumption in the wisdom of human contrivances melt and die away within me. (Burke 1834, p. 186)*

### **Salutary Neglect occurred in three time periods.**

**From 1607 to 1696**, England had no coherent imperial policy regarding specific overseas possessions and their governance, although mercantilist ideas were gaining force and giving general shape to trade policy.

**From 1696 to 1763**, England tried to form a coherent policy through the Navigation Acts but did not enforce it. They tried to dictate that only British flag ships or approved American ships could trade with the mother country and the colonies. No other ships were allowed to enter American ports.

**From 1763 to 1775** Britain began to try to enforce stricter rules and more direct management, driven in part by the outcome of the Seven Years' War [in America this was fought as the French and Indian War] in which Britain had gained large areas of new territory in North America at the Treaty of Paris. Successive British governments passed a number of acts designed to regulate Britain's American colonies including the Stamp Act and Quebec Act. The Quebec Act was not meant to oppress the colonists but was nevertheless widely viewed as oppressive due to the concurrent passage of the Intolerable Acts.

The French and Indian War (1754–63) against France and its Native American allies led to growing tensions between Britain and the Thirteen Colonies. In the 1750s, the colonies began collaborating with one another instead of dealing directly with Britain. These inter-colonial activities cultivated a sense of shared American identity and led to calls for protection of the colonists' "Rights as Englishmen", especially the principle of "no taxation without representation". Grievances with the British government led to the American Revolution, in which the colonies collaborated in forming the Continental Congress. The colonists fought the American Revolutionary War (1775–83) with the aid of France, the Dutch Republic, and Spain.

The end of salutary neglect was a large contributing factor that led to the American Revolutionary War. Since the imperial authority did not assert the power that it had, the colonists were left to govern themselves. These essentially sovereign colonies soon became accustomed to the idea of self-control. They also realized that they were powerful enough to defeat the British (with help from France), and decided to revolt. The effects of such prolonged isolation eventually resulted in the emergence of a collective identity that considered itself separate from Great Britain.

To what extent "salutary neglect" constituted an actual neglect of colonial affairs, as the name suggests, versus a conscious policy of the British government, is controversial among historians, and also varies with national perspective. While Americans may side with Burke on the "salutary" effect of this policy, emphasizing the economic and social development of the colonies, it was from a British imperial perspective a momentous failure, and debate remains as to its true social, economic, and political effects.