Lord Bute and Reform: A Failure in Leading the Change Process

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Abstract

Aim: This study examined the change process in politics by looking at Lord Bute’s tenure as British prime minister.

Methods: The study draws on primary and secondary sources, including John Kotter’s eight-step change model, to evaluate Bute’s political reform efforts. This qualitative study relied on biographies, political histories, correspondence, speeches, and other sources from the figures involved.

Results: While he proposed one of the most monumental reform efforts in 18th century British politics, Bute failed to see them through thanks to his lack of experience on the political stage and other factors. Despite the findings of most historians, Bute achieved some important successes during his brief term as prime minister.

Conclusion: By the metrics of Kotter’s model, Bute did not lead the change process successfully. While Bute offered a coherent change vision, relied on some excellent supporters in office and in the media, and achieved some impressive political victories, his lack of experience ensured he fell short of his stated goal of reforming British political culture and government.

Recommendations: With Bute tackling many of the same issues that current leaders face, more study is needed of this important British political leader. A study of Bute’s tenure as prime minister offers insights on balancing military commitments with increased deficit spending and a rising national debt.

Keywords: Lord Bute, George III, change process, change leadership, John Kotter

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INTRODUCTION

On the morning of October 25, 1760, George, Prince of Wales, planned to start his weekend with an enjoyable ride through Kew Gardens. After crossing over Kew Bridge, a messenger approached Prince George, informing him that his grandfather, King George II, had collapsed earlier in the morning. Claiming his horse was having problems, the prince rode back to Kew Palace and prepared to take the throne (Brooke, 1972). While waiting for an update on his grandfather, Prince George wrote to his friend, mentor, and tutor John Stuart, third Earl of Bute. “A most extraordinary thing just happened to me when on the other side of the bridge one of the messengers came to me with a message from one of the King’s Pages that an accident had happened to my grandfather between seven and eight… I thought I had no time to lose in acquainting my Dearest Friend of this; I have ordered all the servants that were out to be silent about what had passed as they value their employments, and shall wait till I hear from you to know what further must be done” (Sedgwick, 1939, 48).

Later that morning, the young noble—now George III, King of Great Britain and Ireland and the Elector of Hanover—heard of his grandfather’s death and he quickly reached out to Bute again. “I am coming the back way to your house, I have received a letter from my Aunt with an account of the late King my grandfather’s death; the coach will be soon ready” (Sedgwick, 1939, 48).

Now in power, King George III and Bute made it very clear that they would pursue some major policy changes, including on foreign affairs and military matters. On the evening of October 25, only hours into his reign, the new King met with his Privy Council. George III read a speech Bute prepared, saying, “As I mount the throne in the midst of a bloody war, I shall endeavor to prosecute it in the manner most likely to bring an honorable and lasting peace.” While William Pitt the Elder, who had been managing the war efforts from his post as Secretary of State of the Southern Department, protested and persuaded the King and Bute to change “bloody war” to “an expensive but just and necessary war,” the message was clear. A new King was on the throne, Bute was his closest advisor, and they had a very different agenda than that of George II (Hibbert, 1998, 34-35).

Some of the Privy Council members clearly understood the message and accepted Bute’s role as the King’s closest advisor. The next day, the Duke of Newcastle, the prime minister, wrote the Earl of Hardwicke that the newly crowned King told him, “My Lord Bute is your good friend; he will tell you my thoughts at large.” Newcastle answered, “I thought my Lord Bute was so” (Yorke, 1913, 304).

Over the next two and a half years, George III and Lord Bute presented the most ambitious reform agenda that British politics had seen since the Hanoverian dynasty’s rise almost half a century before. The young King and his favorite offered a vision to change Britain’s political culture, including ending partisan battles and cleaning up corruption, while grappling with the problems of ending the Seven Years’ War and trying to keep the government solvent and the economy afloat despite the rapidly expanding national debt. While they achieved some victories, Bute bungled the change process and set the stage for a decade of political chaos, including various decisions to tax the colonies, sparking the American Revolution.

Despite the passage of two and a half centuries, American political leaders, running the gambit from Republicans like George W. Bush and Donald Trump to Democrats like Bill Clinton, Barack Obama, and now Joe Biden, found themselves confronting the same problems that George III and
Bute faced in the early 1760s, including ending long-term international conflicts and managing the national debt. George III and Bute's successes and failures show the importance of leadership in the change process and offer a roadmap for modern leaders dealing with the same problems they faced more than two and a half centuries ago.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

During the 19th century, most literature on the reform agenda George III embraced at the start of his six decades on the throne and on Bute mirrored historians’ politics. With a handful of exceptions, most opposition writers and Whig historians criticized George III and Bute while Tory historians defended them. Bute drew most German historians' scorn in the nineteenth century for his Prussian policies and his poor relations with Frederick the Great (Schweizer, 1988).

Modern studies of George III’s reform agenda and Bute’s role in enacting it began in 1929 and 1930 with the works of Sir Lewis Namier, one of the most legendary historians of the last century. In The Structure of Politics at the Accession of George III (1957) and England in the Age of the American Revolution (1961), Namier destroyed the Whig argument that extreme partisanship dominated British politics in the late 1750s and early 1760s. In his recent biography of Namier, Hayton (2019) noted the “Namier thesis” showed “the inherited party labels of ‘Whig’ and ‘Tory’ meant nothing when applied to the practicalities of parliamentary life in the 1760s” and “political principle was not a factor in the ‘personal reshufflings’ which formed the basis of ministerial reconstruction.” According to Hayton, the “Namier thesis” also focused on Bute, finding “the accepted narrative of the early years of George III’s reign was a delusion: the notion that the young king, encouraged by his mother and his tutor Lord Bute, came to the throne determined to restore power to the crown, through massive corruption and the assistance of subservient politicians known as the ‘king’s friends.’” Namier also held Edmund Burke, a leader of the opposition to Bute and a close ally of the Marquess of Rockingham, as responsible for starting what the historian termed the “black legend” of painting George III as a tyrant (Hayton, 2019, 171).

While Namier pushed back against the notion that Bute favored an absolute monarchy, the historian did not defend the prime minister, finding him too divorced from reality as he pushed his reform agenda. "The theatricals which had originally introduced him to Leicester House, were his proper element; sense of reality he had none," Namier wrote of Bute. "While craving for power, he emphatically disclaimed all thought of it, and while working hard to establish his sole authority, he had his eyes fixed all the time on the grand, moving scene of his future resignation" (Namier, 1961, 133). According to Namier, Bute was "disturbing and ineffective" and possessed "unfitness for a place of responsibility" (Namier, 1961, 134).

Other historians have also offered insights on Bute’s political career with Middleton (1985) looking at the Pitt-Newcastle ministry; Anderson (2000) presenting a magisterial examination of the Seven Years’ War; and Bullion (1982) chronicling the Grenville ministry which followed Bute’s stint in leadership. Bute’s efforts to end the Seven Years’ War ranked as his top priority during his tenure in power. Despite being seven decades old, Rashed’s (1951) book on the Treaty of Paris in 1763 remains an excellent resource that should be harnessed with Calloway’s (2006) look at how the peace agreement impacted North America. Rea’s (1963) examination of the press’ role in British politics in the first decade and a half also offered insights on Bute’s leadership, including his eventual resignation.
Biographers have generally avoided Bute, and most looks at him have focused on his relationship with George III. In the collection of correspondence Sedgwick (1939) compiled contains far more letters from George III than Bute, that historian hoped to discover "the origin of the mythology that has grown up around George III" (Sedgwick, 1939, viii). With an excellent introduction, the letters included in Sedgwick’s book fleshed out the ties between George III and his tutor. McKelvey (1973) also looked at the relationship between the two men, but his study ends with the new King taking the throne. McKelvey found the “dangerous combination” of "hatred, bitterness and failure" that the young prince and Bute experienced during the last five years of George II's reign while "their self-righteous confidence" was "unshaken" helped explain their problems in the early 1760s (McKelvey, 1973, 141-142). Thankfully, Schweizer filled in the gap to some extent with his articles on Bute’s early efforts in obtaining a peace deal despite the opposition of William Pitt the Elder (1981) and other leaders, his clashing with the Duke of Newcastle (1977) over supporting Prussia, and his reputation over the decades. Banke recently completed a dissertation (2017) looking at Bute’s reform efforts but has not, as of now, released it to the public. Special attention also has to be paid to Bullion's recent examination of (2017) George III's early efforts, including his relationship and alliance with Bute, and how they helped set the stage for taxing the American colonies.

While Bute has not garnered much attention from biographers, other figures of the era, including George III, have received their fair share. Brooke’s (1972) biography of George III offered a great deal of insight and the young monarch and his relationship with Bute. Hibbert (1998) also touched on their relationship in his biography of George III. Pares (1953) included some insights on Bute in his look at George III’s relations with political leaders. While sharply differing from Namier on politics of the 1760s, Butterfield’s (1957) look at historians and George III and his take on the early years of the King’s reign remains influential.

Other political figures of the era have also been the subjects of excellent biographies, including Browning’s (1975) take on Bute’s rival Newcastle, Ayling’s work (1976) on Pitt the Elder, and Hoffman’s (1973) look at Lord Rockingham who was becoming the leader of the Whig opposition as Bute held power. Smith’s (1979) book on the rise of Lord North, already an up-and-coming political leader in the early 1760s, presented how the next generation of leadership viewed Bute. In particular, Charles Townshend, one of the most gifted, colorful, and erratic political leaders in British history who both worked with Bute and stood against him, has commanded the attention of scholars including Namier’s biography which Brooke (1964) finished, Forster’s examination of his colonial policies (1978) and Griffin’s magisterial look (2017) at how he and his brothers shaped British imperialism around the globe.

Some historians have recognized that the events and politics of the 1760s reflect contemporary issues. Tuchman (1984) examined "the pursuit by governments of policies contrary to their own interests," placing British taxation of colonial America alongside a host of fateful decisions ranging from a series of popes helping fuel the fires of the Reformation to U.S. handling of the Vietnam War (Tuchman, 1984, 4). While not uncritical of Bute, Tuchman pointed to other British leaders as more culpable in helping set the stage for the American Revolution (Tuchman, 1984). More recently, in his look at the Townshend brothers and their efforts in colonial America and Ireland, Griffin showcased lessons political leaders could learn from the British experience of the 1760s and 1770s (Griffin, 2017).
More than two and a half decades after it was first published, Kotter’s (2012) Leading Change is recognized as one of the most influential books on change management. Kotter explored the concepts of leadership and change in other works. In a pivotal early work, Kotter (1990) sketched out the differences between leadership and management as many of the key factors he highlighted are included in this study, including the importance of vision, communication, and empowering key subordinates. In recent years, Kotter (2014) has returned to his eight-step change process, making slight updates to it. More recently, in the wake of the COVID pandemic, Kotter joined Akhtar and Gupta (2021) as they tied together his theories on change, the differences between leadership and management, and the acceleration of change in the modern world.

Kotter’s model has drawn criticism on several fronts. In his review of change leadership models, Galli (2018) criticized Kotter’s model, insisting it is too driven from the top and too rigid in the order of its steps. Comparing and contrasting it to other change leadership models, Galli also criticized Kotter’s model for being more focused on process than people. Rajan and Ganesan (2017) criticized Kotter’s model for downplaying why change efforts are resisted. Pollack and Pollack (2015) found change efforts need to be incorporated throughout an organization and disagreed with Kotter’s top-down approach to dictate transformations. In her look at how to apply Kotter’s model to a part of the medical field, Aziz (2017) urged caution over skipping the steps and criticized its top-down nature. Despite her criticisms of Kotter’s model, Aziz conceded that it remains extremely useful.

George III and Bute took power in 1760 with an ambitious agenda to change British politics: ending almost a half-century of Whig rule in favor of a united political elite putting the national interest ahead of partisan or factional concerns; cutting down on corruption, including using government money to influence politics; bringing the expensive Seven Years’ War to an honorable close, and reining in the national debt and keeping the government solvent. None of these agenda items would be easily achievable by any means, especially for the young King and considering Bute’s relative lack of political experience.

Despite hailing from Scotland, Bute’s rise to power came as no surprise to Pitt, Newcastle, and the other Privy Council members. Born in 1713, twenty-five years before George III, Bute had an uneven career before the 1760s. Thanks to family connections, while in his mid-20s, Bute briefly sat in the House of Lords as one of the Scottish Representative Peers. But, in 1739, after only two years in office, Bute broke with his family and their allies by supporting war with Spain, and his political career went off the tracks. Bute spent the next six years in the political wilderness and in social exile in Scotland, finally returning to London in 1745 when he quickly became a friend of Frederick Lewis, Prince of Wales, and Princess Augusta (McKelvey, 1973). Bute served as the young prince's tutor and a positive male role model after Prince Frederick's death in 1751. By 1755, Bute had risen from political obscurity to become one of the leaders of Leicester House, where the Prince of Wales held court during the Georgian period, entrusted by Princess Augusta to watch over her son and defend his interests. The two men grew exceptionally close, with George dubbing Bute his "Dearest Friend" (Brooke, 1972). To the dismay of his ministers and leaders in Parliament, George III turned to Bute to head his government during the close of the Seven Years’ War. Bute leapfrogged the likes of Pitt, the Duke of Cumberland, and Newcastle to serve as Prime Minister (Pares, 1953).
Bute came to power planning to push for significant changes. Even as early as 1757, while only 18, George, with the support of Bute, had the foundations of his reform agenda drawn up, including rejecting officeholders, reducing the national debt, and slashing government expenses. Promising to meet "force with force," in a letter to Bute, the young prince sounded ready to pursue his agenda, which included "restoring my much loved country to her ancient state of liberty; of seeing her in time free from her present load of debts and again famous for being the residence of true piety and virtue." Portraying his uncle, the Duke of Cumberland, and his supporters as "mirmidons of the blackest kind," Prince George also warned Bute that a "handful of men might place himself on the throne and establish despotism here" (Sedgwick, 1939, 6). For his part, Bute agreed with that assessment as he and Princess Augusta worried over Cumberland usurping the throne, even thinking he could follow in the footsteps of Richard III (Middleton, 1985).

George III and Bute thought that one way of reducing the politicians' power was by cutting government costs and reducing the national debt. During his years as a tutor, Bute stressed the evils of the national debt and how it could lead to massive political corruption (Bullion, 2017). One of the reasons that the King and Bute wanted an honorable end to the war as quickly as possible was the shocking rise of the national debt. In 1756, the national debt stood at £74.6 million. By the end of the war, it had reached more than £132 million (Land, 2010).

From the start of his reign, George III put the British political world on notice that he would not rule like previous Hanoverian kings. On November 18, 1760, less than a month after he ascended to the throne, George III addressed Parliament for the first time and stressed that he would be a far different king than either his grandfather or great-grandfather. For example, unlike the first two Hanoverian monarchs, George III considered Great Britain—not Hanover in Germany—his home. “Born and educated in this Country, I glory in the Name of Briton; and the peculiar Happiness of My Life will ever consist in promoting the Welfare of a People, whose Loyalty and warm Affection to Me I consider as the greatest and most permanent Security of My Throne; and I doubt not, but their Steadiness in those Principles will equal the Firmness of My invariable Resolution to adhere to, and strengthen, this excellent Constitution in Church and State; and to maintain the Toleration inviolable,” George III told Parliament. “The Civil and Religious Rights of My loving Subjects are equally dear to Me with the most valuable Prerogatives of My Crown: And, as the surest Foundation of the Whole, and the best Means to draw down the Divine Favor on My Reign, it is My fixed Purpose to countenance and encourage the Practice of true Religion and Virtue” (Baskett, 1760).

While historians continue to debate the influence of Lord Bolingbroke, particularly his The Idea of a Patriot King, on George III and Bute, they certainly embraced much of the agenda laid out by that political and intellectual leader. The new King and Bute drew from Tories and the County Whigs to lay out a vision for a patriotic regime that would reel in corruption and patronage driven partisanship by reducing the size and cost of the government, which required ending the war and reducing the national debt while keeping a strong military (Bullion, 2017). Once in power, George III and Bute quickly tried to put this reform plan into action though they faced pushback from the established political leaders—which was what the new King and his top ally had expected. Both George III and Bute came into power with a distrust of politicians, including William Pitt the Elder and the Duke of Newcastle, who led Parliament through the first half of the Seven Years’ War. Despite calling for a rejection of political factionalism, George III and Bute were ready for political conflict. Over Christmas 1759, less than a year before George II’s death, the young Prince of Wales...
wrote Bute that “if I am but steady and have your assistance, we may make them all smart for their ingratitude” (Sedgwick, 1939, 35).

Soon after taking the throne, George III contrasted his behavior with his grandfather’s, writing to Bute that George II had been in a “state of bondage” thanks to his ministers while the new King insisted, he "ought to risk everything rather than submit" to the politicians. George III even sounded ready to pit his popularity against Pitt’s. "I rely on the hearts of my subjects, the only true support of the Crown," the King wrote, insisting "they will never join the man who from his own ambition, pride and impracticability, means to disturb my quiet and (what I feel much stronger) the repose of my subjects." George III ended the letter to Bute with an indication that he was ready to take Pitt on. "I will not permit Ministers to trample on me that my subjects will in time come to esteem me unworthy of the Crown I wear" (Sedgwick, 1939, 49-50). However, it would not be easy, especially as Pitt was increasingly popular, being credited with helping achieve military success, including taking Quebec and Guadeloupe and defending India from the French in 1759. By the time George III took the throne, Pitt was a popular hero (Namier, 1961).

Having worked with Bute to some extent for five years, Pitt and Newcastle tried at first to work with the King’s favorite. With Bute having the King’s confidence, something they certainly did not possess, Pitt and Newcastle accepted political reality and welcomed him into the ministry. Despite having served in the ministry for a decade, Robert Darcy, Earl of Holdernesse, found himself out of power to make room for Bute. Pitt and Newcastle tossed Holdernesse aside and replaced him as Secretary of State of the Northern Department with Bute. In the resulting reshuffling, Newcastle moved powers from the Board of Trade to the Secretary of State of the Southern Department without notifying Pitt, starting a schism between those two leaders (Middleton, 1985).

Bute did not start his new responsibilities on the right foot, protesting that he wanted to nothing to do with holding office. Repeatedly, both to George III and other leaders, Bute insisted he did not want the post and claimed he was only following the King’s wishes in serving in the Cabinet. “Soon after the Demise, the King, too partial to my poor services, insisted for several weeks upon my taking the Secretary’s Office,” Bute wrote Holdernesse in March 1761. “I then used every argument to show in how much better hands the Seales were placed, how much more useful I could be in a private line, how infinitely more agreeable to myself.” Stressing his admiration for Holdernesse, Bute wrote, “condolence suits me better than congratulation, and I venture to affirm your Lordship leaves it not with half the regret that I receive it” (Wortley, 1925, 26). While politicians have always played down their ambitions, especially in the 18th century, Bute might not have put on airs of false modesty here based on his later actions.

As he entered the ministry, Bute found himself forced to balance an increasingly disharmonious team despite the three leaders each having their own source of power. Newcastle controlled Parliament through his masterful use of patronage. Thanks to successful military campaigns, Pitt ranked as the popular favorite, no small factor with a general election in 1761. Bute, of course, retained the support of the King. The three men attempted to work together with Newcastle as prime minister and Bute and Pitt serving as Secretaries of State. (Schweizer, 1981) However, as photographers and students of the First and Second Triumvirates that helped bring down the Roman republic can attest, tripods are not the most stable of structures and it did not take much for the new arrangement to collapse.
Bute found himself in the middle as the Pitt-Newcastle partnership, which had dominated British politics over the past four years, started to fracture. Even as peace negotiations began, Pitt wanted to support expanded military operations against France and her allies. At the same time, Newcastle and most of the Cabinet were more open to ending the war. With the ministry upheld after the elections, Bute claimed the middle ground between Pitt and Newcastle, being far more open to compromise with the French than his fellow Secretary of State while more insistent on protecting British gains than the prime minister and the Cabinet. Thanks mainly to Pitt's high-handed rejection of French peace offerings, namely over fishing rights off Newfoundland, during the summer of 1761, Bute found himself drawing closer to Newcastle (Schweizer, 1981). However, Bute and Newcastle also had their differences, especially over the prime minister's desire to continue supporting Frederick the Great's Prussian armies financially. At the same time, the King and his favorite were willing to end that support (Anderson, 2000). While the ministry dithered over reaching a peace agreement, France was bolstered when the Family Compact drew that nation closer with Spain (Rashed, 1951).

The focus of the ministry’s internal debates quickly shifted as Pitt called for a preemptive strike against Spain, forcing Bute to align with Newcastle (Schweizer, 1981). Bute and Pitt clashed over the matter in a Cabinet meeting on September 18, 1761. The next day, the King wholeheartedly backed Bute over Pitt on expanding the war and attacking Spain. “I highly approve the part my Dearest Friend took yesterday, it was the only way of keeping up the honour of the British Crown, of acting with justice, and of overturning Mr. Pitt’s black scheme,” George III wrote Bute. “I thank heaven that you know him so well, that being the case his venom is not to be feared; were any of the Ministers as spirited as you are my Dearest Friend, I would say let that mad Pitt be dismissed, but as matters are very different from that we must get rid of him in a happier minute than the present one” (Sedgwick, 1939, 63). Despite having worked together to obtain funds for Leicester House during the latter half of the 1750s, Bute had expected trouble from Pitt even before his pupil wore the crown. In 1759, Count Viri, the Sardinian minister, told Newcastle that he had spoken with Bute about Pitt. “Lord Bute said, Mr. Pitt was not contended to be Secretary of State but he must direct the Treasury too, which he out not to do.” While “the Prince of Wales and Lord Bute esteemed Mr. Pitt,” they thought “that his temper and his overbearing were what they could not but much blame” (Yorke, 1913, 54).

With next to no support for attacking Spain from the rest of the ministry, Pitt resigned his post, promising not to go into opposition thanks largely to Bute arranging for his wife to become a noble and for an annual £3,000 pension (Middleton, 1985). Having reached that agreement, Bute then broke with precedent to publicly release the pension details while his allies in the press released pamphlets attacking Pitt. "Insofar as possible, the ungracious Scot had insured that if Pitt went into opposition, he could not easily stake his customary claim to the moral high ground," noted Anderson (2000) about Bute's preemptive strike on Pitt. "And for that, three thousand pounds a year must have seemed a bargain indeed" (Anderson, 2000, 486).

With Pitt out of the ministry, the alliance between Bute and Newcastle grew increasingly strained, especially as the King took sides, backing his old mentor over his prime minister. In 1761, Newcastle pushed to expand the national debt with a £14 million loan for the next year’s budget and settled for £12 million (Bullion, 2017). But Newcastle quickly insisted that such a sum was not enough and began pushing for more loans. As the ministry debated pulling troops out of Prussia to focus on naval expenses, Newcastle called for £2 million in more loans. In comparison, Bute
and other ministers were reluctant to expand the debt by more than £1 million. Newcastle insisted this was not enough and resigned his posts as prime minister and overseeing the Treasury, paving the way for Bute to replace him in both positions at the end of May 1762 (Bullion, 2017).

Now Prime Minister, Bute showed he could create a coalition of his own, including reaching out to key leaders. As Bute seized more of the reins of power, he expanded his coalition to include some of the top figures in Parliament. With Pitt out, Bute courted George Grenville, a rising man in Parliament and Pitt’s brother-in-law, tapping him to serve as the administration’s leader in the House of Commons (Bullion, 2017). When Grenville proved unwilling to defend the peace efforts, Bute moved him to the Admiralty and brought Henry Fox in to replace him as the leader in the House of Commons (Bullion, 1982). While Fox ranked as one of his generation’s most skilled political leaders, he also epitomized business as usual, including relying on patronage, undermining much of the King’s and Bute’s vision of reforming British politics. George III despised Fox and thought he had no principles (Brooke, 1972). However, Bute was able to expand his coalition in Parliament by bringing Fox onboard. Another problematic member of the new government was the erratic Charles Townshend, who moved in and out of the ministry under Bute, serving in the ministry the Board of Trade despite the King’s constant suspicions. (Namier & Brooke, 1964).

As the leader in the House of Commons, Fox helped quell criticism of the peace deal and was able to get it across the finish line, a major win for George III and Bute (Bullion, 2017). Through the treaty, Great Britain gained all of Canada, the Louisiana territory stretching from the Appalachian Mountains to the Mississippi River, Florida, Senegal, and several islands in the Caribbean, including Dominica, Grenada, St. Vincent, and Tobago. While giving up several conquests made during the war, ranging from Havana to Manilla, Great Britain regained Minorca, which the French had taken during the war. While Pitt continued to attack the treaty and called for more aggressive measures against Spain and France, the final peace agreement generally proved popular (Lovat-Fraser, 1912). While Fox did the heavy lifting in the House of Commons, Bute took to the floor in the House of Lords, offering a rare speech and garnering applause for his efforts, including from enemies like the Duke of Cumberland (Lovat-Fraser, 1912).

Even with the war ending, Great Britain continued to struggle with the national debt. Looking to rectify the revenue problems, Bute proposed an excise tax of four shillings for every hogshead of cider which the brewers would pay (Anderson, 2000). Pitt led the opposition to the proposal, which proved highly unpopular even as Charles Townshend tried to add a tax on molasses to it, the first of the series of proposed taxes on the American colonies that increasingly grew prominent throughout the 1760s (Bullion, 1982). Grenville led the ministry’s forces in the House of Commons, but Pitt routed him in debate, even as the measure cleared the chamber (Ayling, 1976).

Bute’s support of the cider tax increase added to his unpopularity. Thanks in large part to his sudden rise at Pitt’s expenses, Scottish roots, and his close ties to the royal family, Bute drew heavy criticism and opposition, even by the standards of eighteenth-century politics. During his time in power, despite relying on famed boxers for bodyguards, Bute repeatedly found himself threatened by mobs, some of which came close to harming him. Other mobs burned him in effigy or included a boo (which led to the term “jackboot”) to symbolize him and petticoats, representing Princess Augusta, who they thought controlled her son and was having an affair with his favorite, in their demonstrations. Following Pitt’s resignation, Bute also found himself pummeled in the
press, facing a barrage of attacks through pamphlets and other outlets (Brewer, 1973). Many of the attacks came from the pen of John Wilkes, a Member of Parliament and supporter of Pitt who was disappointed to be denied patronage by Bute and savaged him in *The North Briton* and other forums (Cash, 2006). With the name of Stuart and less than two decades after the Jacobite uprising, Bute faced prejudice over his Scottish ancestry, especially as more people from Scotland moved to London during the 1750s and 1760s, including taking positions in the government (Schweizer, 1997).

As was seen with how he leaked the information about Pitt’s pension to the public, Bute had allies in the press and many on his payroll or getting money from the government, and he was not afraid to use them. These included the legendary writer Samuel Johnson and the artist William Hogarth who offered prints showcasing Bute in a positive light while trashing his political enemies. In the first of the “Times” prints, Hogarth weighed in on the war, showing a neighborhood on fire thanks to Pitt while the Newcastle Inn was collapsing. In the second of the “Times” prints, Hogarth had Bute operating the pump on a fountain featuring a statue of the new King, letting a garden flourish while Wilkes was in the pillory and Pitt was aiming a gun at a dove, symbolizing his opposition to peace (Rea, 1963). Bute also relied heavily on John Home, a Scottish minister and playwright who worked as his secretary. Home went out of his way to write poems and plays, which presented Bute in a good light (Sher, 1988).

Still, even with his press team and their efforts, Bute’s personality and lack of political experience undermined his effectiveness as a leader and his efforts to enact the change vision he and the King shared. Soon after obtaining the highest office he could possibly hold, Bute quickly looked for a way out. At the end of January 1763, after eight months as prime minister, Bute wrote his friend Dr. Campbell that he hoped to exit the political stage. "A few months ago...the storm that hung over this poor country and my head in particular, grew blacker every minute," Bute wrote, insisting that resigning in 1762 would "have been treason, and ingratitude to the best of Princes." Bute claimed that, with the King now sitting comfortably on the throne and the peace treaty almost finalized, he could now "retire in quiet, and pass the autumnal part of life, unruflled by the little, infamous scenes, the black ingratitude.” Proceeding to complain about his health, Bute bombarded his friend with a litany of problems, ranging from insomnia to not getting any exercise to irregular bowel movements. While he lived another four decades after writing the letter, Bute insisted “my health therefore dictates retirement from the greatest weight that ever lay on any man in this country” (Sedgwick, 1939, lxi-lxii).

After two and a half years of championing the reform agenda, Bute waved the white flag. “In my opinion the Angel Gabriel could not at present govern this country, but by means too long practiced and such as my soul abhors,” Bute wrote Campbell. “If this be so, it matters little to the King or State who shall distribute loaves and fishes, but to my mode of thinking, these arts are the most repugnant” (Sedgwick, 1939, lxii). Having experienced challenges to his change vision, Bute abandoned his efforts. In March and April 1763, Bute actively looked for a successor at the Treasury and as Prime Minister, first pushing Henry Fox, who drew George III's initial opposition though the King eventually relented. But Fox refused the offer, leaving the King and Bute scrambling for a replacement. While they considered the Earl of Halifax, who led the Board of Trade under Newcastle and had served as Secretary of State of both the Northern and Southern
Department under Bute, eventually the King and Bute settled on Grenville who took the post at the end of April after a series of intense negotiations and power and patronage (Bullion, 2017).

Two and a half years after George III took the throne, Bute was out of office. His influence on George III waned rapidly in the years to come with the King promising future ministers that he would not consult or socialize with Bute. While George III continued to refer to Bute as his "dearest friend" in correspondence, they were no longer as close as they once were. After that, the King kept the former prime minister out of politics (Brooke, 1972). While some historians insist the King cut Bute off after the 1770s, George III continued to write his old mentor on occasion. In 1788, right before his 50th birthday and his first bout with mental illness, George III wrote about a lesson he had learned over the years, to “attempt to keep my desires within a narrow compass, that my disappointments be fewer” (Bullion, 2017, 362). That was a far different tone than that he had expressed on taking the throne almost 30 years before when he and Bute vowed to change British political culture.

**METHODOLOGY**

Kotter (2012) offered eight steps for change management. These steps consist of "establishing a sense of urgency," "creating the guiding coalition," "developing a vision and strategy," "communicating the change vision," "empowering broad-based action," "generating short-term wins," "consolidating gains and producing more change," and "anchoring new approaches in the culture." While claiming his steps are "very poorly understood" by the "general population of leaders and managers," Kotter also maintained that the book's success surprised him. "Even today, all the recognition the book has received is a bit hard for me to take in," Kotter wrote in his preface to the second edition of *Leading Change*. "But objectively, I do see how it describes the path of a very powerful set of trends that go back a half-century and will probably continue through my lifetime." Kotter claimed current trends "demand more agility and change-friendly organizations; more leadership from more people, and not just top management; more strategic sophistication; and, most basically, a much greater capacity to execute bold strategic initiatives rapidly while minimizing the size and number of bumps in the road to slow you down." (Kotter, 2012, vii-ix)

Reviewing his findings and the challenges contemporary leaders face, Kotter boiled them down into two simple sentences. "Speed of change is the driving force," Kotter insisted. “Leading change competently is the only answer.” (Kotter, 2012, ix) However, Kotter did not examine how his steps could apply to change leadership efforts in the past.

**RESEARCH FINDINGS**

Kotter (2012) presented eight steps to create major change including “establishing a sense of urgency, creating the guiding coalition, developing a vision and strategy, communicating the change vision, empowering a broad base of people to take action, generating short-term wins, consolidating gains and producing even more change, and institutionalizing new approaches in the culture” (Kotter, 2012, 24). While not exactly tailored to the 18th century, Kotter's steps provide insights into Bute's failure to change British politics permanently. They offer an excellent model to see where Bute succeeded and failed as he offered the most dramatic change vision that British politics had seen since the Hanoverian ascension in 1714.

Whatever his successes in office, namely the Treaty of Paris, Bute fell short of his goal to build a nonpartisan political culture and to control the national debt, leaving British politics far more
divided and partisan over the rest of George III’s time on the throne. Using Kotter’s metrics, Bute earned mixed marks at best as he tried to advance a reform agenda. By focusing on the national debt, Bute created a sense of urgency in his efforts to push the cider tax and the treaty. Bute also developed a vision for reform though he undermined it with bad tactical and strategic decisions. While he tied some political leaders and officeholders to him through patronage, Bute never created a permanent coalition, thanks largely to his rivalries with Pitt and Newcastle and their continued importance in Parliament. Outside of Fox and, to a lesser extent, Grenville, Bute never empowered his supporters and allies in the ministry though he could rely on an excellent team in the press. Bute’s allies in the press helped him communicate his change agenda. However, Bute could have done more there himself as a member of the House of Lords though Fox, as his leader in the House of Commons, helped on that front. Still, Bute won some short-term victories, including getting the peace agreement and the cider tax through Parliament. However, he did not stay in power long enough to consolidate those gains. Two years after Bute fell on his sword, Parliament repealed the cider tax and turned its attention to taxing the colonies, including the Stamp Act, which helped launch the series of events that led to the American Revolution (Tuchman, 1984). In any case, because he did not stay in power long, Bute could not produce more change and institutionalize his reforms.

Still, Bute came closer to achieving his goal than many historians realize despite his missteps in achieving change. With the crown’s power behind him, Bute could have led from the House of Lords while he had an able—if politically immoral—lieutenant in Henry Fox at the point in the Commons. Pares (1953) wrote that if Bute had played his cards better, he could have been a political power the way Lord Sunderland had been under Queen Anne at the start of the century. However, Bute’s character ensured he did not achieve his goals. Burns (1978) noted that conflict was an essential part of legislative leadership. While far more focused on the American presidency than the British prime ministry, Burns found the same held true of executive leadership. (Burns, 1978) Conflict is part of leadership and the change process and, with his limited political experience before joining the ministry, Bute was not ready for it. Facing a series of harsh attacks, Bute could not stand criticism though, admittedly, the physical threats, attacks on his nationality, and the accusations of adultery with Princess Augusta were above and beyond the norm.

Bute seemed well-positioned to help George III push their shared reform agenda, but he simply did not have the character or the background to achieve his change vision. Historians have rightly painted Bute as ill-equipped to the task. Pares insisted that Bute needed more ability and political toughness to achieve his goals, much like Sir Robert Walpole displayed during his two decades in charge of Parliament. Bute did not have the experience or the character to manage things like Walpole had. “Either he had not foreseen the dead set which the politicians made at him, or had he not known how much he would dislike it,” Pares wrote of Bute, noting he lost interest in political leadership when he had to focus more on patronage than pushing reform. “Brought down from his dream of leading the country by an example of virtue and patriotism, to the mere distribution of loaves and fishes, he found this business neither edifying nor interesting, nor he was very good at it” (Pares, 1953, 103-104).

Namier (1961) portrayed Bute as the type of man who had no business wielding political power, noting that he had grown close to Prince Frederick, George III’s father, through performing in amateur theater productions together. “The theatricals which had originally introduced him to
Leicester House, were his proposed element; sense of reality he had none,” Namier insisted of Bute. “While craving for power, he empathically disclaimed all he thought of it, and while working hard to establish his sole authority, he had his eyes fixed all the time on the grand, moving scene of his future resignation” (Namier, 1961, 133).

Brooke (1972) painted Bute as a “pendant, a man of learning without wisdom, eager to apply his knowledge to the business of politics and unacquainted with the real dispositions of mankind,” even a “typical intellectual” whose “learning instead of teaching him humility only added to his pride.” While admitting Bute had some strengths, including a “remarkable” interest in science, Brooke maintained that he had business playing a role on the political stage. “Bute aspired to teach a boy how to become a king and sought in books the answer to the mystery of statecraft,” Brooke wrote. “He should never have gone to Court. His proper place was in an Oxford common room. He is the most finished example in British history of the done in politics” (Brooke, 1972, 47).

These assessments ring true, especially in light of Bute's hermit crab-like performance, scrambling from one shell to another until he finally obtained the highest post attainable to him, only to scurry away from power and responsibility when the attacks intensified on him. Perhaps had Bute suffered more of the slings and arrows that accompany most political careers, he would have been better prepared for the attacks. However, with such a meteoric rise and little experience in Parliament, Bute was unprepared for the criticism. Bute offered a change vision. Despite his lack of experience and other political handicaps, he took the first steps to implement it before resigning his office and abandoning his reform efforts. As the example of Bute shows, managing change relies on leadership, which often comes down to character, including a thick skin—something Bute did not have.

CONCLUSION

George III came to the throne in 1760 with a dramatic change agenda, hoping to push the most extensive series of reforms that British politics had seen in almost half a century. As his closest advisor, eventually rising to be prime minister, Bute was the main enactor of this agenda. While he scored some significant wins, including getting the Treaty of Paris and the cider tax increase through Parliament, Bute fell short of his goals, thanks largely to his early resignation after drawing heavy criticism and even facing physical attacks.

Bute’s resignation led to massive political instability in the coming years, even as the British government started taxing the colonies, sparking the American Revolution. It took almost a decade for George III to grow comfortable with a prime minister again as a series of leaders took quick stints in that office. Best remembered for passing the Stamp Act, Grenville held the post for two years before George III dismissed him (Bullion, 1982). The Marquis of Rockingham, the leader of the Whig opposition, had a year as prime minister but could not keep a coalition together despite successfully repealing the Stamp Act (Hoffman, 1973). Pitt, now Lord Chatham, served as prime minister for two years, during which Townshend was able to get additional taxes and duties placed on the American colonies. But Chatham was in poor health and simply did not wield power in the House of Lords as he had in the House of Commons. After two disappointing years in office, Chatham resigned in favor of the Duke of Grafton (Ayling, 1976). Grafton did not last long in power wither, serving only a year and a half before being replaced by Lord North, who served a dozen years, including overseeing the unsuccessful military effort against the American rebels (Smith, 1979).
In his short tenure at the heights of political power, Bute showed the importance of following and enacting all of the steps in Kotter’s change model. (Kotter, 2012) Despite his transformative vision, Bute relied on transactional methods, no surprise considering his connections to George III and his parents were why he came to power. In many ways, Bute epitomized the perils of reform leadership as laid out by Burns (1978) in his seminal study Leadership. Burns pointed to the “tendency of members of the nobility, aristocracy, gentry, and higher bourgeoisie to take the lead in reforming the very system that seems to shore up their positions of privilege.” He also warned that reform leaders often "act on the benevolent notion that true politics is simply morals applied to public affairs, but they find in the heat of battle that true politics is the everyday scuffling and swapping in governmental and political marketplace" (Burns, 1978, 199-200). With only a few years in the House of Lords, some twenty years before George III came to the throne, Bute found himself ill-prepared for the politics and conflicts which arose from pursuing his change vision and quickly bowed off the stage.

RECOMMENDATIONS

While Bute has been left at the bottom of the proverbial dustbin of history, the issues he attempted to tackle remain important in the U.S. today. Over the past three decades, various presidents and political leaders have grappled with taxation, revenue, and international commitments and conflicts while facing a rising national debt. As the likes of Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, Barack Obama, Donald Trump, and now Joe Biden came to power promising changes from the previous regime, many of them echoed Bute's calls for cutting down on military action abroad, changing the establishing political system, and reducing the national debt. Like Bute, whatever the various successes of these presidents, none of them quite succeeded on these fronts. As strange as it may seem more than two and a half centuries later, activists and leaders wanting to change American politics might want to follow the example that George III set in the 1750s and take a few lessons from the example of his mentor, tutor, and “dearest friend” Lord Bute. With no biography on Bute currently in print, more research needs to be done on this important political leader. Bute’s efforts to champion reform also offer an example of how Kotter’s change leadership model can be applied to historical examples.

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