

The French & Indian War

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France had begun its North American empire in 1534, when Jacques Cartier explored the St. Lawrence River. In 1608, Samuel de Champlain founded the town of Quebec, the first permanent French settlement in North America.

After establishing Quebec, French priests and traders spread into the heart of the continent. In 1682, Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle, claimed the entire Mississippi Valley for France, naming it Louisiana in honor of King Louis XIV. However, by 1754 the European population of New France, the French colony in North America, had grown to only about 70,000 (compared to more than 1,000,000 in the British colonies).

From the start, New France differed from the British colonies. Typical French colonists included fur traders and Catholic priests who wanted to convert Native Americans. Neither had a desire to build towns or raise families.

The French colonists also developed friendlier relations with Native Americans than did the British. They relied on Hurons, Ottawas, Ojibwas, and others to do most of the trapping and then traded with them for the furs, which were in great demand in Europe. This trade relationship led to several military alliances. As early as 1609, for example, the Algonquin and other Native Americans used Champlain's help to defeat their traditional enemies, the Mohawk Iroquois.

As the French empire in North America expanded, it collided with the growing British empire. France and Great Britain had already fought two inconclusive wars during the previous half-century. In 1754, the French-British conflict reignited. In that year, the French built Fort Duquesne at the point where the Allegheny and Monongahela rivers join to form the Ohio—the site of modern Pittsburgh. However, the British had previously granted 200,000 acres of land in the Ohio country to a group of wealthy planters. The Virginia governor sent militia, a group of ordinary citizens who performed military duties, to evict the French.

The small band, led by an ambitious 22-year-old officer named George Washington, established an outpost called Fort Necessity about 40 miles from Fort Duquesne. In May 1754, Washington's militia attacked a small detachment of French soldiers, and the French swiftly counterattacked. In the battle that followed in July, the French forced Washington to surrender. Although neither side realized it, these battles at Fort Necessity were the opening of the French and Indian War, the fourth war between Great Britain and France for control of North America.

A year after his defeat, Washington again headed into battle, this time as an aide to the British general Edward Braddock, whose mission was to drive the French out of the Ohio Valley.

Braddock first launched an attack on Fort Duquesne. As Braddock and nearly 1,500 soldiers neared the fort, French soldiers and their Native American allies ambushed them. The British soldiers,

accustomed to enemies who marched in orderly rows rather than ones who fought from behind trees, turned and fled.

Washington showed incredible courage, while the weakness of the supposedly invincible British army surprised him and many other colonists. They began to question the competence of the British army, which suffered defeat after defeat during 1755 and 1756.

<p>Angered by French victories, Britain's King George II selected new leaders to run his government in 1757. One of these was William Pitt, an energetic, self-confident politician. Under Pitt, the reinvigorated British army finally began winning battles, which prompted the powerful Iroquois to support them. Now Britain had some Native American allies to balance those of France.</p> <p>In September 1759, the war took a dramatic and decisive turn on the Plains of Abraham just outside Quebec. Under the cover of night, British troops under General James Wolfe scaled the high cliffs that protected Quebec. Catching the French and their commander, the Marquis de Montcalm, by surprise,</p>	<p>they won a short but deadly battle. The British triumph at Quebec led them to victory in the war.</p> <p>The French and Indian War officially ended in 1763 with the Treaty of Paris. Great Britain claimed all of North America east of the Mississippi River. This included Florida, which Britain acquired from Spain, an ally of France. Spain gained the French lands west of the Mississippi, including the city of New Orleans. France kept control of only a few small islands near Newfoundland and in the West Indies. The other losers in the war were Native Americans, who found the victorious British harder to bargain with than the French had been</p>
<p>Claiming ownership of the Ohio River Valley brought Great Britain trouble. Native Americans feared that the growing number of British settlers crossing the Appalachian mountains would soon drive away the game they depended on for survival. In the spring of 1763, the Ottawa leader Pontiac recognized that the French loss was a loss for Native Americans.</p> <p>"When I go to see the English commander and say to him that some of our comrades are dead, instead of bewailing their death, as our French brothers do, he laughs at me and at you. If I ask for anything for our sick, he refuses with the reply that he has no use for us. From all this you can well see that they are seeking our ruin. Therefore, my brothers, we must all swear their destruction and wait no longer." Pontiac quoted in <u>Red and White</u></p>	<p>Led by Pontiac, Native Americans captured eight British forts in the Ohio Valley and laid siege to two others. In angry response, British officers presented smallpox-infected blankets to two Delaware chiefs during peace negotiations, and the virus spread rapidly among the Native Americans. Weakened by disease and war, most Native American groups negotiated treaties with the British by the end of 1765.</p> <p>To avoid further conflicts with Native Americans, the British government issued the Proclamation of 1763, which banned all settlement west of the Appalachians. This ban established a Proclamation Line, which the colonists were not to cross. (See the map on page 87.) However, the British could not enforce this ban any more effectively than they could enforce the Navigation Acts, and colonists continued to move west onto Native American lands.</p>