French and Indian War, 1754–1763

Definition: **French and Indian War** from *Collins English Dictionary*

1 the war (1755–60) between the French and British, each aided by different Indian tribes, that formed part of the North American Seven Years' War

Summary Article: **French and Indian War (1754–1763)**

From *Encyclopedia of United States Indian Policy and Law*

The French and Indian War (1754–1763), called the Seven Years’ War in Europe, was the culmination of a series of major wars that pitted European nations against one another in a struggle for imperial supremacy. In North America, the French and Indian War involved French troops and their (primarily Algonquian) Indian allies against the British military, colonial militias, and Native allies principally drawn from the Iroquois confederacy. By 1760 the English had gained the upper hand, which forced the French to turn over the Louisiana Territory to the Spanish and, in the Treaty of Paris (1763), their Canadian possessions to the English. The war led to a greater emphasis by the British to engage American Indians in diplomatic relations even as the historic divide grew larger between American colonists and Native Americans.

The expansion of European empires in America led to increasing tensions and conflict during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The Spanish claimed the southern lands, ranging from Florida east to California. The French claimed the St. Lawrence Valley, the Great Lakes, the major tributaries of the Mississippi River (Ohio, Platte, Missouri, Arkansas), and the Mississippi River itself. The English, meanwhile, claimed the eastern seaboard stretching from Georgia to Maine. The English and French encroached on the lands of Algonquian tribes of the East Coast, such as the Abenakis; the five major tribes of the Southeast (the Cherokees, Chickasaws, Choctaws, Creeks, and Seminoles); the Iroquois Confederation; the tribes of the Great Lakes and northern plains, such as the Ottawas and Sioux; and the Plains Indians.

The first major conflict in North America between the British and the French, King William’s War (1689–1697), was followed by others: Queen Anne’s War (1703–1713), Dummer’s War (1722–1725), and King George’s War (1744–1749). Generally these were wars between the French and English, implacable enemies because of centuries of conflict in Europe. The wars were caused by rival claims of American empire, competition over the resources (such as furs) of the American interior, and conflicting religious views, the French being primarily Catholic and the English predominantly Anglican and Puritan. Control of the fur trade, in particular, brought American Indians into the conflict between the French and the British.

The French were more successful in befriending the Americans Indians, partly because they were less condescending toward the Indians than the English, and also because of the activities of French missionaries in converting the Indians to Catholicism. The English required their British-American colonies to have active militia comprised of citizen-soldiers, led by British regular troops. The French and Indians fought guerrilla warfare, which elicited the same response from the British. Both sides took scalps (the visible sign of the death of an enemy warrior). Indians such as the New England Algonquians...
were adept at raiding British-American settlements, killing, burning, looting, and kidnapping. The British responded in kind, committing appalling acts against Indian villages. For example, after years of heinous crimes committed by the St. Francis Indians against New Hampshire settlements, Major Robert Rogers led a band of rangers against the St. Francis village in October 1759, killing many innocent women and children.

The French and Indian War began in 1754, when Virginia governor Robert Dinwiddie sent Major George Washington of the Virginia militia to try and expel the French from the confluence of the Monongahela and Allegheny rivers. Washington fought a few skirmishes with the French but had to retreat. The next year a much larger British force under the command of General Edward Braddock returned to western Pennsylvania, but was defeated by the French stationed at Fort Duquesne. The French fort held out until 1758, when the English and their Native allies, including the Cherokees from the south, ousted the French. So tenuous was the relationship between the Cherokees and the American colonists that conflict erupted in 1758 into a full scale war, the Anglo-Cherokee War, which lasted until the defeat of the Cherokees in 1761. Meanwhile William Johnson, the British superintendent of Indian affairs, having befriended the Iroquois, led them north to attack the French fortification of Crown Point on Lake Champlain, the loss of which would allow the British to ascend Lake Champlain into Canada. Johnson was stopped, however, and had to retreat to Lake George, where he built Fort William Henry.

The French responded with forces under the command of the Marquis de Montcalm, attacking the fort and driving the British from the lakes of upper New York. The tide changed, however, when the British responded with a huge build-up of troops and ships, attacking the French fortress at Louisburg, which left the St. Lawrence Valley defenseless. Fort Frontenac on Lake Ontario fell soon after. These French defeats allowed British forces in 1759 to move up the St. Lawrence River to attack Quebec. The most significant battle occurred on the Plains of Abraham, where the British, led by James Wolfe, defeated the French under Montcalm. After the surrender of Quebec, Montreal followed suit a year later, and the British controlled New France.

Even so, some French allies refused to give up. When the British occupied the former French forts at Detroit and Michilimackinac, the neighboring Ottawas, Potawatomis, and Hurons refused to accommodate them. Led by the Ottawa chief Pontiac and inspired by a Delaware Indian called Neolin the Prophet, in 1763 the Indians of the Great Lakes and Old Northwest resisted British forces. Bloodshed and violent acts committed by both sides returned to the shores of the Great Lakes; British forts at Michilimackinac, Presque Isle, and Le Boeuf fell; and British-American farms and small settlements were overrun by the Senecas, Delawares, and Chippewas. Fort Detroit held out, and British reinforcements arrived. Pontiac sued for peace, and the region was again pacified.

Pontiac's War (1763–1766) exemplified the problems the British would encounter in trying to administer their expanded empire in North America in the wake of the French and Indian War. The British were wary of continuing conflicts between their settlers and trans-Appalachian Indian tribes, and King George III issued the Proclamation of 1763, which restricted American movement across the Appalachians and into the lands of the Ohio River Valley. To pay for the costs of the French and Indian War and to administer more effectively their expanded empire, the British tightened up old navigation laws, imposed the Sugar Act on the colonies, and passed the Stamp Act in 1765 to raise revenue; these acts were met with violent protest in the thirteen colonies. The French and Indian War and its aftermath convinced the British that they needed a permanent military presence in the colonies, which made worse the growing fear among many colonists that the British were attempting to impose a repressive

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tyranny on them.

Native American tribes, however, began to see the British colonies as a greater threat than the British Empire. The peace treaty that ended Pontiac's War showed the British willingness to engage in diplomacy with the American Indians. At the same time, however, British-American colonists still considered many North American tribes as enemies. When the American Revolution began in the 1770s, most American Indian tribes in the East sided with the British.

See also American Revolutionary War; Canada, Indian Policy of; France, Indian Policy of; Fur Trade; Great Britain, Indian Policy of; Johnson, William; Pennsylvania, Indian Policy of; Pontiac's Rebellion; Proclamation of 1763; Washington, George.

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