

Topic 3.2

The Seven Years' War

It is truly a miserable thing that we no sooner leave fighting our neighbors, the French, but we must fall to quarrelling among ourselves.

Reverend Samuel Johnson, minister in Connecticut, 1763

Learning Objective: Explain the causes and effects of the Seven Years' War (the French and Indian War).

Historic European rivalries, particularly between Great Britain, France, and Spain, had been brought to North America by the earliest immigrants from those nations. While the basis for the conflict between these nations may be found in Europe, disputes between them in their colonies served to intensify their differences. While Britain eventually triumphed in a series of 18th century wars, victory was at a cost that they never could have imagined: the rebellion and the loss of their Atlantic coast colonies.

Empires at War, 1689–1763

Late in the 17th century, a series of wars broke out involving Great Britain, France, and Spain. They were worldwide in scope, with battles in Europe, India, and North America, and they often involved other Europeans and natives of India and North America. The stakes were high for power in Europe and for control of colonies and their lucrative trade. In North America, the most valuable possessions were sugar-producing islands in the Caribbean Sea and the fur-trading network with American Indians in the interior of North America.

The First Three Wars

These conflicts occurred between 1689 and 1748 and were named after the British monarch under whose reign they occurred:

- In King William's War (1689–1697), the British launched expeditions to capture Quebec from the French, but they failed. American Indians supported by the French burned British frontier settlements.
- In Queen Anne's War (1702–1713), the British had more success. They gained both Nova Scotia from France and trading rights in Spanish America.

- King George’s War (1744–1748) was named for George II. In Georgia, James Oglethorpe led a colonial army that repulsed Spanish attacks. New Englanders captured Louisbourg in Canada, a major French fortress on Cape Breton Island that controlled access to the St. Lawrence River. In the peace treaty ending the war, however, Britain returned Louisbourg to the French in exchange for political and economic gains in India. New Englanders were furious about the loss of a fort that they had fought so hard to win.

The Decisive Conflict

In the first three wars, European powers saw little value in committing regular troops to America. They relied on “amateur” colonial forces. Further, most of the fighting was in Europe. However, by 1754, when the fourth and decisive conflict began, conditions had changed. Great Britain and France recognized the great value of their colonies for the raw materials they produced. Only about 60,000 settlers lived in the French colonies, but they worked with Native Americans to carry on a valuable fur trade. The British colonies were more densely populated, with about 1.2 million people. They produced grain, fish, tobacco, lumber and other products that fueled British industry.

The final war in this series was known in Europe as the **Seven Years’ War**. The North American phase of this war is often called the **French and Indian War**. It began in 1754 and ended in 1763.

Beginning of the War From the British point of view, the French provoked the war by building a chain of forts in the Ohio River Valley. One reason the French did so was to halt the westward growth of the British colonies. Hoping to stop the French from completing work on Fort Duquesne (Pittsburgh) and thereby win control of the Ohio River Valley, the governor of Virginia sent a small militia (armed force) under the command of a young colonel named **George Washington**. After gaining a small initial victory, Washington’s troops surrendered to a superior force of Frenchmen and their American Indian allies on July 3, 1754. With this military encounter in the wilderness, the final war for empire began.

At first the war went badly for the British. In 1755, another expedition from Virginia, led by General **Edward Braddock**, ended in a disastrous defeat, as more than 2,000 British regulars and colonial troops were routed by a smaller force of both French troops and American Indians near Fort Duquesne. The Algonquin allies of the French ravaged the frontier from western Pennsylvania to North Carolina. The French repulsed a British invasion of French Canada that began in 1756.

The Albany Plan of Union Recognizing the need for coordinating colonial defense, the British government had called for representatives from several colonies to meet in a congress at Albany, New York, in 1754. The delegates from seven colonies adopted an agreement—the **Albany Plan of Union**—developed by Benjamin Franklin that provided for an intercolonial

government and a system for recruiting troops and collecting taxes from the various colonies for their common defense. Each colony was too concerned about preserving its own taxation powers to accept the plan, however, and it never took effect. The Albany congress was significant, however, because it set a precedent for later, more revolutionary, congresses in the 1770s.

British Victory The British prime minister, William Pitt, concentrated the government's military strategy on conquering Canada. This objective was accomplished with the retaking of Louisbourg in 1758, the surrender of Quebec to General James Wolfe in 1759, and the taking of Montreal in 1760. After these British victories, the European powers negotiated a peace treaty (the **Peace of Paris**) in 1763. Great Britain acquired both French Canada and Spanish Florida. In compensation for Spain's loss of Florida, France ceded (gave up) to Spain its huge territory west of the Mississippi River known as Louisiana. With this treaty, the British extended their control of North America, and French power on the continent virtually ended.

Immediate Effects of the War Britain's victory in the Seven Years' War was a turning point in the military and diplomatic conflict for control of North America among the British, the French, the colonists, and various tribes of American Indians:

- It gave Great Britain unchallenged supremacy among Europeans in North America.
- It challenged the autonomy of many American Indians.
- It established the British as the dominant naval power in the world.
- It meant that the American colonies no longer faced the threat of concerted attacks from the French, the Spanish, and their American Indian allies.

More important to the colonies, though, was a change in how the British and the colonists viewed each other.

The British View of the War The British came away from the war with a low opinion of the colonial military abilities. They held the American militia in contempt as a poorly trained, disorderly rabble. Furthermore, they noted that some of the colonies had refused to contribute either troops or money to the war effort. Most British were convinced that the colonists were both unable and unwilling to defend the new frontiers of the vastly expanded British empire.

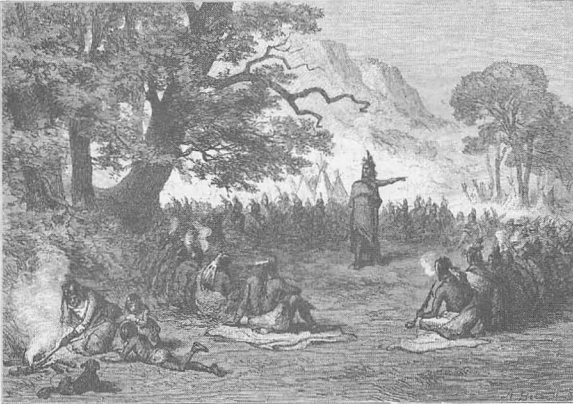
The Colonial View of the War The colonists took an opposite view of their military performance. They were proud of their record in all four wars and developed confidence that they could successfully provide for their own defense. They were not impressed with the British troops or leadership, as their methods of warfare seemed badly suited to the densely wooded terrain of eastern America.

Reorganization of the British Empire

More serious than the resentful feelings stirred by the war experience was the British government's shift in its colonial policies. Previously, Britain had exercised little direct control over the colonies and had not enforced its navigation acts regulating colonial trade. This earlier policy of **salutary neglect** was abandoned as the British adopted more forceful policies for taking control of their expanded North American dominions.

All four wars—and the last one in particular—had been extremely costly. In addition, Britain now felt the need to maintain a large British military force to guard its American frontiers. Among British landowners, pressure was building to reduce the heavy taxes that the government had levied to fund the colonial wars. To pay for troops to guard the frontier without increasing taxes at home, King George III and the dominant political party in Parliament (the Whigs) wanted the American colonies to bear more of the cost of maintaining the British empire.

Pontiac's Rebellion The first major test of the new British imperial policy came in 1763 when Chief Pontiac led an attack against colonial settlements on the western frontier. The American Indians were angered by the growing westward movement of European settlers onto their land and by the British refusal to offer gifts as the French had done. Pontiac's alliance of American Indians in the Ohio River Valley destroyed forts and settlements from New York to Virginia. Rather than relying on colonial forces to retaliate, the British sent regular British troops to put down the uprising.



Pontiac in chief's garb.

Source: Getty Images.

This engraving, made in 1876, portrays Chief Pontiac speaking to other Native American leaders about the need to unite to resist European settlements.

Proclamation of 1763 In an effort to stabilize the western frontier, the British government issued a proclamation that prohibited colonists from settling west of the Appalachian Mountains (see map in Topic 3.3). The British hoped that limiting settlements would prevent future hostilities between colonists and American Indians. But the colonists reacted to the proclamation with anger and defiance. After the British victory in the Seven Years' War, colonists hoped

to reap benefits in the form of access to western lands. For the British to deny such benefits was infuriating. Defying the proclamation, thousands streamed westward past the imaginary boundary line drawn by the British.

Growing British-Colonial Tensions The divergent views on the war and the changes in British imperial policies provided the context for conflict between Great Britain and its North American colonies. These conflicts would become more intense as the two sides debated issues of taxation and representation.

REFLECT ON THE LEARNING OBJECTIVE

1. Explain the causes and effects of the Seven Years' War (French and Indian War).

KEY TERMS BY THEME

Empire (WOR, GEO)

Seven Years' War (French and Indian War)

George Washington

Edward Braddock

Albany Plan of Union (1754)

Peace of Paris (1763)

salutary neglect

American Indians (MIG)

Pontiac's Rebellion

Proclamation of 1763

MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS

Questions 1–3 refer to the following excerpt.

“We apprehend [believe] that as freemen and English subjects, we have an indisputable title to the same privileges and immunities with His Majesty's other subjects who reside in the interior counties . . . , and therefore ought not to be excluded from an equal share with them in the very important privilege of legislation. . . . We cannot but observe with sorrow and indignation that some persons in this province are at pains to extenuate [excuse] the barbarous cruelties practiced by these savages on our murdered brethren and relatives . . . by this means the Indians have been taught to despise us as a weak and disunited people, and from this fatal source have arisen many of our calamities. . . . We humbly pray therefore that this grievance may be redressed.”

The Paxton Boys, to the Pennsylvania Assembly, 1764

1. The sentiments exhibited in this excerpt were most directly influenced by which of the following historical developments?
 - (A) The Great Awakening
 - (B) The Albany Plan of Union
 - (C) The Seven Years' War
 - (D) The Enlightenment
2. The British had earlier attempted to solve the problem expressed in this excerpt most directly by
 - (A) signing the treaty to end the French and Indian War
 - (B) establishing a boundary between Indian lands and lands open for colonial settlement
 - (C) passing a law that required colonists to house British soldiers
 - (D) enforcing regulations on colonial trade after a period of not enforcing them
3. Which of the following individuals led a group that was in the most similar situation to the Paxton Boys?
 - (A) John Smith because his supporters also wanted an equal share of privileges with other colonists
 - (B) Roger Williams because his supporters also relied on prayer to have their problems solved
 - (C) Nathaniel Bacon because his supporters also wanted stronger government action against American Indians
 - (D) Edmund Andros because his supporters also disputed the power of the British monarch

SHORT-ANSWER QUESTION

Use complete sentences; an outline or bulleted list alone is not acceptable.

1. Answer (a), (b), and (c).
 - (a) Briefly explain ONE historical event or development during the Seven Years' War that demonstrated a fundamental change in the British view of its relationship with its American colonies.
 - (b) Briefly explain ONE historical event or development during the Seven Years' War that demonstrated a fundamental change in the colonial view of its relationship with its British government.
 - (c) Briefly describe ONE historical event or development resulting from the changing views by either the British or the colonists.