

Rivalry

In the 1700s, Britain and France were leading European powers. They competed for wealth and empire in different parts of the world. In North America, their rivalry was very strong.

This rivalry turned especially bitter in the mid-1700s. The British began to show interest in the Ohio River valley. This vast land beyond the Appalachian Mountains was rich in resources. The British believed they had a right to this land. The French also viewed the valley as theirs. The French enjoyed a thriving fur trade with the Native Americans of the region. They did not want to share this business with British settlers.

To protect their claims in the valley, the French built a chain of forts from Lake Ontario south to the Ohio River. The British responded by starting to build a fort in what is now western Pennsylvania. Before they could finish, the French seized the site. On it, they built their own fort, calling it Fort Duquesne.

In spring 1754, the governor of Virginia sent a militia—a military force made up of ordinary citizens—to drive out the French. Leading this force was a young Virginian named George Washington.

After marching to Fort Duquesne, Washington set up a small fort of his own nearby. He called it Fort Necessity. Washington's outpost soon came under attack by the French and their Native American allies. This combined army won the battle and forced Washington's soldiers to surrender. The French later released the soldiers, who returned to Virginia.

Native American Alliances

As the conflict got underway, the French and the British both sought Native American help. The French had a big advantage. They already had many Native American allies. Native Americans generally distrusted the British and their hunger for land. In contrast, the French were more interested in fur trading than in land. French trappers and fur traders often married Native American women. French missionaries converted many Native Americans to Catholicism. For these reasons, Native Americans helped the French and raided British settlements.

To counter the threat of the French and their Native American friends, the British colonists tried to make a treaty with the Iroquois. The **Iroquois Confederacy** was the most powerful group of Native Americans in eastern North America. At that

time, the confederacy included six nations—the Mohawk, Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida and Tuscarora. Delegates—representatives from seven colonies met with Iroquois leaders at Albany, New York, in June 1754. The Iroquois refused an alliance, or partnership, with the British. They did, however, promise to remain neutral—that is, to take no side.

The Albany delegates also talked about how the colonies might work together more closely against the French. They decided to adopt the plan of the Pennsylvanian **Benjamin Franklin's** Albany Plan of Union for a united colonial government. To form a colonial government, each colony would have to give up some of its powers. Not one colonial assembly was willing to do so. Disappointed, Franklin wrote, "Everybody cries, a Union is absolutely necessary; but when they come to a manner and form of the union, [they] are perfectly distracted."

The Albany meeting failed to unify the colonists. Meanwhile, the conflict between the British and the French expanded into full-scale war—the French and Indian War.

The French and Indian War

The French enjoyed early success in the war. They captured several British forts. Meanwhile, their Native American allies carried out raids on the frontier, or edges, of the colonies. They killed colonists, burned farmhouses and crops, and drove many families back toward the coast.

The turning point came in 1757, when William Pitt became the prime minister, the head of the British government. Pitt was a great military planner. He sent more trained British troops to fight in North America. To stop colonial complaints about the cost of war, Pitt decided that Britain would pay for it. He knew that, after the war, the British would raise colonists' taxes to help pay the large bill. Pitt had only delayed the time when the colonists would have to pay their share of the military costs.

Pitt's goal was not just to open the Ohio River valley. He also wanted to conquer French Canada. In 1758 British forces won a key victory at Fort Louisbourg, in present-day Nova Scotia.

The same year a British force, made up mostly of New York and New England militia, captured Fort Frontenac at Lake Ontario. Another British force

finally took Fort Duquesne. The British renamed it Fort Pitt.

Quebec, the capital of New France, sat on a cliff above the St. Lawrence River. Because of its position, Quebec was thought to be impossible to attack. In September 1759, British scouts spotted a poorly guarded path along the back of the cliff. At night, Major General James Wolfe's soldiers overwhelmed the French guards and scrambled up the path. The British troops then surprised and defeated the French army on a field called the Plains of Abraham. The fall of Quebec and of Montreal the next year marked the defeat of France in North America.

The war in Europe finally ended with the Treaty of Paris in 1763. This treaty forced France to give Canada and most of the lands east of the Mississippi River to Great Britain. Great Britain also received Florida from France's ally, Spain. Spain acquired French lands west of the Mississippi—called Louisiana as well as the port of New Orleans.

The Treaty of Paris marked the end of France as a power in North America. In its aftermath, North America was in the hands of two European powers—Great Britain and Spain.

New British Policies

The French defeat was a blow to Native Americans in the Ohio River valley. They had lost their French allies and trading partners and now had to deal with the British. The British raised the prices of goods. Unlike the French, the British refused to pay Native Americans for their land. Worst of all, more colonists began settling in Native American lands.

Many Native Americans saw the settlers as a threat to their way of life. One of these was Pontiac, the chief of an Ottawa village near Detroit. In 1763, Pontiac and his forces captured the British fort at Detroit and other British outposts. During Pontiac's War, Native Americans killed settlers along the Pennsylvania and Virginia frontiers.

The same year as Pontiac's War began, Britain's King George declared that colonists were not to settle west of the Appalachian Mountains. To enforce the new rule, the British planned to keep 10,000 troops in America. The Proclamation of 1763 helped remove a source of conflict with Native Americans. It also kept colonists on the coast.

Colonists believed the proclamation limited their freedom of movement. They feared that the large number of British troops might interfere with their liberties. As a result, distrust began to grow between Britain and its American colonies.

Britain's financial problems also led to trouble. Deeply in debt as a result of war with France, the British government made plans to tax the colonies and tighten trade rules.



