

The French and Indian War (1754-1763)

General Summary

The French and Indian War, a colonial extension of the Seven Years War that ravaged Europe from 1756 to 1763, was the bloodiest American war in the 18th century. It took more lives than the American Revolution, involved people on three continents, including the Caribbean. The war was the product of an imperial struggle, a clash between the French and English over colonial territory and wealth. Within these global forces, the war can also be seen as a product of the localized rivalry between British and French colonists.

Tensions between the British and French in America had been rising for some time, as each side wanted to increase its land holdings. What is now considered the French and Indian War (though at the time the war was undeclared), began in November 1753, when the young Virginian major George Washington and a number of men headed out into the Ohio region with the mission to deliver a message to a French captain demanding that French troops withdraw from the territory. The demand was rejected. In 1754, Washington received authorization to build a fort near the present site of Pittsburgh. He was unsuccessful because of the strong French presence in the area. In May, Washington's troops clashed with local French forces, a skirmish that ultimately resulted in Washington having to surrender the meager fort he had managed to build just one month later. The incident set off a string of small battles. In 1755, The British sent General Edward Braddock to oversee the British Colonial forces, but on his way to oust the French from Fort Duquesne he was surprised by the French and badly routed, losing his life in the process.

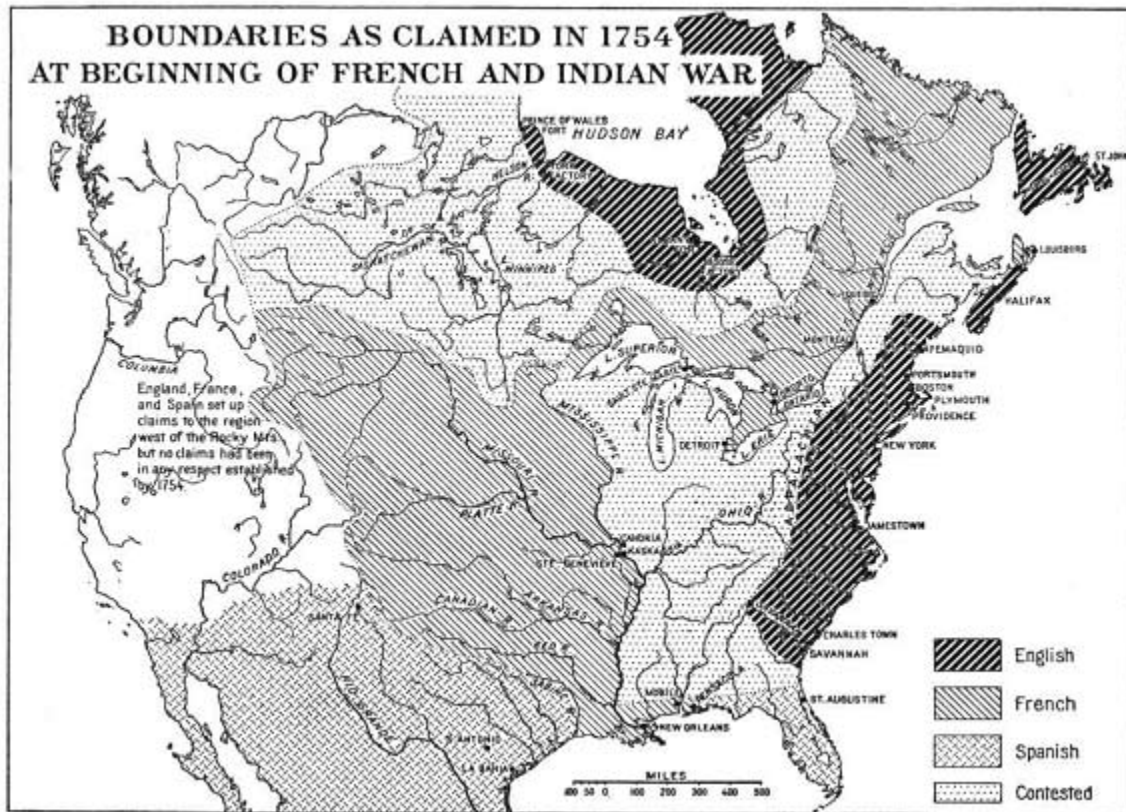
After a year and a half of undeclared war, the French and the English formally declared war in May 1756. For the first three years of the war, the outnumbered French dominated the battlefield, soundly defeating the English in battles at Fort Oswego and Ticonderoga. Perhaps the most notorious battle of the war was the French victory at Fort William Henry, which ended in a massacre of British soldiers by Indians allied with the French. The battle and ensuing massacre was captured for history—though not accurately—by James Fenimore Cooper in his classic *The Last of the Mohicans* .

The tide turned for the British in 1758, as they began to make peace with important Indian allies and, under the direction of Lord William Pitt began adapting their war strategies to fit the territory and landscape of the American frontier. The British had a further stroke of good fortune when the French were abandoned by many of their Indian allies. Exhausted by years of battle, outnumbered and outgunned by the British, the French collapsed during the years 1758-59, climaxing with a massive defeat at Quebec in September 1759.

By September 1760, the British controlled all of the North American frontier; the war between the two countries was effectively over. The 1763 Treaty of Paris, which also ended the European Seven Years War, set the terms by which France would capitulate. Under the treaty, France was forced to surrender all of her American possessions to the British and the Spanish.

Although the war with the French ended in 1763, the British continued to fight with the Indians over the issue of land claims. "Pontiac's War" flared shortly after the Treaty of Paris was signed, and many of the battlefields—including Detroit, Fort Pitt, and Niagara—were the same. The Indians, however, already exhausted by many years of war, quickly capitulated under the ferocious British retaliation; still, the issue remained a problem for many years to come.

The results of the war effectively ended French political and cultural influence in North America. England gained massive amounts of land and vastly strengthened its hold on the continent. The war, however, also had subtler results. It badly eroded the relationship between England and Native Americans; and, though the war seemed to strengthen England's hold on the colonies, the effects of the French and Indian War played a major role in the worsening relationship between England and its colonies that eventually led into the Revolutionary War.



Questions

1. Identify the following people and their role within the French & Indian War:
 - a. George Washington
 - b. General Edward Braddock
 - c. Lord William Pitt
2. Why did the French & English fight in this war? What did each side want?
3. Who dominated the first half of the war? What battles did they win?
4. What turned the tide for the British in 1758?
5. What terms did the Treaty of Paris in 1758 set for the French in North America?
6. Describe the result of the war for:
 - a. The British
 - b. The French