

# The Duel for North America

1608–1763

A TORCH LIGHTED IN THE FORESTS OF AMERICA  
SET ALL EUROPE IN CONFLAGRATION.

VOLTAIRE, c. 1756

As the seventeenth century neared its sunset, a titanic struggle was shaping up for mastery of the North American continent. The contest involved three Old World nations—England,\* France, and Spain—and it unavoidably swept up Native American peoples as well. From 1688 to 1763, four bitter wars convulsed Europe. All four of those conflicts were world wars. They amounted to a death struggle for domination in Europe as well as in the New World, and they were fought on the waters and soil of two hemispheres. Counting these first four clashes, nine world wars have been waged since 1688. The American people, whether as British subjects or as American citizens, proved unable to stay out of a single one of them. And one of those wars—known as the Seven Years' War in Europe and sometimes as the French and Indian War in America—set the stage for America's independence.

\*After the union of England and Scotland in 1707, the nation's official name became "Great Britain."

## France Finds a Foothold in Canada

Like England and Holland, France was a latecomer in the scramble for New World real estate, and for basically the same reasons. It was convulsed during the 1500s by foreign wars and domestic strife, including the frightful clashes between Roman Catholics and Protestant Huguenots. On St. Bartholomew's Day, 1572, over ten thousand Huguenots—men, women, and children—were butchered in cold blood.

A new era dawned in 1598 when the Edict of Nantes, issued by the crown, granted limited toleration to French Protestants. Religious wars ceased, and in the new century France blossomed into the mightiest and most feared nation in Europe, led by a series of brilliant ministers and by the vainglorious King Louis XIV. Enthroned as a five-year-old boy, he reigned for no less than seventy-two years (1643–1715), surrounded by a glittering court and scheming ministers and mistresses.

Fatefully for North America, Louis XIV also took a deep interest in overseas colonies.

After rocky beginnings, success finally rewarded the exertions of France in the New World. In 1608, the year after the founding of Jamestown, the permanent beginnings of a vast empire were established at Quebec, a granite sentinel commanding the St. Lawrence River. The leading figure was Samuel de Champlain, an intrepid soldier and explorer whose energy and leadership fairly earned him the title “Father of New France.”

Champlain entered into friendly relations—a fateful friendship—with the nearby Huron Indian tribes. At their request, he joined them in battle against their foes, the federated Iroquois tribes of the upper New York area. Two volleys from the “lightning sticks” of the whites routed the terrified Iroquois, who left behind three dead and one wounded. France, to its sorrow, thus earned the lasting enmity of the Iroquois tribes. They thereafter hampered French penetration of the Ohio Valley, some-

times ravaging French settlements and frequently serving as allies of the British in the prolonged struggle for supremacy on the continent.

The government of New France (Canada) finally fell under the direct control of the king after various commercial companies had faltered or failed. This royal regime was almost completely autocratic. The people elected no representative assemblies, nor did they enjoy the right to trial by jury, as in the English colonies.

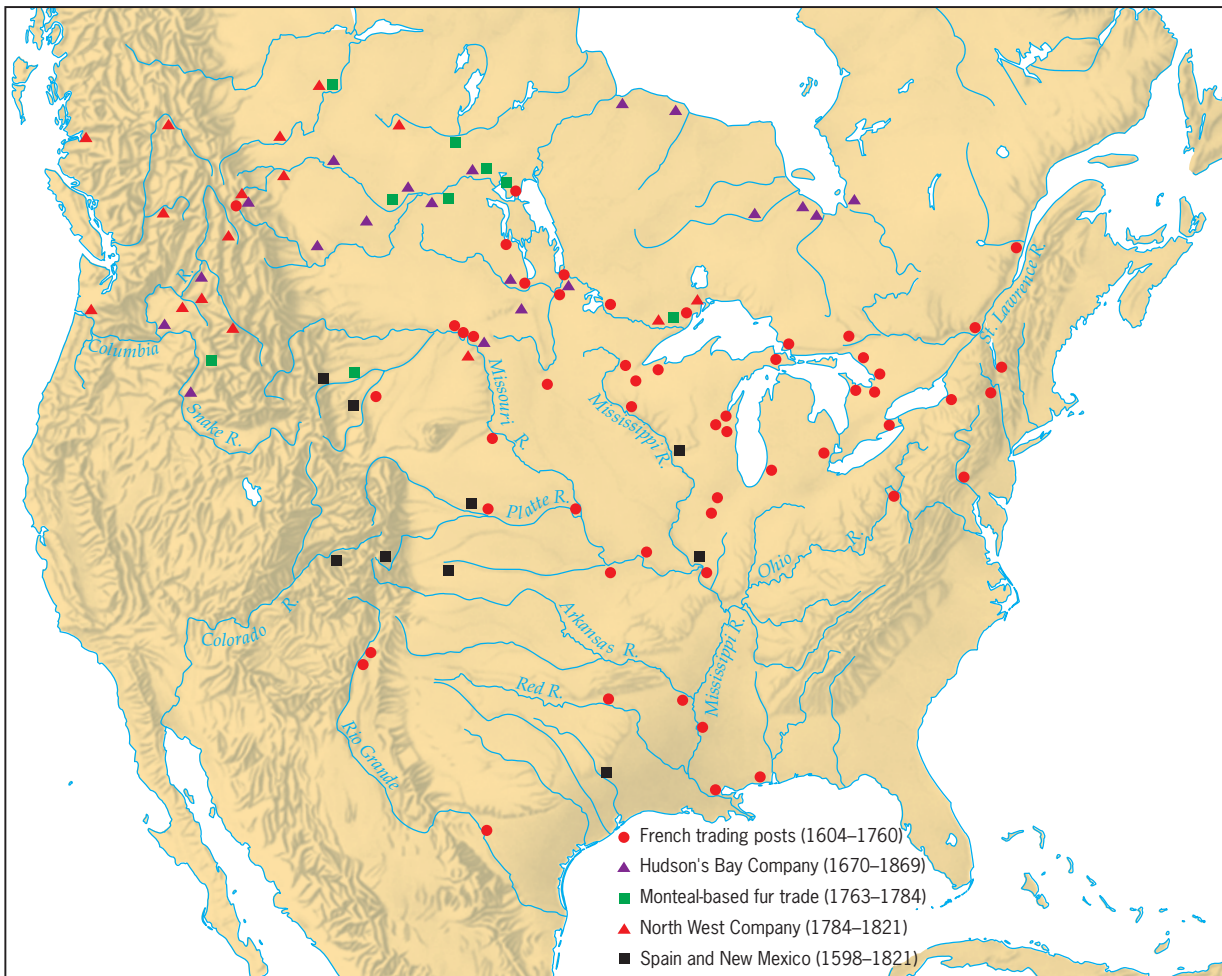
The population of Catholic New France grew at a listless pace. As late as 1750, only sixty thousand or so whites inhabited New France. Landowning French peasants, unlike the dispossessed English tenant farmers who embarked for the British colonies, had little economic motive to move. Protestant Huguenots, who might have had a religious motive to migrate, were denied a refuge in this raw colony. The French government, in any case, favored its Caribbean island colonies, rich in sugar and rum, over the snow-cloaked wilderness of Canada.



France’s American Empire at Its Greatest Extent, 1700



Quebec Scene, by Jean-Baptiste-Louis Franquelin, c. 1699 (detail) The metal cooking pot and the Indians’ clothing and blankets show the Native Americans’ growing reliance on European trade goods.



**Fur-Trading Posts** To serve the needs of European fashion, fur-traders pursued the beaver for more than two centuries over the entire continent of North America. They brought many Indians for the first time into contact with white culture.

### New France Fans Out

New France did contain one valuable resource: the beaver. European fashion-setters valued beaver-pelt hats for their warmth and opulent appearance. To adorn the heads of Europeans, French fur-trappers ranged over the woods and waterways of North America in pursuit of beaver. These colorful *coureurs de bois* (“runners of the woods”) were also runners of risks—two-fisted drinkers, free spenders, free livers and lovers. They littered the land with scores of place names, including Baton Rouge (red stick), Terre Haute (high land), Des Moines (some monks), and Grand Teton (big breast).

Singing, paddle-swinging French *voyageurs* also recruited Indians into the fur business. The Indian fur flotilla arriving in Montreal in 1693 numbered four hundred canoes. But the fur trade had some disastrous drawbacks. Indians recruited into the fur business were decimated by the white man’s diseases and debauched by his alcohol. Slaughtering beaver by the boatload also violated many Indians’ religious beliefs and sadly demonstrated the shattering effect that contact with Europeans wreaked on traditional Indian ways of life.

Pursuing the sharp-toothed beaver ever deeper into the heart of the continent, the French trappers and their Indian partners hiked, rode, snowshoed, sailed, and paddled across amazing distances. They trekked in a huge arc across the Great Lakes, into present-day Saskatchewan and Manitoba; along the valleys of the



Platte, the Arkansas, and the Missouri; west to the Rockies; and south to the border of Spanish Texas (see map at left). In the process they all but extinguished the beaver population in many areas, inflicting incalculable ecological damage.

French Catholic missionaries, notably the Jesuits, labored zealously to save the Indians for Christ and from the fur-trappers. Some of the Jesuit missionaries, their efforts scorned, suffered unspeakable tortures at the hands of the Indians. But though they made few permanent converts, the Jesuits played a vital role as explorers and geographers.

Other explorers sought neither souls nor fur, but empire. To thwart English settlers pushing into the Ohio Valley, Antoine Cadillac founded Detroit, “the City of Straits,” in 1701. To check Spanish penetration into the region of the Gulf of Mexico, ambitious Robert de La Salle floated down the Mississippi in 1682 to the point where it mingles with the Gulf. He named the great interior basin “Louisiana,” in honor of his sovereign, Louis XIV. Dreaming of empire, he returned to the Gulf three years later with a colonizing expedition of four ships. But he failed

to find the Mississippi delta, landed in Spanish Texas, and in 1687 was murdered by his mutinous men.

Undismayed, French officials persisted in their efforts to block Spain on the Gulf of Mexico. They planted several fortified posts in what is now Mississippi and Louisiana, the most important of which was New Orleans (1718). Commanding the mouth of the Mississippi River, this strategic semitropical outpost also tapped the fur trade of the huge interior valley. The fertile Illinois country—where the French established forts and trading posts at Kaskaskia, Cahokia, and Vincennes—became the garden of France’s North American empire. Surprising amounts of grain were floated down the Mississippi for transshipment to the West Indies and to Europe.

### **The Clash of Empires**

The earliest contests among the European powers for control of North America, known to the British colonists as King William’s War (1689–1697) and Queen Anne’s War

**Chief of the Taensa Indians Receiving La Salle, March 20, 1682, by George Catlin, 1847–1848 (detail)** Driven by the dream of a vast North American empire for France, La Salle spent years exploring the Great Lakes region and the valleys of the Illinois and Mississippi Rivers. This scene of his encounter with an Indian chieftain was imaginatively re-created by the nineteenth-century artist George Catlin.



(1702–1713), mostly pitted British colonists against the French *coureurs de bois*, with both sides recruiting whatever Indian allies they could. Neither France nor Britain at this stage considered America worth the commitment of large detachments of regular troops, so the combatants waged a kind of primitive guerrilla warfare. Indian allies of the French ravaged with torch and tomahawk the British colonial frontiers, visiting especially bloody violence on the villages of Schenectady, New York, and Deerfield, Massachusetts (see the top map on p. 112). Spain, eventually allied with France, probed from its Florida base at outlying South Carolina settlements. For their part the British colonists failed miserably in sallies against Quebec and Montreal but scored a signal victory when they temporarily seized the stronghold of Port Royal in Acadia (present-day Nova Scotia).

Peace terms, signed at Utrecht in 1713, revealed how badly France and its Spanish ally had been beaten. Britain was rewarded with French-populated Acadia (which the British renamed Nova Scotia, or New Scotland) and the wintry wastes of Newfoundland and Hudson Bay. These immense tracts pinched the St. Lawrence settlements of France, foreshadowing their ultimate doom. A generation of peace ensued, during which Britain provided its American colonies with decades of “salutary neglect”—fertile soil for the roots of independence.

By the treaty of 1713, the British also won limited trading rights in Spanish America, but these later involved much friction over smuggling. Ill feeling flared up when the British captain Jenkins, encountering Spanish revenue authorities, had one ear sliced off by a sword. The Spanish commander reportedly sneered, “Carry this home to the King, your master, whom, if he were present, I would serve in like fashion.” The victim, with a tale of woe on his tongue and a shriveled ear in his hand, aroused furious resentment when he returned home to Britain.

The War of Jenkins’s Ear, curiously but aptly named, broke out in 1739 between the British and the Spaniards.



**British Territory After Two Wars, 1713**

It was confined to the Caribbean Sea and to the much-buffed buffer colony of Georgia, where philanthropist-soldier James Oglethorpe fought his Spanish foe to a standstill.

This small-scale scuffle with Spain in America soon merged with the large-scale War of Austrian Succession in Europe, and came to be called King George’s War in

**Later English Monarchs\***

Name, Reign	Relation to America
William III, 1689–1702	Collapse of Dominion of New England; King William’s War
Anne, 1702–1714	Queen Anne’s War, 1702–1713
George I, 1714–1727	Navigation Laws laxly enforced (“salutary neglect”)
George II, 1727–1760	Ga. founded; King George’s War; Seven Years’ War
George III, 1760–1820	American Revolution, 1775–1783

\*See pp. 29 and 53 for earlier monarchs.





**New Englanders Capture Louisbourg, 1745** When the final peace settlement returned this fortress to France, the American colonists felt betrayed by their British masters.

America. Once again, France allied itself with Spain. And once again, a rustic force of New Englanders invaded New France. With help from a British fleet and with a great deal of good luck, the raw and sometimes drunken recruits captured the reputedly impregnable French fortress of Louisbourg, which was on Cape Breton Island and commanded the approaches to the St. Lawrence River (see the top map on p. 112).

When the peace treaty of 1748 handed Louisbourg back to their French foe, the victorious New Englanders were outraged. The glory of their arms—never terribly lustrous in any event—seemed tarnished by the wiles of Old World diplomats. Worse, Louisbourg was still a cocked pistol pointed at the heart of the American continent. France, powerful and unappeased, still clung to its vast holdings in North America.

### The Nine World Wars

Dates	In Europe	In America
1688–1697	War of the League of Augsburg	King William's War, 1689–1697
1701–1713	War of Spanish Succession	Queen Anne's War, 1702–1713
1740–1748	War of Austrian Succession	King George's War, 1744–1748
1756–1763	Seven Years' War	French and Indian War, 1754–1763
1778–1783	War of the American Revolution	American Revolution, 1775–1783
1793–1802	Wars of the French Revolution	Undeclared French War, 1798–1800
1803–1815	Napoleonic Wars	War of 1812, 1812–1814
1914–1918	World War I	World War I, 1917–1918
1939–1945	World War II	World War II, 1941–1945



**Scenes of the French Wars** The arrows indicate French-Indian attacks. Schenectady was burned to the ground in the raid of 1690. At Deerfield, site of one of the New England frontier's bloodiest confrontations, invaders killed fifty inhabitants and sent over a hundred others fleeing for their lives into the winter wilderness. The Indian attackers also took over one hundred Deerfield residents captive, including the child Titus King. He later wrote, "Captivity is an awful school for children, when we see how quick they will fall in with the Indian ways. Nothing seems to be more taking [appealing]. In six months' time they forsake father and mother, forget their own land, refuse to speak their own tongue, and seemingly be wholly swallowed up with the Indians."



### George Washington Inaugurates War with France

As the dogfight intensified in the New World, the Ohio Valley became the chief bone of contention between the French and British. The Ohio Country was the critical area into which the westward-pushing British colonists would inevitably penetrate. For France it was also the key to the continent that the French had to retain, particularly if they were going to link their Canadian holdings with those of the lower Mississippi Valley. By the mid-1700s, the British colonists, painfully aware of these basic truths, were no longer so reluctant to bear the burdens of empire. Alarmed by French land-grabbing and cutthroat fur-trade competition in the Ohio Valley, they were determined to fight for their economic security and for the supremacy of their way of life in North America.

Rivalry for the lush lands of the upper Ohio Valley brought tensions to the snapping point. In 1749 a group of British colonial speculators, chiefly influential Virginians, including the Washington family, had secured shaky legal "rights" to some 500,000 acres in this region. In the same disputed wilderness, the French were in the process of erecting a chain of forts commanding the strategic Ohio River. Especially formidable was Fort Duquesne at the pivotal point where the Monongahela and Allegheny Rivers join to form the Ohio—the later site of Pittsburgh.

In 1754 the governor of Virginia ushered George Washington, a twenty-one-year-old surveyor and fellow Virginian, onto the stage of history. To secure the

Virginians' claims, Washington was sent to the Ohio Country as a lieutenant colonel in command of about 150 Virginia militiamen. Encountering a small detachment of French troops in the forest about forty miles from Fort Duquesne, the Virginians fired the first shots of the globe-girdling new war. The French leader was killed, and his men retreated. An exultant Washington wrote, "I heard the bullets whistle, and believe me, there is something charming in the sound." It soon lost its charm.

### The Ohio Country, 1753–1754





The French promptly returned with reinforcements, who surrounded Washington in his hastily constructed breastworks, Fort Mifflin. After a ten-hour siege, he was forced to surrender his entire command in July 1754—ironically the fourth of July. But he was permitted to march his men away with the full honors of war.

With the shooting already started and in danger of spreading, the British authorities in Nova Scotia took vigorous action. Understandably fearing a stab in the back from the French Acadians, whom Britain had conquered in 1713, the British brutally uprooted some four thousand of them in 1755. These unhappy French deportees were scattered as far south as Louisiana, where the descendants of the French-speaking Acadians are now called “Cajuns” and number nearly a million.



### Global War and Colonial Disunity

The first three Anglo-French colonial wars had all started in Europe, but the tables were now reversed. The fourth struggle, sometimes known as the French and Indian War, began in America. Touched off by George Washington in the wilds of the Ohio Valley in 1754, it rocked along on an undeclared basis for two years and then widened into the most far-flung conflict the world had yet seen—the Seven Years’ War. It was fought not only in America but in Europe, in the West Indies, in the Philippines, in Africa, and on the ocean. The Seven Years’ War was a seven-seas war.

In Europe the principal adversaries were Britain and Prussia on one side, arrayed against France, Spain, Austria, and Russia on the other. The bloodiest theater was in Germany, where Frederick the Great deservedly won the title of “Great” by repelling French, Austrian, and Russian armies, often with the opposing forces outnumbering his own three to one. The London government, unable to send him effective troop reinforcements, liberally subsidized him with gold. Luckily for the British colonists, the French wasted so much strength in this European bloodbath that they were unable to throw an adequate force into the New World. “America was conquered in Germany,” declared Britain’s great statesman William Pitt.

In previous colonial clashes, the Americans had revealed an astonishing lack of unity. Colonists who were nearest the shooting had responded much more generously with volunteers and money than those



**Famous Cartoon by Benjamin Franklin**  
Delaware and Georgia were omitted.

enjoying the safety of remoteness. Even the Indians had laughed at the inability of the colonists to pull together. Now, with musketballs already splitting the air in Ohio, the crisis demanded concerted action.

In 1754 the British government summoned an intercolonial congress to Albany, New York, near the Iroquois Indian country. Travel-weary delegates from only seven of the thirteen colonies showed up. The immediate purpose was to keep the scalping knives of the Iroquois tribes loyal to the British in the spreading war. The chiefs were harangued at length and then presented with thirty wagonloads of gifts, including guns.

The longer-range purpose at Albany was to achieve greater colonial unity and thus bolster the common defense against France. A month before the congress assembled, ingenious Benjamin Franklin published in his *Pennsylvania Gazette* the most famous cartoon of the colonial era. Showing the separate colonies as parts of a disjointed snake, it broadcast the slogan “Join, or Die.”

Franklin himself, a wise and witty counselor, was the leading spirit of the Albany Congress. His outstanding contribution was a well-devised but premature scheme for colonial home rule. The Albany delegates unanimously adopted the plan, but the individual colonies spurned it, as did the London regime. To the colonists, it did not seem to give enough independence; to the British officials, it seemed to give too much. The disappointing result confirmed one of Franklin’s sage observations: all people agreed on the need for union, but their “weak noddles” were “perfectly distracted” when they attempted to agree on details.





## Braddock's Blundering and Its Aftermath

The opening clashes of the French and Indian War went badly for the British colonists. Haughty and bullheaded General Braddock, a sixty-year-old officer experienced in European warfare, was sent to Virginia with a strong detachment of British regulars. After foraging scanty supplies from the reluctant colonists, he set out in 1755 with some two thousand men to capture Fort Duquesne. A considerable part of his force consisted of ill-disciplined colonial militiamen (“buckskins”), whose behind-the-tree methods of fighting Indians won “Bulldog” Braddock’s professional contempt.

Braddock’s expedition, dragging heavy artillery, moved slowly. Axmen laboriously hacked a path through the dense forest, thus opening a road that was later to be an important artery to the West. A few miles from Fort Duquesne, Braddock encountered a much smaller French and Indian army. At first the enemy force was repulsed, but it quickly melted into the thickets and

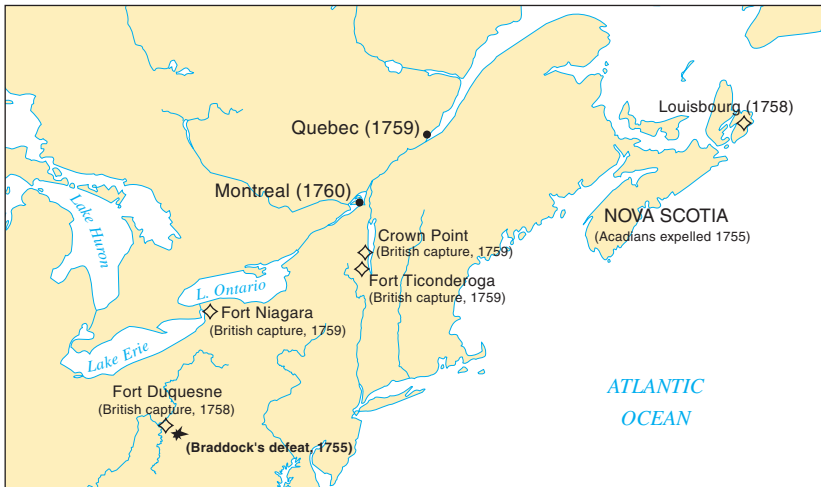
poured a murderous fire into the ranks of the redcoats. In the ensuing debate, George Washington, an energetic and fearless aide to Braddock, had two horses shot from under him and four bullets pierced his coat, and Braddock himself was mortally wounded. The entire British force was routed after appalling losses.

Inflamed by this easy victory, the Indians took to a wider warpath. The whole frontier from Pennsylvania to North Carolina, left virtually naked by Braddock’s bloody defeat, felt their fury. Scalping forays occurred within eighty miles of Philadelphia, and in desperation the local authorities offered bounties for Indian scalps: \$50 for a woman’s and \$130 for a warrior’s. George Washington, with only three hundred men, tried desperately to defend the scorched frontier.

The British launched a full-scale invasion of Canada in 1756, now that the undeclared war in America had at last merged into a world conflict. But they unwisely tried to attack a number of exposed wilderness posts simultaneously, instead of throwing all their strength at Quebec and Montreal. If these strongholds had fallen, all the outposts to the west would have withered for lack of riverborne supplies. But the British ignored such sound

**Detroit, 1794** A key French outpost from 1701 to 1760, Detroit fell to Britain during the Seven Years’ War. The British remained at Detroit even after the American War of Independence, exciting bitter resentment in the infant American Republic (see pp. 175–176).





Events of 1755–1760

strategy, and defeat after defeat tarnished their arms, both in America and in Europe.

### **Pitt's Palms of Victory**

In the hour of crisis, Britain brought forth, as it repeatedly has, a superlative leader—William Pitt. A tall and imposing figure, whose flashing eyes were set in a hawklike face, he was popularly known as the “Great Commoner.” Pitt drew much of his strength from the common people, who admired him so greatly that on occasion they kissed his horses. A splendid orator endowed with a majestic voice, he believed passionately in his cause, in his country, and in himself.

In 1757 Pitt became a foremost leader in the London government. Throwing himself headlong into his task, he soon earned the title “Organizer of Victory.” He wisely decided to soft-pedal assaults on the French West Indies, which had been bleeding away much British strength, and to concentrate on the vitals of Canada—the Quebec-Montreal area. He also picked young and energetic leaders, thus bypassing incompetent and cautious old generals.

Pitt first dispatched a powerful expedition in 1758 against Louisbourg. The frowning fortress, though it had been greatly strengthened, fell after a blistering siege. Wild rejoicing swept Britain, for this was the first significant British victory of the entire war.

Quebec was next on Pitt’s list. For this crucial expedition, he chose the thirty-two-year-old James Wolfe, who had been an officer since the age of fourteen.

Though slight and sickly, Wolfe combined a mixture of dash with painstaking attention to detail. The British attackers were making woeful progress when Wolfe, in a daring night move, sent a detachment up a poorly guarded part of the rocky eminence protecting Quebec. This vanguard scaled the cliff, pulling itself upward by the bushes and showing the way for the others. In the morning the two armies faced each other on the Plains of Abraham on the outskirts of Quebec, the British under Wolfe and the French under the Marquis de Montcalm. Both commanders fell fatally wounded, but the French were defeated and the city surrendered (see “Makers of America: The French,” pp. 116–117).

The Battle of Quebec in 1759 ranks as one of the most significant engagements in British and American history. When Montreal fell in 1760, the French flag had fluttered in Canada for the last time. By the peace settlement at Paris (1763), French power was thrown completely off the continent of North America, leaving behind a fertile French population that is to this day a strong minority in Canada. This bitter pill was sweetened somewhat when the French were allowed to retain several small but valuable sugar islands in the West Indies, and two never-to-be-fortified islets in the Gulf of St. Lawrence for fishing stations. A final blow came when the French, to compensate their luckless Spanish ally for its losses, ceded to Spain all trans-Mississippi Louisiana, plus the outlet of New Orleans. Spain, for its part, turned Florida over to Britain in return for Cuba, where Havana had fallen to British arms.

Great Britain thus emerged as the dominant power in North America, while taking its place as the leading naval power of the world.





## The French

At the height of his reign in the late seventeenth century, Louis XIV, France's "Sun King," turned his covetous eyes westward to the New World. He envisioned there a bountiful New France, settled by civilizing French pioneers, in the maritime provinces of Acadia and the icy expanses of Quebec. But his dreams flickered out like candles before the British juggernaut in the eighteenth century, and his former New World subjects had to suffer foreign governance in the aftermath of the French defeats in 1713 and 1763. Over the course of two centuries, many chafed under the British yoke and eventually found their way to the United States.

The first French to leave Canada were the Acadians, the settlers of the seaboard region that now comprises Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and part of Maine. In 1713 the French crown ceded this territory to the British, who demanded that the Acadians either swear allegiance to Britain or withdraw to French territory. At first doing neither, they managed to escape reprisals until *Le Grand Derangement* ("the Great Displacement") in 1755, when the British expelled them from the region at bayonet point. The Acadians fled far south to the French colony of Louisiana, where they settled among the sleepy bayous, planted sugar cane



(above) **Acadian Architecture** This architectural style was transplanted by the uprooted Acadians to the Cajun bayous of Louisiana. (right) **Franco-American Mill Workers in New England, c. 1910**







**Modern-Day Quebec** A bit of the Old World in the New.

and sweet potatoes, practiced Roman Catholicism, and spoke the French dialect that came to be called Cajun (a corruption of the English word *Acadian*). The Cajun settlements were tiny and secluded, many of them accessible only by small boat.

For generations these insular people were scarcely influenced by developments outside their tight-knit communities. Louisiana passed through Spanish, French, and American hands, but the Cajuns kept to themselves. Cajun women sometimes married German, English, or Spanish men—today one finds such names as Schneider and Lopez in the bayous—but the outsiders were always absorbed completely into the large Cajun families. Not until the twentieth century did Cajun parents surrender their children to public schools and submit to a state law restricting French speech. Only in the 1930s, with a bridge-

building spree engineered by Governor Huey Long, was the isolation of these bayou communities broken.

In 1763, as the French settlers of Quebec fell under British rule, a second group of French people began to leave Canada. By 1840 what had been an irregular southward trickle of Quebecois swelled to a steady stream, depositing most of the migrating French Canadians in New England. These nineteenth-century emigrants were not goaded by bayonets but driven away by the lean harvests yielded by Quebec's short growing season and scarcity of arable land. They frequently recrossed the border to visit their old homes, availing themselves of the train routes opened in the 1840s between Quebec and Boston. Most hoped someday to return to Canada for good.

They emigrated mostly to work in New England's lumberyards and textile mills, gradually establishing permanent settlements in the northern woods. Like the Acadians, these later migrants from Quebec stubbornly preserved their Roman Catholicism. And both groups shared a passionate love of their French language, believing it to be the cement that bound them, their religion, and their culture together. As one French Canadian explained, "Let us worship in peace and in our own tongue. All else may disappear but this must remain our badge." Yet today almost all Cajuns and New England French Canadians speak English.

North of the border, in the land that these immigrants left behind, Louis XIV's dream of implanting a French civilization in the New World lingers on in the Canadian province of Quebec. Centuries have passed since the British won the great eighteenth-century duel for North America, but the French language still adorns the road signs of Quebec and rings out in its classrooms, courts, and markets, eloquently testifying to the continued vitality of French culture in North America.



**View of the Taking of Quebec, 1759** On the night of September 13, British forces scaled the rocky cliffs of Quebec and defeated the French army defending the city. The following year, Montreal, France’s last bastion in North America, surrendered. Fighting continued in the Caribbean, Europe, and the Philippines for two more years, until the Treaty of Paris was signed in 1763, eliminating France as a colonial power in North America.



### Restless Colonists

Britain’s colonists, baptized by fire, emerged with increased confidence in their military strength. They had borne the brunt of battle at first; they had fought bravely alongside the crack British regulars; and they had gained valuable experience, officers and men alike. In the closing days of the conflict, some twenty thousand American recruits were under arms.

The French and Indian War, while bolstering colonial self-esteem, simultaneously shattered the myth of British invincibility. On Braddock’s bloody field, the “buckskin” militia had seen the demoralized regulars huddling helplessly together or fleeing their unseen enemy.

Ominously, friction had developed during the war between arrogant British officers and the raw colonial

“boors.” Displaying the contempt of the professional soldier for amateurs, the British refused to recognize any American militia commission above the rank of captain—a demotion humiliating to “Colonel” George Washington. They also showed the usual condescension of snobs from the civilized Old Country toward the “scum” who had confessed failure by fleeing to the “outhouses of civilization.” General Wolfe referred to the colonial militia, with exaggeration, as “in general the dirtiest, most contemptible, cowardly dogs that you can conceive.” Energetic and hard-working American settlers, in contrast, believed themselves to be the cutting edge of British civilization. They felt that they deserved credit rather than contempt for risking their lives to secure a New World empire.

British officials were further distressed by the reluctance of the colonists to support the common cause wholeheartedly. American shippers, using fraudulent



North America Before 1754



North America After 1763 (after French losses)

papers, developed a golden traffic with the enemy ports of the Spanish and French West Indies. This treasonable trade in foodstuffs actually kept some of the hostile islands from starving at the very time when the British navy was trying to subdue them. In the final year of the war, the British authorities, forced to resort to drastic measures, forbade the export of all supplies from New England and the middle colonies.

Other colonists, self-centered and alienated by distance from the war, refused to provide troops and money for the conflict. They demanded the rights and privileges of Englishmen, without the duties and responsibilities of Englishmen. Not until Pitt had offered to reimburse the colonies for a substantial part of their expenditures—some £900,000—did they move with some enthusiasm. If the Americans had to be bribed to defend themselves against a relentless and savage foe, would they ever unite to strike the mother country?

The curse of intercolonial disunity, present from early days, had continued throughout the recent hostilities. It had been caused mainly by enormous distances; by geographical barriers like rivers; by conflicting religions, from Catholic to Quaker; by varied nationalities, from German to Irish; by differing types of colonial governments; by many boundary disputes; and by the resentment of the crude backcountry settlers against the aristocratic bigwigs.

Yet unity received some encouragement during the French and Indian War. When soldiers and statesmen from widely separated colonies met around common campfires and council tables, they were often agreeably surprised by what they found. Despite deep-seated jealousy and suspicion, they discovered that they were all fellow Americans who generally spoke the same language and shared common ideals. Barriers of disunity began to melt, although a long and rugged road lay ahead before a coherent nation would emerge.



*The Reverend Andrew Burnaby, an observant Church of England clergyman who visited the colonies in the closing months of the Seven Years' War, scoffed at any possibility of unification (1760):*

"... for fire and water are not more heterogeneous than the different colonies in North America. Nothing can exceed the jealousy and emulation which they possess in regard to each other. . . . In short . . . were they left to themselves there would soon be a civil war from one end of the continent to the other, while the Indians and Negros would . . . impatiently watch the opportunity of exterminating them all together."

### War's Fateful Aftermath

The removal of the French menace in Canada profoundly affected American attitudes. While the French hawk had been hovering in the North and West, the colonial chicks had been forced to cling close to the wings of their British mother hen. Now that the hawk was killed, they could range far afield with a new spirit of independence.

The French, humiliated by the British and saddened by the fate of Canada, consoled themselves with one wishful thought. Perhaps the loss of their American empire would one day result in Britain's loss of its American empire. In a sense the history of the United States began with the fall of Quebec and Montreal; the infant Republic was cradled on the Plains of Abraham.

The Spanish and Indian menaces were also now substantially reduced. Spain was eliminated from Florida, although entrenched in Louisiana and New Orleans, and was still securely in possession of much of western North America, including the vast territory from present-day Texas to California. As for the Indians, the Treaty of Paris that ended the Seven Years' War dealt a harsh blow to the Iroquois, Creeks, and other interior tribes. The Spanish removal from Florida and the French removal from Canada deprived the Indians of their most powerful diplomatic weapon—the ability to play off the rival European powers against one another. In the future the Indians would have to negotiate exclusively with the British.



#### British Colonies at End of the Seven Years' War, 1763

This map, showing the colonies thirteen years before the Declaration of Independence, helps to explain why the British would be unable to conquer their offspring. The colonists were spreading rapidly into the backcountry, where the powerful British navy could not flush them out. During the Revolutionary War, the British at one time or another captured the leading colonial cities—Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Charleston—but the more remote interior remained a sanctuary for rebels.

Sensing the newly precarious position of the Indian peoples, the Ottawa chief Pontiac in 1763 led several tribes, aided by a handful of French traders who remained in the region, in a violent campaign to drive the British out of the Ohio Country. Pontiac's warriors besieged Detroit in the spring of 1763 and eventually overran all but three British posts west of the Appalachians, killing some two thousand soldiers and settlers.

The British retaliated swiftly and cruelly. Waging a primitive version of biological warfare, one British commander ordered blankets infected with smallpox to be distributed among the Indians. Such tactics crushed

the uprising and brought an uneasy truce to the frontier. His bold plan frustrated, Pontiac himself perished in 1769 at the hands of a rival chieftain. As for the British, the bloody episode convinced them of the need to stabilize relations with the western Indians and to keep regular troops stationed along the restless frontier, a measure for which they soon asked the colonists to foot the bill.

Land-hungry American colonists were now free to burst over the dam of the Appalachian Mountains and flood out over the verdant western lands. A tiny rivulet of pioneers like Daniel Boone had already trickled into Tennessee and Kentucky; other courageous settlers made their preparations for the long, dangerous trek over the mountains.

Then, out of a clear sky, the London government issued its Proclamation of 1763. It flatly prohibited settlement in the area beyond the Appalachians, pending further adjustments. The truth is that this hastily drawn document was not designed to oppress the colonists at all, but to work out the Indian problem fairly and prevent another bloody eruption like Pontiac's uprising.

But countless Americans, especially land speculators, were dismayed and angered. Was not the land beyond the mountains their birthright? Had they not, in addition, purchased it with their blood in the recent war? In complete defiance of the proclamation, they clogged the westward trails. In 1765 an estimated one thousand wagons rolled through the town of Salisbury, North Carolina, on their way "up west." This wholesale flouting of royal authority boded ill for the longevity of British rule in America.

The Seven Years' War also caused the colonists to develop a new vision of their destiny. With the path cleared for the conquest of a continent, with their birthrate high and their energy boundless, they sensed that they were a potent people on the march. And they were in no mood to be restrained.

Lordly Britons, whose suddenly swollen empire had tended to produce swollen heads, were in no mood for back talk. Puffed up over their recent victories, they were already annoyed with their unruly colonial subjects. The stage was set for a violent family quarrel.

## Chronology

<b>1598</b>	Edict of Nantes	<b>1744-1748</b>	King George's War (War of Austrian Succession)
<b>1608</b>	Champlain colonizes Quebec for France	<b>1754</b>	Washington battles French on frontier Albany Congress
<b>1643</b>	Louis XIV becomes king of France	<b>1754-1763</b>	Seven Years' War (French and Indian War)
<b>1682</b>	La Salle explores Mississippi River to the Gulf of Mexico	<b>1755</b>	Braddock's defeat
<b>1689-1697</b>	King William's War (War of the League of Augsburg)	<b>1757</b>	Pitt emerges as leader of British government
<b>1702-1713</b>	Queen Anne's War (War of Spanish Succession)	<b>1759</b>	Battle of Quebec
<b>1718</b>	French found New Orleans	<b>1763</b>	Peace of Paris Pontiac's uprising Proclamation of 1763
<b>1739</b>	War of Jenkins's Ear		

For further reading, see the Appendix. For web resources, go to <http://college.hmco.com>.