Effects of the French and Indian War

Background

The French and Indian War (a.k.a. the Seven Years War) was fought between 1754 and 1763. The British (along their English colonies and some Native American allies) fought against the French (along with their colonists and Native American allies). While this war was a major victory for the British, it also sowed the seeds of future conflict with the English colonies.

When the French and Indian War ended in 1763, British Prime Minister William Pitt’s goal of ending French influence in North America was complete. Excepting a few Caribbean islands, France was expelled from all of North America a well as losing India to the British. The effects of the war on the English colonies, however, were to serve as a detriment to imperial goals. Twenty years after the end of the French and Indian War, another war was concluded, resulting in an independent United States. How did this happen?



**The Cost of the War** **and Empire**

In 1763 the new British Prime Minister, George, Lord Grenville, faced significant obstacles related to the recent war. The American colonists were beginning to assert themselves while the new king, George III, attempted to bring back royal authority and control in the style of James I and Charles I. The national debt stood at 123 million pounds (equivalent to fifty billion pounds in contemporary values).

An expanded empire also meant vastly increased future costs. Englishmen living in England were already overtaxed and recent riots throughout the land precluded any further home taxation. The American colonies, however, were prosperous. According to historian Oliver Dickerson, the thirteen colonies enjoyed the highest standard of living compared to any other society.

Consequently, British would later look to the colonies to help pay some of the cost of running and defending this new empire. While the colonists had long been used to the policy of salutary neglect (lax enforcement of tax laws), after the war the British government found it necessary to levy new taxes on the colonies.

**Perceptions of Colonials as Provincials**

The interaction of British officers and soldiers with colonial militia during the French and Indian War clearly set the stage for long-term perceptions. General James Wolfe, whose aggressive strategies helped to defeat the French, commented that, “The Americans are in general the dirtiest most contemptible cowardly dogs that you can conceive.”

Equally as noxious were colonial views of the British. As early as 1755, general officers like Edward Braddock were perceived as pompous and arrogant. But the rag-tag militias were trained by such men during the war, despite heavy desertion rates. As Robert Harvey states in his book on the British perspective of the Revolution, such training helped to “militarize” the colonies, an action beneficial when war finally broke out.

**Pontiac’s Rebellion and the 1763 Proclamation**

Out of a total population of 2.5 million at the end of the French and Indian War, 50,000 lived beyond the Appalachians. Once the war ended, colonists by the thousands looked westward, now that the French threat was over. Massive migrations led to Indian reprisals, the greatest occurring in 1763 under Chief Pontiac. Pontiac managed to do what no other Native American had been able to: unifying disparate tribes under one goal.

The uprising was bloody, forcing Grenville to dispatch troops to protect the colonists. The defeat of Pontiac led to the Proclamation of 1763, which forbade English settlers from settling west of the Appalachian Mountains. Colonists, who had sacrificed during the war, thought they should have the right to settle the rich fertile lands of the trans-Appalachian West. Consequently, the proclamation line was largely a “paper boundary;” the English colonists ignored it, settling the West anyway.

The cost of maintaining a military force in the colonies to protect the settlers – something the colonists were unwilling to do but fully expected from Britain, was 200,000 pounds, of which the government agreed to pay 100,000. Yet the colonists refused to pay even this amount, leading to a series of Parliamentary taxes on the colonies.

**Seven Years War and the Revolution**

The coming of the American War for Independence owes much to the events during and immediately after the French and Indian War. In many cases, both perceptions tended to be overstated and exaggerated.

**Questions**

1. Who fought on each side in the French and Indian War?

2. What territory did Great Britain gain after the war?

3. How did Britain plan on paying the higher costs associated with a larger empire?

4. How did the war increase tensions between the colonists and their British countrymen?

5. What was Pontiac’s Rebellion?

6. What did the Proclamation of 1763 do?

7. How did the English colonists respond to the Proclamation of 1763?

8. How did the French and Indian War set the stage for future conflict between the English colonies and Great Britain?