

# The French And Indian War: Causes

## I. Introduction

- Recap of previous topics:
  - Overview of the French and Indian War.
  - The Iroquois Confederacy, the Great Law of Peace, and the role of wampum.
  - Clan Mothers' role as checks and balances in the Iroquois government.
- Transition to discussing the causes of the French and Indian War.

## II. The Causes of the French and Indian War

### 1. Territorial Disputes

- Both the French and British claimed the fertile Ohio Valley.
- Understanding the Ohio Valley:
  - Included present-day Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Kentucky, and Western Pennsylvania.
  - Rich in resources: fertile land, forests, access to major rivers (Ohio and Mississippi).
- French Colonization:
  - French established control in Quebec, Ontario, Great Lakes, and along the Mississippi River to New Orleans (New France/Louisiana).
  - Strategic importance of the Mississippi River as a “highway” for trade and transportation.
- French Forts:
  - French built forts along the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers to defend their claims.
- British Expansion:
  - British colonies on the East Coast were growing rapidly.
  - Private companies, like the Ohio Company of Virginia, promoted westward expansion into the Ohio Valley.
  - British settlers ignored French claims and forts, moving into the disputed territory.

### 2. Fur Trade Competition

- Lucrative Fur Trade:
  - High demand for beaver pelts in Europe for making hats and clothing.
  - Economic dominance over fur trade was a key goal for both France and Britain.
- Mercantilism:
  - Both powers adhered to the idea that there was a fixed amount of wealth in the world.
  - They sought to control trade routes and resources to dominate economically.
- French Fur Trade Strategy:
  - Centered around New France (Canada, Great Lakes, Mississippi River).
  - Built alliances with Native American tribes like the Algonquin and Huron.
  - Relied on "courier des bois" (independent French-Canadian fur traders) who lived among the native tribes.
- British Fur Trade Strategy:
  - More centralized along the Eastern Seaboard.
  - Controlled by companies like the Hudson Bay Company and the Ohio Company.
  - Expanded westward, offering better prices to attract native suppliers.
- Alliances with Native Tribes:

## **The French And Indian War: Causes**

- Both French and British sought alliances with tribes to secure their fur trade interests.
- The Iroquois Confederacy used their relationship with the British to maintain power and control.

### **3. Historic Rivalry Between France and Britain**

- Long-standing Conflicts:
  - Centuries of political, territorial, and economic rivalry dating back to the 1300s.
  - Conflicts over European territory, thrones, and power dynamics.
- British and French Colonial Presence:
  - British Colonies:
    - 13 colonies along the Eastern Seaboard.
    - Highly populated, economically diverse, expanding westward.
  - French Colonies:
    - New France included Canada, Great Lakes, and Mississippi River Valley down to Louisiana.
      - Less populated, focused on the fur trade, missionary work, and building forts and trading posts.
- Clashing Perspectives:
  - British colonies valued self-governance, expansion, and individualism.
  - French approach was more centralized and focused on maintaining control over specific trade routes.
- Global Ambitions:
  - Both nations sought to dominate not just North America but global trade.
  - Naval and military conflicts were common as each nation asserted its dominance.

### **III. Conclusion and Transition**

- Summary of the three primary causes of the French and Indian War:
  - Territorial disputes in the Ohio Valley.
  - Competition for control of the fur trade.
  - The historic rivalry between the French and British empires.
- Hint at the conflict's escalation and George Washington's role in the coming events.

# The French And Indian War: Causes

## Why?

### Causes

1. Territorial Disputes
2. Fur Trade Competition
3. Historic Rivalry

**1. Territorial Disputes: Both the British and French claimed the fertile Ohio Valley. The French had established a string of forts to protect their claims and trade routes, while the British wanted to expand their colonies westward.**

The territorial disputes over the Ohio River Valley were a key catalyst for the French and Indian War. This fertile and strategic region, located west of the Appalachian Mountains and extending from modern-day western Pennsylvania through Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois, became a flashpoint for colonial rivalry between Britain and France, as well as various Native American tribes who had long inhabited and controlled the area.

### Importance of the Ohio River Valley

**1. Fertile Land:** The Ohio River Valley was highly valued for its rich, fertile soil, which was ideal for farming. As the British colonies on the eastern seaboard grew, settlers began looking for more land, and the valley promised ample opportunity for expansion and agricultural development.

**2. Strategic Location:** The Ohio River itself was a major artery for transportation and trade, connecting various waterways, including the Mississippi River, and providing access deep into the interior of North America. Whoever controlled the Ohio River Valley could control much of the commerce and movement in the region.

**3. Fur Trade:** The valley was crucial for the lucrative fur trade, especially for pelts such as beaver, which were highly sought after in Europe. Both French and British traders relied heavily on the region's access to fur resources, and control over trading routes was seen as vital to maintaining economic dominance.

### French Claims and Actions

- New France had laid claim to a vast area of North America, which included the Ohio River Valley. From the French perspective, this region formed part of a larger network that connected Canada (specifically Quebec and Montreal) to their southern colony in Louisiana. By controlling the valley, France could maintain its supply routes and protect its empire from British encroachment.

- To protect their claims, the French built a series of forts in the Ohio Valley in the early 1750s, which were designed to establish a strong French presence and fend off British settlers. Notable forts included Fort Duquesne at the confluence of the Allegheny and Monongahela Rivers (the site of modern Pittsburgh), which became a key military stronghold.

## **The French And Indian War: Causes**

### **British Ambitions**

- The British colonies, especially Virginia, also laid claim to the Ohio River Valley. By the mid-18th century, the British population along the eastern seaboard was rapidly growing, and land speculation companies, like the Ohio Company of Virginia, were actively promoting westward settlement into the region.
- British settlers and traders began venturing into the valley, disregarding French claims. For Britain, control of the Ohio River Valley was not only about land for expansion but also about pushing back French influence and securing the western frontier.

### **Native American Presence and Alliances**

- The Ohio River Valley had been inhabited by various Native American nations, including the Shawnee, Delaware, Miami, and others. These tribes were not passive bystanders but active players in the conflict, as they sought to maintain control over their ancestral lands and resist encroachment by both European powers.
- Native American tribes formed strategic alliances with the French, who had established trading partnerships and were viewed as less of a threat to Native land than British settlers. However, the Iroquois Confederacy, particularly influential in the region, had a complex relationship with both the British and the French, often playing both sides to protect their interests.
- The Ohio Country became a contested region where Native tribes fought not only against European powers but also with each other, as tribal allegiances shifted throughout the war.

### **Escalation of the Conflict**

- In 1753, Governor Robert Dinwiddie of Virginia dispatched a young George Washington to deliver a formal protest to the French, demanding that they vacate the Ohio Valley. The French refused.
- In 1754, Washington was sent back with a small force to assert British claims. After a skirmish at Jumonville Glen, Washington hastily built Fort Necessity in southwestern Pennsylvania. However, he was quickly surrounded by a superior French force and forced to surrender. This encounter marked the formal beginning of hostilities between Britain and France over the Ohio River Valley.
- The French continued to fortify their positions in the valley, particularly at Fort Duquesne, while the British attempted to mobilize colonial militias and British regular troops to dislodge them.

### **Impact of the Dispute**

1. Colonial Ambitions: The dispute over the Ohio River Valley highlighted the broader clash of colonial ambitions between Britain and France. For Britain, the valley represented future expansion for its rapidly growing colonies, while for France, it was essential for maintaining the integrity of its North American empire.

## The French And Indian War: Causes

2. Native American Power: Native American tribes played a central role in the dispute, often holding the balance of power between the two European empires. Tribes like the Delaware and Shawnee used the conflict to defend their land from encroachment, but many ultimately found themselves at the mercy of the European powers' treaties and territorial changes after the war.

3. British and French Strategies: The French sought to build a network of forts and alliances to protect their fur trade and maintain dominance in the interior of the continent, while the British aimed to settle the region with colonists and assert control through military campaigns.

### Conclusion

The territorial dispute over the Ohio River Valley was a critical factor leading to the outbreak of the French and Indian War. It was not just a fight over a patch of land but a struggle for control of the vast North American continent, its economic resources, and the balance of power between Britain, France, and the Native American nations. The eventual British victory not only resulted in French expulsion from much of North America but also set the stage for future tensions between Britain and its own American colonies, contributing to the causes of the American Revolution.

### **2. Competition for Fur Trade: Both powers competed for alliances with Native American tribes who controlled the fur trade, especially in the Great Lakes and Ohio Valley regions.**

The fur trade competition was a central factor in the conflict between Britain and France during the French and Indian War, especially in contested regions like the Ohio River Valley and the Great Lakes area. The trade in furs, particularly beaver pelts, was one of the most lucrative industries in North America throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, driving the colonial ambitions of both European powers.

### Importance of the Fur Trade

1. Beaver Pelts: Beaver fur was highly valued in Europe for making felt hats, which were a symbol of status and fashion at the time. The pelts were durable, water-resistant, and ideal for making high-quality hats, which created a booming market.

2. Economic Power: The fur trade was an integral part of both the French and British colonial economies in North America. Control over fur trade routes and access to fur-rich regions provided immense wealth for European powers. This economic incentive fueled the expansion into the interior of the continent.

3. Native American Role: Native American tribes were the primary trappers and suppliers of furs, making them indispensable to the trade. Their extensive knowledge of the land and

## **The French And Indian War: Causes**

expertise in hunting made them key players in the fur trade economy. Both the French and British vied for alliances with Native tribes to gain control of the trade.

## **The French And Indian War: Causes**

### **French Fur Trade System**

1. **New France's Strategy:** The French fur trade was centered around New France (modern-day Quebec, parts of Ontario, and the Mississippi Valley), which extended deep into the interior of North America, including the Great Lakes, Mississippi River, and Ohio Valley regions. French traders established a system of trade networks and alliances with Native Americans, such as the Algonquin and Huron peoples, who supplied furs in exchange for European goods like metal tools, firearms, cloth, and alcohol.
2. **Trading Posts and Forts:** The French built a network of forts and trading posts to protect their fur trade routes and alliances. Important posts included Fort Niagara, Fort Detroit, and Fort Duquesne in the Ohio Valley. These forts served as commercial hubs where Native American trappers brought furs to trade with the French.
3. **Coueurs de Bois:** The French fur trade relied heavily on the coueurs de bois (runners of the woods), independent French-Canadian traders who ventured deep into the wilderness to trade directly with Native Americans. These men often lived among the Native tribes, learning their languages and customs, and fostering close economic and diplomatic relationships.
4. **Indigenous Alliances:** The French strategy of fostering alliances with Native American tribes was essential to their success. They tended to focus on trade partnerships rather than large-scale settlement, which made them less of a threat to Native lands than British settlers. This allowed the French to maintain strong ties with many tribes, who preferred the French over the land-hungry British.

### **British Fur Trade System**

1. **British Competition:** The British fur trade was more concentrated along the eastern seaboard and was controlled by several major companies, most notably the Hudson's Bay Company and later, the Ohio Company. These companies were chartered by the British Crown and controlled vast trading operations. The British sought to extend their control westward into the fur-rich regions of the Ohio Valley and beyond.
2. **Colonial Traders:** While the British fur trade was more centralized, independent traders and land companies, such as the Ohio Company of Virginia, began to push into the Ohio River Valley by the mid-18th century, challenging French dominance. British traders from the colonies, especially from Pennsylvania and Virginia, sought to establish trading posts and supply furs to Europe, often offering better prices than the French to attract Native American suppliers.
3. **Impact of Settlement:** British fur traders were often followed by settlers seeking to establish farms and communities. This expansionist approach threatened Native American lands and disrupted traditional hunting grounds, creating tension with the tribes. Unlike the

## **The French And Indian War: Causes**

French, who mostly focused on trading, the British colonial model was more aggressive in terms of settlement and land acquisition, which increased conflict with Native tribes.

4. Iroquois Confederacy: The British developed a key alliance with the powerful Iroquois Confederacy, a coalition of Native American nations in the northeastern United States. The Iroquois played a balancing act, using their relationship with the British to leverage power and control over other Native groups and the fur trade. Their support gave the British access to fur-rich areas in the Great Lakes and Ohio Valley.

### **Native American Role in the Fur Trade**

1. Vital Middlemen: Native American tribes were essential to the fur trade, acting as trappers and middlemen between the European powers. Tribes such as the Huron, Ottawa, Shawnee, and Algonquin were skilled hunters and traders who could access remote wilderness areas where beavers and other fur-bearing animals were abundant. They often traded furs for European goods like guns, metal tools, and cloth, which became vital to their own economies and societies.

2. Shifting Alliances: Native tribes shifted their alliances between the French and British, depending on who offered better trade goods or posed less of a threat to their land. For example, the French were more focused on maintaining a fur trade network and building strategic forts, while the British settlers sought to acquire land, leading many tribes to initially prefer French partnerships.

3. Cultural and Economic Impact: The fur trade had a profound impact on Native American societies. It introduced European goods into Native cultures, reshaped hunting patterns, and often led to over-hunting in certain areas. Firearms became especially sought after, as they gave Native hunters an advantage but also led to greater competition and conflict between tribes.

### **Competition Between the French and British**

1. Territorial Expansion: Both the French and British sought to control fur-rich regions such as the Great Lakes and the Ohio River Valley. The French built forts to secure their trading routes, while the British attempted to expand westward, often inciting conflict with both the French and Native American tribes.

2. Conflict Over Trade Routes: The French fur trade relied on a network of rivers and lakes stretching from the St. Lawrence River, through the Great Lakes, and down the Mississippi. The British aimed to penetrate this network and establish their own control over key trade routes. The Ohio River Valley, in particular, was seen as a strategic gateway to the interior of the continent and thus became a focal point of competition.



## **The French And Indian War: Causes**

3. Better Prices and Goods: Both powers competed to offer Native Americans better trade terms. The British often had cheaper and more plentiful goods because of their larger industrial capacity. They offered Native tribes superior trade goods, particularly firearms and metal tools, to draw them away from French trade networks. This economic rivalry sometimes shifted Native alliances toward the British, which weakened French influence.

### **Role in the French and Indian War**

The competition for control over the fur trade directly contributed to the outbreak of the French and Indian War (1754–1763). Both the British and the French sought to dominate the fur-rich Ohio River Valley, and tensions over territory and trade led to skirmishes, such as George Washington's early battles with French forces in the region. The war escalated into a broader struggle for control over North America, with the fur trade playing a central role in motivating each side's colonial ambitions.

- The war disrupted the fur trade significantly, as French forts were captured by British forces, and Native alliances shifted. With the British victory in the war, France was largely expelled from North America, and the British gained control over the fur trade in the Ohio Valley and the Great Lakes region.

- The Treaty of Paris (1763) ended the war and transferred most French territories in North America to Britain, including control over key fur trading areas. This gave Britain dominance over the fur trade but also increased tensions with Native American tribes who had previously relied on French partnerships and now faced greater pressure from British settlers.

### **Long-term Consequences**

1. British Control of the Fur Trade: After the French defeat, Britain took over France's fur trade networks, but tensions remained with Native American tribes who had previously been allied with the French. British policies, including restrictions on western settlement (such as the Proclamation of 1763), sought to prevent conflicts with Native Americans over land and hunting grounds, but they were largely ignored by colonial settlers.

2. Native American Resistance: The end of French control over the fur trade weakened Native American bargaining power. Without French support, many tribes found themselves increasingly marginalized, leading to uprisings like Pontiac's Rebellion (1763), where Native groups, dissatisfied with British policies, attempted to resist British expansion into the Ohio Valley.

In conclusion, the competition over the fur trade was not only a major economic driver of the French and Indian War but also shaped the course of colonial and Native American relations. Control of the fur trade was linked to territorial expansion, alliances, and ultimately, the fate of North America in the 18th century.

## The French And Indian War: Causes

### **3. Colonial Rivalries: The war was also fueled by long-standing tensions between Britain and France, as both sought to dominate the global stage.**

The colonial rivalries between Britain and France were a central cause of the French and Indian War (1754–1763). These rivalries reflected a broader global struggle between the two European powers for supremacy, with North America as one of the major battlegrounds. The competition between their colonies for territorial expansion, economic control, and political dominance contributed to tensions that eventually erupted into war.

#### **Historical Context of Colonial Rivalries**

By the mid-18th century, both Britain and France had established vast colonial empires in North America, and their ambitions for further expansion came into direct conflict:

#### **1. British Colonies:**

- Britain's thirteen colonies along the eastern seaboard were populous, economically diverse, and expanding rapidly.
- These colonies operated with a degree of self-governance and had significant populations involved in agriculture, trade, and commerce.
- British colonists, particularly in areas like Virginia and Pennsylvania, were eager to expand westward into the Ohio River Valley, which they saw as vital for future growth.

#### **2. French Colonies:**

- New France, comprising modern-day Canada, the Great Lakes region, and the Mississippi River Valley (including Louisiana), was geographically vast but sparsely populated.
- French colonial efforts were largely focused on the fur trade, missionary work, and the establishment of trading posts and forts to secure alliances with Native American tribes.
- The French colonial model emphasized maintaining good relations with Native American tribes, which helped secure access to the interior of the continent and protect French fur-trading interests.

#### **Specific Areas of Rivalry**

##### **1. Territorial Rivalry:**

- Westward Expansion: The most immediate cause of conflict was the competition for control of the Ohio River Valley, a region claimed by both the British and French. The valley was crucial for both the fur trade and future territorial expansion. French efforts to construct forts in the region, like Fort Duquesne, were seen by the British as an encroachment on land they considered theirs.
- Imperial Ambitions: Britain and France both aspired to expand their colonial holdings in North America, not just for territorial gain but to increase their global influence. Control over key territories such as the Ohio River Valley, the Great Lakes, and the Mississippi River Valley offered access to the continent's rich natural resources, including furs and fertile land. The Mississippi River was particularly strategic for the French, as it connected their northern territories in Canada with the southern colony of Louisiana.

# The French And Indian War: Causes

## 2. Economic Rivalry:

- Fur Trade Competition: The fur trade, especially in beaver pelts, was immensely profitable, and both Britain and France wanted to dominate it. The French, who had been deeply entrenched in the fur trade with Native Americans, built a vast trading network that stretched from Canada through the Great Lakes to Louisiana. The British sought to disrupt this network by expanding their influence in the Ohio Valley and pushing westward.
- Land and Settlement: The British colonies were much more densely populated and relied on agriculture and land expansion for economic growth. As British settlers moved westward into the interior, they increasingly encroached on French territory and Native American lands. By contrast, the French focused less on large-scale settlement and more on maintaining strategic forts and trading outposts, relying on Native alliances.

## 3. Political and Military Rivalry:

- Balance of Power in Europe: The French and Indian War was part of a larger global conflict, known in Europe as the Seven Years' War (1756–1763), which saw Britain and France battle for dominance in Europe, India, and the Americas. The colonial aspect of this rivalry played out in North America, where both powers sought to control critical territories and resources.
- Military Fortifications: Both Britain and France established military outposts to protect their colonial interests. For instance, France constructed forts along strategic points like the Ohio River and the Great Lakes to safeguard their access to the fur trade and deter British expansion. Britain, in turn, built forts and sent troops to counter French advances, leading to a military standoff in the contested regions.

## 4. Colonial Identity and Ambitions:

- British Colonial Growth: By the 1750s, the British colonies had grown considerably in population and wealth, fostering a growing sense of colonial identity and ambition. Many colonists, particularly land speculators and wealthy planters, were eager to expand westward, seeing the Ohio Valley and beyond as critical for future prosperity. The colonies had developed a degree of self-governance, and this sense of autonomy made them increasingly assertive in pushing westward.
- French Strategy of Control: In contrast, France's colonial approach was more centralized and focused on controlling trade routes and forging alliances with Native Americans. The French government sought to maintain tight control over its territories and was less concerned with large-scale settlement. French efforts in the interior aimed to link their Canadian holdings with their southern colonies, effectively encircling the British colonies along the coast.

## Tensions Between Colonists and Empires

**1. Conflicting Claims:** Both the British and French governments issued conflicting territorial claims in the Ohio River Valley, resulting in tension between colonists on the ground. British land companies like the Ohio Company of Virginia were actively promoting

## The French And Indian War: Causes

westward settlement, leading to clashes with French traders and soldiers, who were building forts to solidify their claims.

**2. Colonial Militias:** The growing tensions between Britain and France in North America led to the involvement of colonial militias. In 1754, for example, George Washington, then a young officer in the Virginia militia, led a force into the Ohio Valley to challenge French claims. The resulting skirmish at Fort Necessity escalated into open warfare. This demonstrated how colonial rivalries on the ground could spark broader imperial conflicts.

**3. Native American Alliances:** Both colonial powers sought to secure alliances with Native American tribes, who held significant power in the region. Many Native tribes preferred the French, who had established longstanding trade relationships with them and were seen as less of a threat to their land. However, the British also had key alliances, particularly with the powerful Iroquois Confederacy. The competition for Native American allies was another factor that heightened tensions between the two colonial empires.

### Escalation to War

The colonial rivalries between Britain and France over North American territories came to a head in the early 1750s:

**1. French Fort Building:** The French began constructing a series of forts, such as Fort Le Boeuf, Fort Venango, and Fort Duquesne (at modern-day Pittsburgh), in the Ohio River Valley to protect their claims. These forts were seen as a direct threat by the British, who were promoting settlement in the same region.

**2. British Response:** In response, British colonial governors, especially Robert Dinwiddie of Virginia, took aggressive steps to challenge French control. Dinwiddie sent Washington to deliver an ultimatum to the French, demanding that they leave the region, which the French refused. This set the stage for conflict.

**3. Skirmish at Jumonville Glen:** The conflict escalated when Washington led a force against a small French detachment at Jumonville Glen in 1754, killing its commander. The skirmish led to further hostilities, with the French attacking Washington's hastily constructed Fort Necessity, forcing his surrender. This marked the beginning of open conflict in North America.

### Broader Global Conflict: The Seven Years' War

The French and Indian War was part of the larger Seven Years' War (1756–1763), which was fought between Britain and France on a global scale. The North American theater was a crucial part of this larger struggle:

**1. Imperial Stakes:** The stakes in North America were high for both Britain and France. Control of the continent would not only secure vast territories and resources but also enhance the global standing of each empire.

## The French And Indian War: Causes

**2. British Naval Power:** Britain's powerful navy allowed it to cut off French supply lines to its colonies, while British colonies outnumbered the French. The British government invested heavily in the war effort in North America, deploying regular troops to reinforce colonial militias.

**3. French Weaknesses:** France was at a disadvantage in terms of population and resources in North America. Their reliance on Native American alliances and fur trade networks could not compete with the larger, wealthier, and more aggressive British colonies. Ultimately, France's defeat in North America was sealed by British military successes, such as the capture of Quebec in 1759 and Montreal in 1760.

### Consequences of Colonial Rivalries

**1. British Victory:** The British ultimately triumphed in the French and Indian War, solidifying their control over North America and expelling France from most of the continent. The Treaty of Paris (1763) awarded Britain Canada, Florida, and French territories east of the Mississippi River.

**2. Shift in Colonial Power:** With the defeat of France, Britain became the dominant colonial power in North America. However, the war also left Britain with a huge debt, leading to new taxation policies on its colonies, which contributed to growing colonial unrest and the eventual American Revolution.

**3. Impact on Native Americans:** Native American tribes, who had played both sides in the conflict, found themselves increasingly marginalized after the war. With the French gone, many tribes lost a key ally and buffer against British expansion. The British victory set the stage for further encroachments on Native land, leading to resistance movements like Pontiac's Rebellion in 1763.