

Effects of the french and indian war



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Why do I think the French and Indian war created America?

Much of historians work on the creation of America has focused primarily upon the War of Independence and its great influence in shaping the institutions of the American state. This scholarly focus upon the War of Independence as the cradle of America has meant that the French and Indian war has rather less significance in the popular imagination than it merits. It is the aim of this essay to demonstrate that the French and Indian war was not just a mere precursor to the much more widely recognized American War of Independence but rather a seminal event in its own right that had a profound effect on the course of American history. The French and Indian war sowed the seeds for the creation of America as we know it today. The noted historian Fred Anderson believes that the importance and influence of the French and Indian war was such that he terms it “ the war that made America.” [1] The argument that the French and Indian war created America shall be made with the exposition of the following points: Firstly, the war changed the colonials’ view of their own standing within the Empire. They believed that they had proved themselves as equals but their status had not undergone a similar conversion in the eyes of the Whitehall. Secondly, the removal of the French threat from North America led some to question why they needed to continue in their relationship with the British. Thirdly, the French and Indian war led to the Royal Proclamation of 1763 which denied the expression of the colonies’ determination for further westward expansion. Finally, the cost of the French and Indian war, and the wider Seven Years War led to increased taxes being imposed upon the colonies, taxes that were increasingly seen as an unjust imposition. All of these factors outlined

converged to produce the thirst for independence from the British Crown and led ultimately to the creation of America.

The French and Indian war initiated a cultural shift which led the colonials “to conceive of themselves as equal partners in the [British] empire” ^[2], an idea that put them at odds with their British overlords and ultimately led to conflict with the British Empire and the eventual creation of a independent America. The colonists assumed that their efforts in the war had proved their status as equal members of the Empire. They were, in their own opinion now ‘partners in Empire.’ There was a sense of pride in belonging to the Empire. Benjamin Franklin celebrated “not merely as I am a colonist, but as I am a Briton.” ^[3] In a mood of rejoicing, New York erected statues of King George III and William Pitt. However, the British did not agree that the colonists had earned their newfound status as partners in Empire. The views of the British had not altered, the belief in the Empire’s hierarchy and the primacy of the Crown remained. These “competing visions of empire” ^[4] were irreconcilable and meant yet further division between the two sides.

The Treaty of Paris (1763) saw France lose all of its North American territory east of the Mississippi save for the two small islands of Saint Pierre and Miquelon. This routing of the French led the colonies to question quite why they should remain tied to the British. There was now no common enemy to unite them. In 1773 the royal governor of Massachusetts stated that had Canada “remained to the French none of the spirit of opposition to the Mother Country would yet have appeared.” ^[5] The removal of the French threat that resulted from the conflict fostered an atmosphere in which the

colonials began to give birth to their own ideas of democracy and self-rule thus providing them with the intellectual and philosophical ammunition with which to attack British imperialism

The British were concerned that the colonies' western frontiers should not expand any further, lest it aggravate the Indian tribes and thus provoke a further spate of conflicts. Furthermore, Britain's new North American Empire, minus the French, was vast and any efforts to enlarge it yet further risked rendering it ungovernable. As a result the Royal Proclamation of 1763 prohibited further westward expansion beyond the Appalachian Mountains. The ejection of the French from North America meant that the colonists' desire for further westward expansion grew stronger at the very time when such expansion was denied by the Crown. In the eyes of the colonials the war had opened up the vast North American continent for further expansion and settlement. A 1763 farmer's almanac summed up the prevailing mood; " But now behold! The farmer may have land for nothing... Land enough for himself and all his sons, be they ever so many." [6] Something had to give and the issue of pushing back the frontiers soon brought the colonies into conflict with the Empire and added to the clamor for independence. Ironically the imperial expansionist ambitions of the settlers brought helped turn them against the impositions of the British Empire.

The huge cost of the French and Indian conflict, and the wider Seven Years War meant that British debt spiraled as a result. To help ease this financial burden a greater taxation was imposed upon the colonies. This fiscal burden, along with the philosophical objections - ' no taxation without

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representation' went the famous cry - made the colonies further question the wisdom of British rule. Protecting the continent had cost the British dearly and relative to British taxpayers the colonists paid less in taxes even though they were more prosperous. A prewar British debt of £73 million had grown to £137 million postwar ^[7] and the burden of administering North America was now more costly because the Empire had expanded so greatly. The colonists objected to paying what they saw as arbitrary taxes to a distant parliament where no colonist sat. Furthermore, the new taxes came at a time when the colonial economy was suffering a downturn, making them even more resented. The rebellion over taxes, the Stamp Act in particular, also had the effect of confirming British suspicions that the colonists longed for independence and helped set the colonist on a collision course with the Mother country.

In conclusion, this paper has demonstrated that the French and Indian war was a crucial contributing factor in the creation of an independent America. Whilst the American War of Independence may get much of the glory, the events of 1754-1763 clearly sowed the seeds for the colonies' break away from the British Empire. It did so due to four key reasons. Firstly the war encouraged the colonials to view themselves as equals yet their status had not undergone a similar conversion in the eyes of the Mother country, leading to discontent in North America. Secondly, the removal of the French threat also meant the removal of the common enemy that united the colonies and Britain, thus leading the colonists to question their ties to the Crown. Thirdly, the French and Indian war, due to the vast expansion of the North American empire, resulted in Royal Proclamation of 1763 which denied

any further westward expansion, the very expansion that the settlers desired. Finally, the cost of the French and Indian war, and the wider Seven Years War led to increased taxes being imposed upon the colonies who resented paying what they felt were arbitrary taxes to a distant parliament, especially in a time in which they were experiencing an economic downturn. All of these factors combined to stoke the fires of independence and rebellion in North America leading to the creation of an American nation free from imperialism. As Anderson argues, without the French and Indian war “ American independence would surely have been long delayed” [8]

Bibliography

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Footnotes

[1] Anderson, Fred, *The War That Made America : A Short History of the French and Indian War* (New York: Penguin, 2006)

[2] Anderson, Fred, *Crucible of War: The Seven Years' War and the Fate of Empire in British North America, 1754-1766* (London: Faber & Faber, 2000)

[3] Taylor, Alan, *American Colonies: The Settling of North America* (London: Penguin, 2001), 437

[4] Anderson, *The War That Made America* , 746

[5] Taylor (op cit) 438

[6] Ibid. 437

[7] Ibid. 439

[8] Anderson, *Crucible of Wa, r xi*