



Chapter 6

The Duel for North America

1608–1763

A torch lighted in the forests of America set all Europe in conflagration.

VOLTAIRE, CA. 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.

★ 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, more than ten thousand Huguenots—men, women, and children—were butchered in cold blood.

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

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 on the European continent, 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 (see Map 6.1) were established at Québec, 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, sometimes ravaging French settlements and frequently serving as allies of the British in the prolonged struggle for supremacy on the continent.



MAP 6.1 France's American Empire at Its Greatest Extent, 1700 © 2016 Cengage Learning

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.

★ 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

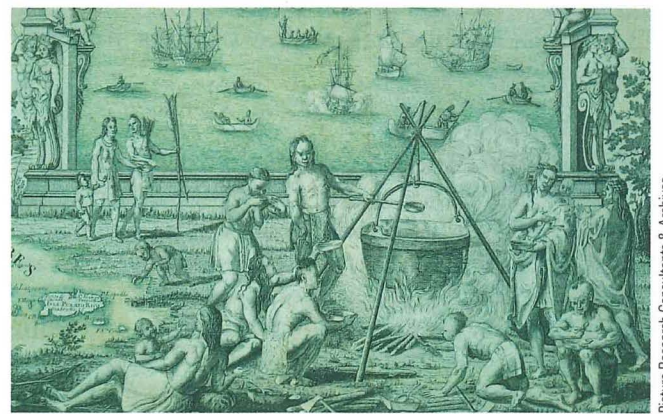
of beaver. These colorful **coureurs de bois** (“runners of the woods”) were also runners of risks—two-fisted drinkers, free spenders, free livers and lovers. They littered the land with scores of place names, including Baton Rouge (red stick), Terre Haute (high land), Des Moines (some monks), and Grand Teton (big breast).

Singing, paddle-swinging French **voyageurs** also recruited Indians into the fur business. The Indian fur flotilla arriving in Montréal 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.

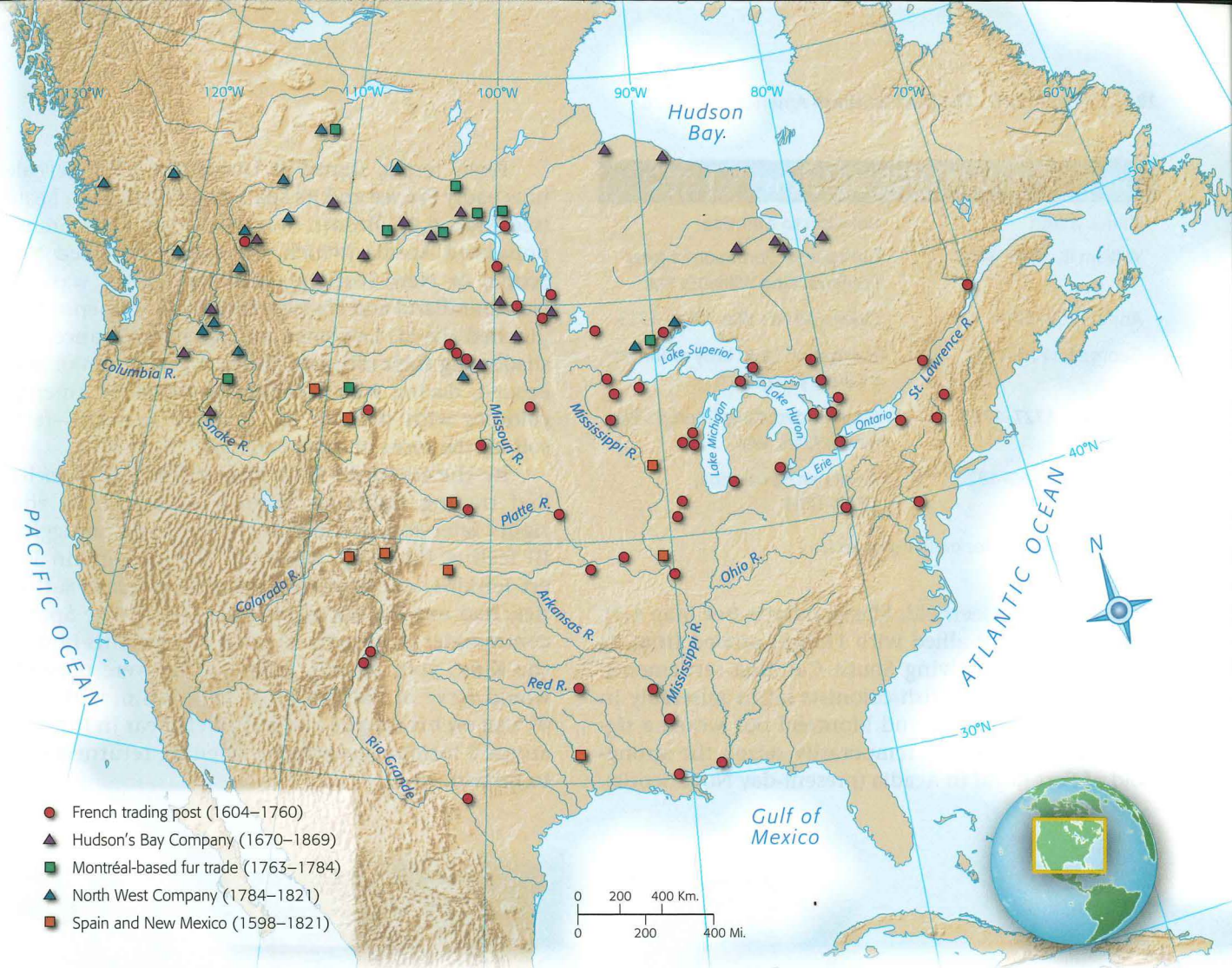
Pursuing the sharp-toothed beaver ever deeper into the heart of the continent, the French trappers and their Indian partners hiked, rode, snowshoed, sailed, and paddled across amazing distances. They trekked in a huge arc across the Great Lakes, into present-day Saskatchewan and Manitoba; along the valleys of the Platte, the Arkansas, and the Missouri; west to the Rockies; and south to the border of Spanish Texas (see Map 6.2). 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



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



MAP 6.2 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. © 2016 Cengage Learning

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** (1702–1713) (see Table 6.1), 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,

TABLE 6.1 Later English Monarchs*

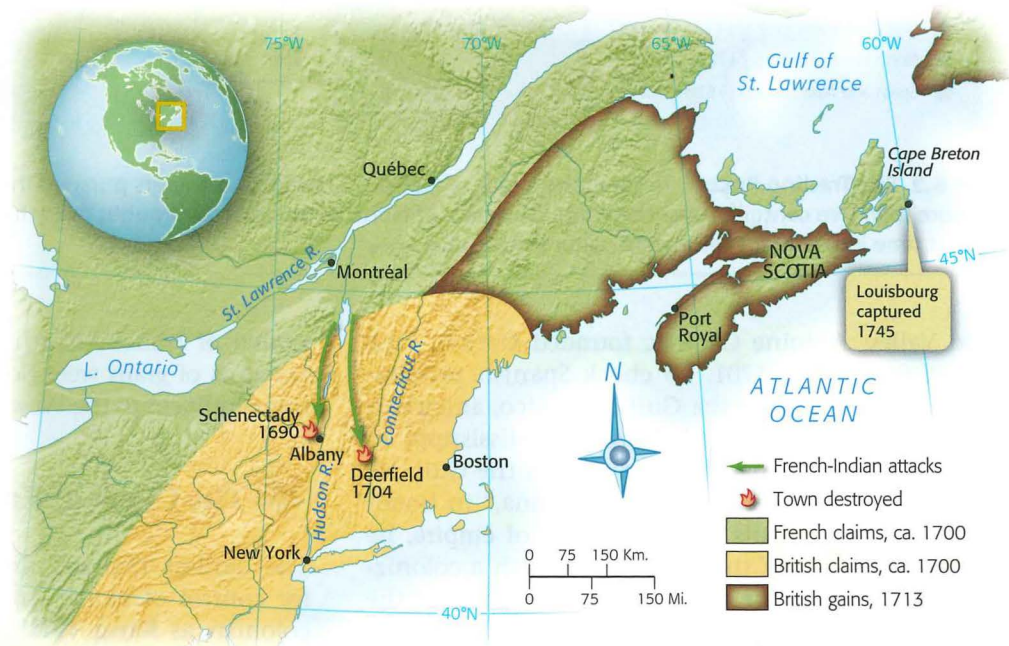
Name, Reign	Relation to America
William III, 1689–1702	Collapse of Dominion of New England; King William's War
Anne, 1702–1714	Queen Anne's War, 1702–1713
George I, 1714–1727	Navigation Laws laxly enforced ("salutary neglect")
George II, 1727–1760	Ga. founded; King George's War; Seven Years' War
George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

*See pp. 26 and 50 for earlier monarchs.

New York, and Deerfield, Massachusetts (see Map 6.3). 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 Québec and Montréal 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 (see Map 6.4). 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 rights later fostered much friction over smuggling. Ill feeling flared up when the British captain Robert 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.



MAP 6.3 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 more than 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." © 2016 Cengage Learning



George Catlin, Chief of the Taensa Indians Receiving La Salle, Paul Mellon Collection, image courtesy of the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

Chief of the Taensa Indians Receiving La Salle, March 20, 1682, by George Catlin, 1847–1848

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 recreated by the nineteenth-century artist George Catlin.

The **War of Jenkins's Ear**, curiously but aptly named, broke out in 1739 between the British and the Spaniards. 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 (see Table 6.2) and came to be called **King George's War** in 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 Map 6.3).

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.



MAP 6.4 North America After Two Wars, 1713 © 2016 Cengage Learning

★ **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