Chapter 6: Conflict on the Edge of the Empire, 1713-1774

Overview

Between 1689 and 1763, Britain and France were at war with one another more than half of the time. The world’s two most powerful nations struggled for world dominance. Britain would benefit from securing her borders, expanding markets, and increasing the size and power of her empire. The imperial wars exposed a widening division between the political economy of the colonies and the mother country. The costs were staggering and required an increasingly centralized state and a bigger bureaucracy as well as a more aggressive and focused leadership. Britain increased her power over the colonies, raised their taxes, and stationed a permanent army in North America to protect her possessions. Britain’s attempt to strengthen control resulted in colonial resistance and rebellion but her victory over the French came at an enormous price where her colonies were concerned. Three forces came together in this conflict. (1) King George III, who seemed unable to find a minister to his liking and therefore changed them frequently, believed that he should be the one to bring the colonies back under control. (2) Parliament was unwilling to abdicate power to the king and showed its willingness to exert its legislative powers over the colonies. (3) The colonists interpreted all of these actions and formulated their responses within the context of years of strife. The colonists rested their resistance on the British constitution and their rights as Englishmen. Economics and politics had become inseparable. The colonists equated representative government and prosperity. Britain believed that the colonies were a small part of a larger whole held together by a centralized and powerful government. The overarching question was: just how did the British constitution apply to the colonists; what were their rights within the empire? Each attempt by Parliament to enforce Empire was met with an organized colonial opposition. Britain responded with punitive measures, the colonists mobilized larger and larger segments of the society including women, and the two sides moved further and further apart. Soon reconciliation was no longer a desirable option.

Key Topics

The information in chapter 6 introduces your students to the following key topics:

- The Imperial Wars of the eighteenth century and their impact on colonial society.
- Relationships among French, English, Spanish, and various Indian tribes and how those relationships affected imperial conflicts in North America.
- The sources of the French and Indian War in the Ohio River Valley, why the French empire crumbled from within, and how the British achieved dominance.
- British attempts to reorganize the colonial empire at the end of the French and Indian War.
- The basis for growing colonial resistance to British regulation, its origins in British political and constitutional thought, and the development of new theories of government.
- The series of British acts and colonial responses that brought Britain and the colonies to the brink of war.

Chapter Outline
Susannah Willard Johnson Experiences the Empire

The Wars for Empire
- An Uneasy Peace
- New War, Old Pattern
- War and Political Economy

The Victory of the British Empire
- The French Empire Crumbles from Within
- The Virginians Ignite a War

Feature: Focus on Youth: Youth in Captivity
- From Local to Imperial War
- Problems with British-Colonial Cooperation
- The British Gain the Advantage

Enforcing the Empire
- Pontiac’s Rebellion and its Aftermath
- Paying for the Empire: Sugar and Stamps

Rejecting the Empire
- An Argument about Rights and Obligations
- The Imperial Crisis in Local Context
- Contesting the Townshend Duties

A Revolution in the Empire
- “Massacre” in Boston
- The Empire Comes Apart
- The First Continental Congress

Conclusion

Annotated chapter outline

Susannah Willard Johnson Experiences the Empire: Susannah and James Johnson, settlers in New Hampshire’s frontier region were typical of most: they had seized the opportunity to live the good life on the frontier, secure in the promises of the developing market economy but threatened by an imperial conflict between Britain and France and France’s Indian allies. While France and England were competing to decide who would dominate both the markets the consumer revolution was creating and the lands it was populating, the Johnsons were caught up in the fear and violence that had become a way of life for frontier settlers.

The Wars for Empire: Between 1689 and 1763, Britain and France were at war with one another more than half of the time. The world’s two most powerful nations struggled for world dominance. Britain would benefit from securing her borders, expanding markets, and increasing the size and power of her empire. The imperial wars exposed a widening division between the political economy of the colonies and the mother country. The costs were staggering and required an increasingly centralized state and a bigger bureaucracy as well as a more aggressive and focused leadership. Britain increased her power over the colonies, raised their taxes, and stationed a permanent army in North America to protect her possessions. Britain’s attempt to strengthen control resulted in colonial resistance and rebellion.

An Uneasy Peace: England and France may have concluded the end of hostilities following Queen Anne’s War, but that did not mean that hostilities on the frontier ceased. The French constructed forts and Indian battles and reprisals forced the Chickasaw into a closer alliance with the British. The British were unable to establish peaceful relations with their Indian neighbors in the Southeast. Encroachments on their land, enslavement of their women and children, and abuses by
traders led the Tuscaroras and Yamasees to rise up. When international rivalries commenced in 1739, the frontier regions were much as they had been a quarter of a century earlier, dangerous and unstable, for settlers, traders, and Indians alike.

New War, Old Pattern: Beginning in 1739 and continuing for nine more years, Britain attempted to expand onto Spanish and French territories and markets in North America. The war with Spain (Jenkin’s Ear 1739-1744) ended in stalemate just as a new war between Britain and France began. King George’s War (1744-1748) was the by now predictable pattern of European-inspired Indian raids along the frontiers. Britain blockaded French ports and disrupted the all-important gift-giving and the French-Indian empire began to crumble. The balance of power between Britain, France, and Spain in the New World had begun to become unbalanced.

War and Political Economy: The imperial wars had a profound impact on British colonists. Although they were patriotic to the cause, colonists felt the burden of the cost of war in terms of increased taxes and the number of colonists fighting the war. The colonists, whether in town or on the frontier, were victims of warfare: troops relied on plundering for their daily food, frontier Indians adapted their mourning wars to attacks on frontier settlements, and frontier settlers were at risk of being captured by the Indians. Between 1675 and 1763, frontier warfare was a more common experience than peace.

The Wars for Empire: Between 1689 and 1763, Britain and France were at war with one another more than half of the time. The world’s two most powerful nations struggled for world dominance. The imperial wars exposed a widening division between the political economy of the colonies and the mother country. The costs were staggering and required an increasingly centralized state and a bigger bureaucracy as well as a more aggressive and focused leadership. Britain increased her power over the colonies, raised their taxes, and stationed a permanent army in North America to protect her possessions. Britain’s attempt to strengthen control resulted in colonial resistance and rebellion.

- When hostilities ended following Queen Anne’s War hostilities did not cease on the frontier. When international rivalries commenced in 1739, the frontier regions were much as they had been a quarter of a century earlier: dangerous and unstable for settlers, traders, and Indians alike.
- During King George’s War (1744-1748) Britain blockaded French ports and disrupted the all-important gift-giving and the French-Indian empire began to crumble.
- The imperial wars had a profound impact on British colonists. Although they were patriotic to the cause, colonists felt the burden of the cost of war in terms of increased taxes and the number of colonists fighting the war.

What effect did the Imperial Wars of the eighteenth century have on the American colonies? Which regions were affected the most?

The Victory of the British Empire: The European powers contended with one another for market domination and a steady supply of food and raw materials. The French and Indian War began in political chaos.

- A British blockade cut short trade goods and the once cheap trade goods became expensive. France had a hard time keeping her Indian allies in tow and her control over the Indians in the Ohio River Valley waned.
- Indian tribes, with agendas of their own, played the British and French against one another and the colonies of Virginia and Pennsylvania also entered the fray for control of lands along the Ohio River.
• Both France and Virginia claimed land in the Ohio River Valley. They constructed forts to hold their claims. An especially important fort was the newly constructed fort at the fork of the Ohio River at present-day Pittsburgh. Virginians attacked and defeated a small French force at Pittsburgh but then the fort was overwhelmed by the French and the war in America was on.
• From the beginning of the war the advantage was with the French because of its population and the size of its army. The French state was more centralized and better prepared to speak with one voice to the Indians. But the French began to lose control: they alienated many of their Indian allies and the British were about to commit more troops to the field.
• The British and her colonists were another matter, as Benjamin Franklin’s Albany Plan for Union illustrated. The British blamed the colonists and the colonists blamed the British for their inability to defeat the French. Britain’s defeats in the early part of the war were the result of three related problems: neither British nor colonists were willing to sacrifice for the war effort, disastrous infighting among the colonists, and extraordinary arrogance among the British.
• Another significant reason for Britain’s change of luck in 1757 was the new head of the cabinet, William Pitt, who took office with a commitment to winning the war with France. Britain’s war aim shifted from simply regaining territory it had already claimed to seizing all of New France and thereby eliminating French competition in North America. Pitt’s willingness to outspend the French in military soldiers and supplies brought Britain the advantage and the victory.
• The Treaty of Paris 1763 saw France cede all of her North America claims east of the Mississippi River to the British and all of her claims west of the river, including New Orleans to Spain. Britain also acquired Florida from the Spanish.

What were the conflicts among the British, French, Spanish, and various Indian tribes on the North American continent about? Over the course of the century, who gained the most, and who lost the most?

What role did the colonies play in these conflicts?

**Enforcing the Empire:** The French and Indian War reinforced Britain’s need to act more forcefully in dealing with the colonies and exercise more control over them. Great Britain came out of the war with a staggering national debt as well as a huge new territory to manage. She set out with a new resolve to enforce a set of assumptions about how an empire should function and what the role of colonies should be.
• Peace in the west should have been easy because Great Britain had entered into alliances with the Iroquois and Ohio Valley Indians during the war. However, once the war was over, Britain discontinued the presents to the Indians and began to exert their will on the Indians -- Great Britain soon found herself in another war -- Pontiac’s Rebellion. The frontier violence led to yet another British “solution” to the problem of colonists and Indians trying to occupy the same region.
• This “solution” was the Proclamation Line of 1763. Colonists were prevented from moving west of a line drawn down the crest of the Alleghenies. It resulted in confusion and conflict.
• English domestic priorities, such as George III’s desire for a large and expensive military, led to the passage of four pieces of legislation designed to make the colonists pay for a portion of the cost of maintaining a British army in North America.
How and why did Britain attempt to reorganize its colonial empire at the end of the French and Indian War? Why did the colonists resist?

**Rejecting the Empire:** Colonial resistance to the legislation was swift and forceful. A coalition of elite leaders and more common people, the colonists rested their resistance on the British constitution and their rights as Englishmen. The question was: just how did the British constitution apply to the colonists; what were their rights within the empire?

- Britain maintained its right to regulate the colonies. Britain’s government was based on constitutionalism which was made up of two elements: the rule of law and the principle of consent. At issue was whether the legislation violated these principles. Parliament claimed the colonists were represented by Parliament, if not in a direct way, at least in a virtual way. It was supposed to act on behalf of the entire Empire, not only one’s constituents or even those who voted for him.

- Colonial reaction to the Stamp Act came in newspapers, public street protests, and political protest in the colonial assemblies. The protest cut across class lines; wealthy merchants and planters as well as working men and women and the poor joined in the protest in order to protect what they perceived as their rights.

- The Stamp Act Congress convened to protest the act on constitutional grounds. The protests were successful as the Stamp Act was never enforced. When Parliament repealed the Stamp Act, it passed the Declaratory Act which proclaimed Parliament sovereign over the colonists in all cases whatsoever. Parliament was determined to tighten its control over the colonies.

- The Townshend Revenue Act (1767) was an external tax. Opposition to it was slow to build. Those who opposed it saw the Townshend Duties as part of a larger issue or conspiracy designed to deprive the colonists of their liberties. Once opposition was organized, colonial assemblies organized to protest the legislation. Imports to the colonies were dramatically reduced and the Townshend Duties were repealed.

- How did the colonists justify their resistance to British attempts to reorganize the empire and make them pay for their own defense? What was the source of those theories of resistance, and how did they change as tensions increased?

**A Revolution in the Empire:** A pattern had been established: each attempt by Parliament to enforce Empire was met with an organized colonial opposition. Britain responded with punitive measures, colonists mobilized larger and larger segments of the society including women. Economics and politics had become inseparable. Two opposing viewpoints centered on Britain’s belief that the colonies were a small part of a larger whole held together by a centralized and powerful government. The colonists equated representative government and prosperity.

- The massacre in Boston grew out of the escalating tensions and on March 8, 1770, a scuffle turned into an armed conflict. Eleven colonists were wounded and five killed. Britain removed her troops. As long as Great Britain backed down after a colonial protest, everything was fine. The Boston massacre ushered in three years of peace. Troops were removed, trade resumed, everyone prospered as all objectionable legislation was repealed.

- The move that led to revolution was more accidental than calculated and it was the Tea Act (1773) that brought it about. The result was the Boston Tea Party.

- Parliament was determined to make the colonists pay for their defiance of the law and destruction of property. As a result, Parliament passed five laws in 1774, known as the Coercive Acts, designed to punish the colonists.
• The first continental congress was convened in Philadelphia September 5, 1774. The delegates met for seven weeks, got to know one another, and learned how to achieve unity. They discussed a national boycott of British goods and adopted the “Declaration of Rights” which stated their rights, liberties, and immunities as citizens of Great Britain. Their final decision was to reconvene in March 1775.

What was the series of events that brought Britain and the colonies to the brink of war in 1774? To what extent were they the product of poor leadership? Differing theories of government? Different social experiences?

Feature: Focus on Youth: Youth in Captivity: Susannah and James Johnson’s family was taken captive by Abenaki Indians one morning in 1754. Susannah’s son, Sylvanus, was only six years old when captured. When he was finally reunited with his mother four years later he had forgotten her, all of his memory for the English language, and his English “habits.” Like Sylvanus Johnson, Eunice Williams was abducted when she was seven. She, too, lost her English culture and by the age of sixteen she had converted to Catholicism, and married a Mohawk man with whom she lived for over fifty years. Despite opportunities to return to her English family she chose life with her new Mohawk family. Sylvanus Johnson and Eunice Williams represent a broader pattern of behavior. Only one out of ten male captives chose to stay with their Indian captors; more than half of female captives chose to remain. Just what this means is still uncertain.

Conclusion: As a result of Britain’s changing imperial policies, the colonists had developed their own political economy, one that linked self-government, limited government, and prosperity. The revolution could only come about if Britain proved unwilling to compromise on issues of governance and if the colonial radicals could convince the moderates that there was no other alternative but revolution.

Making links to other ideas Using the maps and websites, in addition to your prepared lectures and other assignments, can give you more resources to enable your students to see that history is much more than memorizing names and dates. You will find that the websites are even more comprehensive and adaptable than described and because they have been collected here in one volume you have a world of information no further away than the click of your mouse. If you are new to the web’s opportunities, you will be pleasantly surprised at the breadth and depth of the information available in these sites.

Map 01: Discuss the kinds of Indian relationships the colonists and Indians would have had according to this map.
Map 02: In what ways were the colonists and Indians brought into the French and English conflicts depicted here? Compare this map with the map in chapter 4 (Map 04.03). What conclusions did you draw?
Map 03: What information do these maps convey? What happened to cause these changes? Do the French have any possessions in North America at the conclusion of the war?
Map 04: What effect did the war have on the settlement pattern of the region depicted?

Web connections and resources Consider using these websites to supplement your students’ reading and analytical skills. The sites were chosen because of their relevance to the material in the chapter -- not just to mirror it but to provide additional materials and perspectives. Questions from the student study guide have been included so that you can use or amend them to
your own needs. Your students may find it insightful for you to guide them through the site as you help them develop research strategies.

“Conflict on the Edge of Empire” www.prenhall.com/boydston/stampact

In 1765, in the wake of its great victory in the Seven Year’s War (known at the French and Indian War in the American colonies), Great Britain set about putting its imperial house in order. Retiring the debt was a major priority, and the Stamp Act was one of several revenue measures designed to get the colonies to pay a greater share of the costs of empire. Colonists refused to pay the new stamp tax. Instead they organized a boycott of British goods and proclaimed that Parliament lacked the power to tax them, something only their own colonial legislatures could legitimately do. Use the materials here to explore how Americans forged their own peculiar notions of representation.

“Two Divergent Accounts of the Boston Massacre” http://odur.let.rug.nl/~usa/D/1751-1775/bostonmassacre/prest.htm

From both the British and American colonialists’ perspectives, these two documents help to show the growing ideological rift between England and the colonies.
1. Is the anonymous author’s account of the Boston Massacre biased in any way? If so, how?
2. Is Preston’s account of the Boston Massacre biased in any way? If so, how?
3. Do these two accounts differ in the significant facts? If so, how?
4. Why did Preston assume he would be found guilty?

“Chief Pontiac’s Siege of Detroit” http://www.detnews.com/history/pontiac/pontiac.htm

This site contains the story of Pontiac, Chief of the Ottawas, and chronicles his leadership in taking control of the Fort of Detroit. The site is enriched with illustrations, photos, and archival materials including a copy of Pontiac’s surrender.
1. Why did Pontiac work to unite the Indian tribes against the English?
2. What did he hope to gain if the English lost?
3. Why weren’t the Indians successful?
4. In the summer of 1765, Pontiac accepted the English “as brothers.” Why this change of attitude and alliance?

“Resolutions of the Stamp Act Congress” http://odur.let.rug.nl/~usa/E/sugar_stamp/actxx.htm

With an introduction and background on colonial resistance, read the full text of the resolutions of the Stamp Act.
1. Why did the colonists write the Stamp Act Resolutions?
2. What did they hope to accomplish with their resolutions?
3. Were they successful?

“Declaration and Resolves” http://www.ushistory.org/declaration/related/decres.htm

Read the Declaration and Resolves of the first Continental Congress. Under the “related information” link, read biographical sketches on colonial leaders and descriptions of events that led to the colonials’ quest for freedom.
1. List the rights the colonists believe they are entitled to as English citizens.
2. In their opinion, how has Parliament violated those rights?
3. What do the colonists want Parliament to do?
4. What will the colonists do until Parliament begins to respect their rights?
Analytical reading  
Your students may need more experience analyzing a short reading passage so that he or she can determine its component parts. They may need help identifying primary and supporting information as well as the author’s analysis. The analytical reading passages and the questions from the student study guide have been duplicated in the instructor’s manual for your use. Your students may need direction and encouragement in using them.

Republicanism helped colonial political thinkers discern a pattern in the series of imperial acts after 1763. In his “Letters for a Farmer in Pennsylvania,” John Dickinson, a wealthy, English-born Philadelphia lawyer, combined constitutional and republican arguments to tell his fellow countrymen why the British no longer could be trusted. While they called the Townshend Duties simply “regulations of trade,” Dickinson explained that “names will not change the nature of things.” Once Americans became aware of the true nature of British imperial legislation, they would recognize “an undoubted truth, confirmed by the unhappy experience of many states heretofore free, that UNLESS THE MOST WATCHFUL ATTENTION BE EXERTED, A NEW SERVITUDE MAY BE SLIPPED UPON US, UNDER THE SANCTION OF USUAL AND RESPECTABLE TERMS.”

1. The authors refer to a “pattern” in the series of imperial acts after 1763. What actions are they referring to that make up a pattern?
2. Dickinson wrote that Parliament could not be trusted. What specific constitutional and republican arguments would tell the reader that Parliament could not be trusted?
3. Dickinson was writing about the Townshend Duties. What does he mean when he writes that “names will not change the nature of things.”
4. Why should the colonists be “watchful?” Just what are they to watch for?

Writing  
The questions or writing prompts from the student study guide have been duplicated here for your use. These writing topics make good lecture topics especially if you help your students see the development of the idea in lecture format before they refine the idea in their writing assignments.

1. The wars for empire (Queen Anne’s War, King George’s War, the French and Indian War) followed the same “old pattern.” What was the pattern that made King George’s War and the French and Indian War so similar?
2. For the American colonists, what were the positive results of these wars; the negative results?
3. Explain the assumptions Britain and Parliament made about the colonists and their place within the empire.
4. Explain the assumptions the colonists had about their place in the empire.
5. Why didn’t the colonists’ attempts at reconciliation make any difference in settling their differences?

Lecture Strategies  
Ultimately the lecture is where you impart, or profess, your knowledge for the benefit of your students. These strategies were designed around the textbook and if your classroom strategy is to use the organization of the text to organize your course content, these lecture ideas may prove helpful. However, if you lecture around themes please see the section entitled “Thematic Lecture Topics.” You may find that you are more comfortable with and your students are more responsive to a combination of the two. Consider, too, the projects suggested in the student study guide. If your students complete these before your lecture, their comprehension will surely be enhanced.
Explore the relationship of frontier violence to the almost continuous struggles between Great Britain and France for supremacy in North America. Understanding the wars for empire, your students will then be equipped to grapple with the intellectual and political and economic questions that the break-up of the colonies and the American Revolution pose. You might also go back to the textbook’s prologue and examine the themes of the book in light of the wars for empire and the colonists breaking away from Great Britain. Examine the connection between government (Parliament and its legislation designed to enforce its authority over the colonies) and the colonial economy and the way the interplay of these two forces shaped the colonists’ lives. As the relationship became more unworkable and certainly less beneficial where the colonists were concerned, a radical change seems almost predictable. At the same time, it is interesting to look at the philosophical roots of the American revolution and this is an opportunity to refer back to the enlightenment in America and prepare them for the philosophical meanings of the Declaration of Independence. In order for them to master this material your students should master the concepts of constitutionalism and republicanism.

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