Although much attention is being given to the 200\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of the War of 1812, the French and Indian Wars of 1756-1773 (or the Seven Years' War as it is called in Canada) is, historically speaking, one of the "Top Ten" wars since the fall of the Roman Empire. This war reshaped the map of North America (see below), setting in motion a political path that eventually led to the formation of both the United States and Canada as independent nations. Notably, French Canadians call it the \textit{Guerre de la conquête} (War of the Conquest), the war in which New France relinquished its authority to the British. The official motto of Québec (noted on all car license plates) remarks on this past by stating "\textit{Je me souviens}" ("I remember").

As we all know, beginning in the 16\textsuperscript{th} century, the provinces and territories of what is now modern Canada were under the control of either the French or the English. The most populous areas of Canada have always been in the St. Lawrence and Great Lakes region; this "heartland" of Canada along with most of the Maritime Provinces were acquired when France gave up all claims to mainland North America in 1763 with the signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1773.

Indeed, although Canada remained a collection of separate British colonies until Confederation in 1867, the treaty settlement transferred the former French colonies to British authority, thus changing the course of North American history.
Students will better understand the impact of the Seven Years’ War on our history and why it turned out as it did if they know that North America had long been a source of tension between countries of Europe. Our frontier was ripe for expansion, offering promising resources and territory for whomever gained control. Although conflicts between France and Britain go back much further, by the mid-1700s, France and Britain both found themselves clawing for North America, neither one willing to give up this coveted prize. The once exclusively European squabble had suddenly found its way west.

Although the Seven Years’ War was a global struggle officially beginning in 1756, focusing on the events in North America offers insight into the formation of both the United States and Canada. This war pitted the colonies of New France in Canada against the young British colonies; the result has everything to do with the continued strong ties to Britain in Canada as well as the eventual struggle for independence in what is now the US.

As the battles between New France and the Thirteen Colonies began to heat up, Britain and France made distinctly different decisions. France chose to focus her efforts on winning the war in Europe, while Britain equipped her colonies with supplies while taxing those colonies to pay for some of the costs of war. France was more concerned with maintaining hold of her territories in the West Indies than in New France because of the booming sugar trade found there. As a result, New France quickly found itself at a disadvantage to the heavily-backed British colonies.

Battles continued until 1759 when British forces, led by General Wolfe, defeated General Montcalm’s forces on the Plains of Abraham outside Québec’s Citadel (a site that can still be visited in Quebec City). This battle—“The Conquest” as the victory came to be known—proved decisive, though some lesser battles followed and four more years passed until the Treaty of Paris was eventually signed. As a result, Britain gained almost total control of North America.

(Military leaders from both sides were killed in this battle and a study of it in greater detail is strongly recommended. Some excellent resources about the Battle at the Plains of Abraham are found at: http://www.militaryheritage.com/quebec1.htm and http://www.uppercanadahistory.ca/wm/wm8.html.)

Montcalm at Plains of Abraham

The Death of General Wolfe

The Battle on the Plains of Abraham

Although the impact on Indian/First Nations peoples is always encouraged to offer multiple perspectives in classrooms, in this instance I’d like to pay special attention to the impact of the Seven Years’ War on the French-speaking people of Acadia. Acadia, a small independent French colony, had already been living peacefully under British rule in what is now Nova Scotia since the signing of the Treaty of Utrecht in the early 1700s. Although this small colony was not
actually part of New France, Acadians were nonetheless proud of their French roots. When the Seven Years’ War began, all Acadians were told they must swear their allegiance to Britain and even fight against their motherland, France. When the Acadians refused, Charles Lawrence, an officer in the British army and governor of Nova Scotia at the time, ordered their expulsion from the region.

This forced exodus, recounted in Longfellow’s epic poem “Evangeline: A Tale of Acadie,” is a dark cloud on Canadian history and considered by many to be the most tragic impact of the war. Thousands of Acadians were “exported” back to France or put aboard ships that sailed throughout the Thirteen Colonies. Many eventually settled in Louisiana and became known as “Cajuns,” forming a French culture in the United States that remains tied to its Acadian roots today. For more information about the Acadian Expulsion and Acadian/Cajun culture, please explore the following websites:

- [http://www.uppercanadahistory.ca/finna/finna6a.html](http://www.uppercanadahistory.ca/finna/finna6a.html)
- [http://www.cajuncrawfishpie.com/what-is-a-cajun.html](http://www.cajuncrawfishpie.com/what-is-a-cajun.html)

Of course, the clashes between the French and British during the Seven Years’ War also strongly impacted colonists in the Thirteen Colonies. The English taxed them heavily to pay for the war with France and when the Quebec Act of 1774 was passed, it angered colonists even more. The Quebec Act enlarged the boundaries of the newly-gained Quebec colony and closed off the Ohio-Mississippi Valley to expansion. The restrictions increased anti-English sentiment and dissatisfaction, contributing to revolt and revolution in 1775-76. And so the United States was born.

The Seven Years’ War and the American Revolution in turn gave birth to Canada. With British North America now split, Americans who were loyal to the British king fled to Canada and settled in what are now the provinces of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Ontario, and Quebec. These Loyalists brought a strong pro-English viewpoint to Canada and in Québec, brought a new language and culture that has been at the heart of struggles in la belle province ever since.

Perhaps the British learned a lesson during the Acadian Expulsion, because once the Treaty of Paris was signed, Great Britain attempted to minimize the threat of disruption from the conquered French Canadians through legislation that protected their rights. In Canada, the same Quebec Act that angered the Thirteen Colonies allowed French-speaking people in Canada to keep their language, religion, civil law, and education, ensuring that French-Canadian culture and language would endure and form an important part of Canada’s national identity.

Still, the French and English peoples found it difficult to live together. The problems were addressed in 1791 by dividing Canada into two colonies: Lower Canada, inhabited by most French Canadians (the southern part of Quebec) and Upper Canada, the area settled by Loyalists (the southern part of Ontario). Although each colony was given its own legislature and legal system, discontent was still widespread. Claims by the French of unfair treatment, economic troubles, and pressure for independence led to a series of rebellions and riots. In 1840, the controversial Durham Report recommended the union of Upper and Lower Canada
and that French Canadians be absorbed into British culture. Although the two colonies were officially joined as a single colony in 1841, the proposal to “anglicize” French Canadians made them even more determined to maintain their culture and identity.


Trade disputes, poor transportation, and debt plagued the British colonies and led to calls for further unification. Canadians feared the growing power of the U.S. and worry only increased when American forces invaded Canada during the War of 1812. After a series of battles, the Americans withdrew; nevertheless, in later years, the large Union Army idled after the Civil War and the purchase of Alaska again led to unease among Canadians regarding their southern neighbor.

In 1867, the British government passed the British North America (BNA) Act, splitting the united Canada colony into the provinces of Ontario and Quebec and adding the colonies of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, forming a federal union with a strong central government. The name given to the new country was the Dominion of Canada with the BNA Act serving as the founding constitution. After 1867, other colonies gradually became Canadian provinces. Manitoba joined in 1870, British Columbia in 1871, Prince Edward Island in 1873, Alberta and Saskatchewan in 1905, and Newfoundland became the tenth and last province in 1949. The Territories were formed over the course of a century, starting with the Northwest Territories being handed over to Canada from the Hudson’s Bay Company in 1870. The Yukon Territory was next in 1898, while Nunavut officially became its own territory in 1999, a hundred and one years later (and only thirteen years ago!)

Next year will commemorate the 240th anniversary of the Treaty of Paris. Although it seems like “ancient history” to some, it is “living history” to francophone communities in North America whose cultural identities and political platforms have been shaped by the struggle. I am sure that “la conquête” will be remembered, though not celebrated, by Quebeckers and Acadians/Cajuns living across our continent. It’s a legacy that merits further consideration and discussion in our classrooms.

[Note: This article was adapted from O Canada! The True North Strong and Free!, a Newspapers in Education supplement written by Tina Storer and originally published in 2003 by The Washington Times although subsequent publications followed by numerous newspapers across the United States. A copy can be downloaded from the homepage of www.k12studycanada.org].

Image Citations:

More Classroom Resources to:

- Seven Years War Timeline: [http://ns1763.ca/remem/7yw-timeline-w.html](http://ns1763.ca/remem/7yw-timeline-w.html)
- French and Indian War Interactive Timeline: [http://www.wqed.org/tv/specials/the-war-that-made-america/timeline.html](http://www.wqed.org/tv/specials/the-war-that-made-america/timeline.html)