

Pontiac's Rebellion

With the conclusion of the French and Indian War, the money saving postwar policies were challenged by a coordinated assault on territories occupied by the British Army. A confederation of tribes, typically credited to have been led by Pontiac commenced hostilities by sieging Fort Detroit.

The origins of this conflict are beyond the scope of this work, but suffice to say, the tribes involved were unhappy with British policies and treatment. Without a doubt, the British wished to limit, if not outright eliminate, the policy of gift giving, which was an important mechanism of tribal politics. The indigenous tribes also feared unfettered expansion of the British colonists into their territory.

Pontiac's Rebellion eventually ended with a negotiated settlement in 1764, though some continued resistance as late as 1766. King George issued the Proclamation of 1763, which authorities hope would preclude further conflict between the colonists and the tribes of the region. It created the Proclamation Line which prohibited colonial expansion into the area called the Indian Reserve. It prohibited the private purchase of land from the tribes, reserving that right for the Crown.

Immediately, this drew criticism from the colonists which viewed the lands to the west as open for expansion by right of conquest. The French, which had protected the region and backed the natives no longer stood as a threat, and some viewed expansion into this territory as one of the primary benefits of removing French presence from North America. Furthermore, land grants in this region had been issued by the government, and those who fought in the war wished to cash in upon those promises. Finally, some settlements already existed beyond the boundary line.

This forced the government to slowly push the boundary west, alienating the tribes they wished to protect, while simultaneously inflaming colonial opinion which held the lands should be freely available for purchase and development. The British government satisfied no one, and was forced to act as a barrier between ostensible two populations under the protection of the Crown. In essence, the Crown reaped the worst of both worlds. Its military response failed to impress the natives nor the colonists. It made promises which it would not be able to keep to the tribes, but by making those promises, they alienated colonists.

Despite a somewhat satisfactory conclusion to the rebellion, by 1765, colonial ire was diverted from land policies to taxation issues, which will be the topic of a future article.