Britain and France were engaged in a geopolitical and economic rivalry during the 18th century. Identify the factors that contributed to this rivalry, and assess the results for both countries over the period 1689-1789.

I. Introduction

1. Great Britain and France emerged as the dominant powers of Western Europe during the eighteenth century. The two states had strong and stable central governments; France had an absolute monarchy while in England parliament shared power with the monarch under a constitutional monarchy. Other factors which led to their rise were their efficient bureaucracies and their powerful armies, as well as organized tax systems to support their state and army. Although both nations were powerful and dominant, they still found reason to engage in geopolitical and economic rivalry. There were different factors which led to this and separate results for each. Some of the factors which played major roles in their conflicts with each other were their competing with each other for overseas colonies and the riches the Americas held, and their wanting to be the leading economic power in Europe.

II. Great Britain and France Before the 18th century

1. Britain
   a. Parliamentary government and the Stuart Monarchy
   b. In need of recovery
   c. As an institution, the monarchy had not yet reached the degraded state of the French monarchy
   d. At the beginning of the 18th century, Britain emerged victorious over Louis XIV
      i. (1713) Treaty of Utrecht- ended Queen Anne's war of the War of Spanish Succession
      ii. France recognized that the House of Hanover would accede to the English throne

2. France
   a. King Louis XIV- absolute monarchy
   b. Possesses the largest European population
   c. Had advanced economy
   d. Administrative structure- Louis prevented his ministers and the local elite from capturing or limiting his power
   e. Had also been drained of resources because of the wars
   f. In need of reconstruction
      i. economic recovery due to Louis’ wars which brought widespread death and destruction
ii. wiser political leadership
iii. less ambitious foreign policy

III. Dominant Colonial Powers

1. Britain
   a. Controlled the 13 North American Colonies, parts of Canada, British Guinea in South America, Gibraltar, parts of Africa, India, the Middle East, Australia, parts of modern-day Indonesia. Also gained Florida from the Spanish through the Peace of Paris

2. France
   a. Controlled most of western Africa, colonies in North America, India, Canada, southeast Asia
   b. After the French and Indian War, France’s colonial presence north of the Caribbean was reduced to tiny islands

3. Major Conflicts around the World
   a. there were numerous territories and their wealth at stake
   A. Conflict on the Indian Sub-Continent
      1. The presence of the East India Trading Company
   5. King George’s War or The French and Indian War (1756-1763)
      a. French and Native Americans vs. Britain (Fought to decide who would become the stronger power in North America and as a conflict over land)
      b. France was at a major disadvantage since the naval power had been greatly weakened by England.
      c. Battle at the Plains of Abraham (1759) in Quebec, British General Wolfe defeated the French General Montcalm.
      d. War concluded with the Treaty of Paris in 1763.

7. Britain and France fought over land and its natural resources because, it would give them the money necessary to fix and restructure their nations, to finance their state, and help to begin to get rid of their debt.

IV. Leaders of the economy

1. Britain took the lead in the consumer revolution
   a. Leader in the Agricultural Revolution
   b. Britain was on the verge of a great economic transformation, “The Industrial Revolution”
      i. From small manufacturing workshops around the country arose a group of inventors that made Britain the chief manufacturing country in the world
   c. Britain became more economically powerful as a result of its leading the Industrial Revolution
      i. Britain had large reserves of coal and iron, a large work force, capital, and a government that supported business owners and technological innovations
2. France
   a. remained Britain's primary economic and political rival
   b. colonial possessions made France wealthy
      i. especially the West Indies - which grew cash crops such as tobacco and cotton
   c. Economic structure centered on mercantilism
      i. government controlled major industries, unlike Britain's government which supported individual business owners

3. Britain was only slightly ahead of France in its industrial production but nonetheless it had superior technology and methods and an advanced economy.

V. Results of the Rivalry Between Great Britain and France
   1. Europe:
      a. The fortunes of war in Europe had more effect in determining the winner, than the fighting in the disputed territory itself.
      b. The war between Great Britain and the French was fought to determine whose national culture would dominate the heart of North America, and trading rights.
      c. The French and Indian War was an off-shoot of the Seven Years War in Europe.
   2. France
      a. The countries that were at stake were Canada, the American West, and the West Indies.
      b. At the end of the war, France lost Canada to the British.
      c. France lost all of its possessions from the east coast to the Mississippi to the British.
      d. France ceded New Orleans and the Louisiana Territory to Spain.
   2. Great Britain:
      a. The British were victorious when the war was over which took place in Quebec, and with the signing of the treaty of Paris in 1763 the war had officially ended. The territories that previously belonged to the French (which stretched from the East coast to the Mississippi River) now belonged to Great Britain.
      b. The end of the French and Indian war resulted in a large debt for Great Britain.
   3. The New World (America)
      a. Pros:
         i. The wars helped to bring changes that are more important to the British colonies – the British colonies found themselves being less dependent on the British by the end of the wars.
         ii. The Colonies were able to start putting greater value on their own institutions.
         iii. The Colonies began to think of themselves as more American than they did British.
      b. Cons:
i. The Rivalry between France and Great Britain meant tribal warfare in the Americas.

VI. Conclusion
1. Without a doubt, the rivalry between France and Britain would be one of the defining factors to Britain’s rise to power throughout the nineteenth century and France’s instability and fate in turmoil. This rivalry succeeded in raising one nation’s fortunes to a high success, while casting another into the darkness of rebellion and unrest. The two states had conflicting policies, and an extensive conflict over colonial possessions. They also fought to be leaders of the economy with Britain coming out on top. This happened after defeating Napoleon, when Britain was free of serious competition from France, and was able to apply the newfound wealth, international experience and technology to building an Empire, the golden days of which fell under Queen Victoria, who reigned for 63 years.

Works Cited


