

PICKING SIDES

The Iroquois in the American Revolution

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Introduction

The American Revolution is remembered for many things. Iconic events such as the Boston Tea Party and iconic figures such as George Washington are what often come to mind first in the discussions about the American Revolution. What usually does not come to mind, however, is the role Native Americans played. The American Revolution is often described as a conflict between the British and the Americans. This is only partly true, however, because more parties were involved in the conflict than just these two.

This thesis examines the role of Native Americans in the American Revolution, because while they have not received as much attention as other groups, such as the British and Americans themselves, they did play an important role. Because they and the American colonists felt that they were the rightful owners of the land, there were many conflicts to begin with. During the Revolutionary War, however, Native Americans came to be important figures for the British and Americans: they were seen as potential allies in the war. Of course the Native Americans wanted to choose the side of the group that would prove to treat them reasonably and benevolently. However, it was unclear which group would have the best intentions for the Native Americans after its victory in the conflict. The choice of whom to side with was therefore a difficult one and it was often hard to determine which cause was the righteous one. Many Native Americans wanted to remain neutral, a stance that was initially also the wish of the British Crown and the American colonists, while others wanted to choose the side of the Americans or the British. Moreover, many Native Americans switched sides because of changes in opinion about the conflict and the participating parties.

In the discussions about Native Americans and their role in the American Revolution, it is important to note that they were not one homogeneous group, but rather divergent tribes, with their own ideas and visions. Even among individual tribes there were conflicting opinions about

their role in the American Revolution. Because of the conflict, relationships within tribes slowly began to show cracks.

This thesis explores the role of the Iroquois in specific, also called the Five, and later, Six Nations, which was a group of united Nations. They are the perfect example of Native Americans who first wished to remain neutral, but eventually concluded that they had no other option than to pick a side. They perfectly exemplify not only how they eventually took up arms against either the British or Americans but also how the conflict divided the Nations themselves. By focusing on this group of Native Americans, this thesis shows that there is another, different and often underexposed narrative of the American Revolution that is still important to remember.

Increasingly, recent research focuses on minorities in conflicts such as the American Revolution. Books such as Russell Shorto's *Revolution Song: A Story of American Freedom*¹ pay attention to the more underexposed aspects of the Revolution. In this work, Shorto focuses on five different people, several of whom from minorities, to show the different experiences of the American Revolution. He tells the story of, for example, a woman, an African American and the Native American Cornplanter. Shorto's work shows that the current academic landscape has space for narratives and perspectives that until recently were left out of the accounts on the American Revolution.

Shorto is not the only author offering this relatively new perspective. Academic works that can be considered important on the issue of Native Americans in the American Revolution are *The American Revolution in Indian Country: Crisis and Diversity in Native American Communities* by Colin G. Calloway² and Ethan A. Schmidt's *Native Americans in the American*

¹ Russell Shorto, *Revolution Song: A Story of American Freedom* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2018).

² Colin G. Calloway, *The American Revolution in Indian Country: Crisis and Diversity in Native American Communities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

*Revolution: How the War Divided, Devastated, and Transformed the Early American Indian World.*³ Both books focus on the experience of Native Americans in a more general sense. Calloway is not so much interested in Native American influence and involvement in the Revolutionary War, but describes Native American life on the entire continent more generally during the era. Schmidt, on the other hand, tries to give an all-encompassing account of the role of the Native Americans in the conflict. However, this overly ambitious project makes his work not very detailed, because he has to divide his attention between too many Native American tribes.

But even more important - and perhaps even the most important work on the role of Native Americans in the American Revolution - is Barbara Graymont's *The Iroquois in the American Revolution.*⁴ Like this thesis, Graymont looks into the situation of the Iroquois. However, she focuses on the Iroquois' experience in a different sense than this thesis does. She for example describes in detail how the Iroquois fought next to their allies. Though also dealing with Native American participation in, and contributions to specific fights and battles, this thesis considers more of the pre-history of the struggle: the way in which alliances were forged, Native American motivations to either side with the British or the Americans, and the ways these motivations and decisions shaped the relationships between and among tribes.

One of the first accounts of the role of Native Americans in the American Revolution, written by James H. O'Donnell in 1973, already notes that "little will be found on the 'numerous tribes of Indians' or the negotiations with them"⁵ during the American Revolution. O'Donnell's work studies Southern Indians in particular, because he argues that the British and American dealings with Northern and Southern Indians in the conflict differ clearly from each other. He

³ Ethan A. Schmidt, *Native Americans in the American Revolution: How the War Divided, Devastated, and Transformed the Early American Indian World* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2014).

⁴ Barbara Graymont, *The Iroquois in the American Revolution* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1972).

⁵ James H. O'Donnell, *Southern Indians in the American Revolution* (University of Tennessee Press, 1973).

also contends, and advises, that focusing on the experiences of only one of these groups, even though events and decisions in different areas throughout the conflict were often linked to each other, makes his account of their experience “less confusing”.⁶

To make things “less confusing”, this thesis therefore considers the Iroquois in particular. By focusing on a particular group and not on Native Americans in general, as Calloway and Schmidt have done for example, the account will be more focused and detailed. Rather than giving a general account of Iroquois life during the American Revolutionary War, this thesis shows and explains the motivations and decisions that shaped the Iroquois position in the conflict. Moreover, the existing academic literature on the topic has often described the role of Native Americans in the American Revolution as a tragic history and have put too much emphasis on the location of their land to explain their involvement in the conflict. This thesis argues that it was in fact not an unfortunate coincidence, but rather a more deliberate choice on the part of the Iroquois that explains their participation in the conflict. They were not simply victims of circumstances but made a deliberate decision, to eventually join in the conflict. Agency plays an important role in this decision. This thesis therefore puts the focus, not on the fighting in the conflict itself, but on the decisions the Iroquois reached to join and support either the British or the American side.

While most of these existing academic works refer to Native Americans in different ways, using terms such as ‘Indians’, ‘American Indians’ or ‘Indigenous people’, this thesis uses the term ‘Native Americans’. It is important, however, to acknowledge the ongoing controversy over the issue how to refer to Native Americans and other aspects of Native American life. While there is no real consensus over what terms are appropriate, Native American is an often used and often preferred expression. Hence the use of this term in this thesis. Furthermore, the

⁶ O’Donnell, *Southern Indians*, 4.

same controversy exists over how to refer to certain groups of Native Americans. This thesis uses multiple terms, depending on what fits best in the context. Terms such as ‘tribes’, ‘nations’ or ‘groups’ can therefore all be encountered in this thesis.

This thesis has been divided into three chapters, each discussing a different theme in a chronological order. The first chapter will discuss the Iroquois before the Revolution, arguing that the Iroquois wished to remain neutral, because they found that the disagreement between the British and Americans did not concern them. However, despite their wish for neutrality, they came into contact with both the English and Americans who were already subtly trying to win over the Iroquois. The second chapter shows that the wish for neutrality the Iroquois had, did not last. They eventually joined forces with either the British or Americans. This was not only due to the location of their land, as is often argued in existing literature, but also because of deliberate choices of the Iroquois themselves, as well as the persuasive efforts of the conflicting parties. The last chapter illustrates that even though the Iroquois had already picked sides before the conflict, many Iroquois switched sides during the war itself, basing their decision on outcomes of battles, American and British promises or the way they were treated.

The sources that have been used for this research include multiple primary sources, among them letters, narratives and memoirs written by those involved in this history. Important collections that contain these are for example the Kirkland papers. Kirkland was an American missionary who worked among the Iroquois Nations, among the Oneidas in particular. He collected letters and reports, sent by and to these Native Americans. He provides scholars with interesting insights in how these Nations desired to remain neutral, but eventually came to support the American side. The collection has been made available online by Hamilton College, which is the school Kirkland established in his years as missionary. What makes this collection ideal to use is the fact that some letters have even been transcribed. Other valuable collections are the Schuyler Papers on the website of the New York Public Library. Unfortunately these

collections do not contain transcripts, but most letters are written in an easily readable handwriting, which made them nevertheless useful for this thesis. Schuyler was a General in the Continental Army and served as US Senator. He was important because of his contacts with the Iroquois during the Revolution. The Schuyler papers contain, for example, letters to and from the Iroquois about war issues such as alliances. Another important source is the memoir of Governor Blacksnake⁷. Blacksnake was a Seneca, who witnessed many of the important meetings that took place between the Six Nations and either the British or the Americans. His memoir provides a detailed account of these meetings, shedding light on the way the Nations picked sides and formed alliances. The Narrative of Mary Jemison⁸ also provides us with detailed accounts of the American Revolution and the events leading up to it. Unlike Blacksnake, Jemison was not present at important meetings alongside the Chiefs, but was part of the Native American community, providing insights from a different perspective. While these are some of the main primary sources that will be used, other sources and databases have been consulted as well, such as the *Colbraith Journal* and *Journals of the Continental Congress*, in order to sketch the Iroquois' position.

However, despite the availability of the abovementioned sources, one of the problems in studies about Native American history is that in general primary sources are scarce. Documentation on the side of the Native Americans was not as abundant as that on the British and American side. Furthermore, many of the few available sources have not yet been digitalized and are located in archives across the United States. Another reason why a considerable amount of the Iroquois' sources are not useful for this thesis is the fact that many of these documents are written in their own languages, which makes them well-nigh impossible

⁷ Blacksnake and Benjamin Williams, *Chainbreaker: The Revolutionary War Memoirs of Governor Blacksnake as Told to Benjamin Williams* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989).

⁸ James E. Seaver, *Narrative of the Life of Mary Jemison: White Woman of the Genesee* (New York: American Scenic & Historic Preservation Society, 1824).

to read and translate, especially because there are no translations or transcriptions available on the internet.

Next to limited access to sources, the reliability of the sources creates another problem. This is for example the case with Governor Blacksnake's autobiography. The biography has been compiled after the Revolutionary War, with the help of a transcriber. Governor Blacksnake was not able to produce an understandable English text by himself. The fact that he dictated the autobiography years after the events that it depicts means that the information he shares might not be completely reliable. He may have altered the truth in order to make himself or others look better or worse, or he might simply have forgotten how events took place. Furthermore, the transcriber may have made mistakes while translating and writing the autobiography. The question of reliability is an important one; however, when sources are scarce, there is not much choice but to rely on what is available. I therefore acknowledge that a few of the sources used here may not be completely reliable.

These sources will prove that the choice which side in the American Revolutionary War to choose was not an easy one for the Iroquois. After they had just lived through the French and Indian War, which only ended two years prior to the start of the American Revolution, the Native Americans were reluctant to join in another conflict that did not concern them. Interesting about the French and Indian War was that while plenty of tribes sided with the French, only the Iroquois supported the British. While the Iroquois Nations expressed their wish to remain neutral during the Revolution,⁹ there were also clear examples of bonds between, for example, missionaries and tribes that had an impact on the Iroquois decisions. The clearest example of this is Samuel Kirkland's position with the Oneidas. He had built strong bonds with tribe members and even spoke their language.¹⁰ This is one of the factors that may have shaped

⁹ Blacksnake, *Chainbreaker*. 50.

¹⁰ "Indian petition to Samuel Kirkland" (copy of), May 27, 1802, *Samuel Kirkland Correspondence (1765-1793)*, Hamilton College library, digital collections.

the Oneidas' choice in picking sides and will be described in more detail in chapter two. However, their choices were also partly based on other considerations such as the questions which side was most likely to win and who had to offer them the most. This does perhaps not come as a surprise. However, it was often hard to determine whose victory would prove to be most beneficial to the Native Americans: the American revolutionaries or the British government. Therefore, the British and Americans expected that the Iroquois were "open to the highest bidder,"¹¹ and that they would choose and even switch sides when either the English or the Americans made a good offer that would persuade them. While this is undoubtedly true, the Iroquois were not simply passive bystanders to be persuaded by others; they had a more active role in their decision of whom to support. Iroquois agency is important in this history. Although it is true that the Native Americans, and therefore also the Iroquois, were often mistreated and taken advantage of by the British and the Americans, existing literature has too often described their role in the American Revolution as a tragic fate, in terms of victimhood. This is, however, unjust. The involvement of the Iroquois in the American Revolution was no unfortunate coincidence due to the location of their land, but rather a deliberate choice based on longstanding alliances and thoughtful considerations.

Motives are notoriously difficult to fathom and to trace. Exactly because the existing literature emphasizes the importance of the location of the Iroquois' land for the Iroquois' decisions about alliances during the Revolutionary War, however, this thesis examines the Native Americans' own motives in reaching these decisions. Trying to explain the Iroquois' participation in, and contribution to, the Revolutionary War, this thesis attributes to Native Americans a certain agency. It takes their motives for joining or not joining seriously.

<http://contentdm6.hamilton.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/arc-kir/id/2453/rec/13>

¹¹ Calloway, *The American Revolution in Indian Country*, 69.

Chapter 1: “Our Desire is to be Nutrail”

No people can live more happy than the Indians did in times of peace, before the introduction of spirituous liquors amongst them. Their lives were a continual round of pleasures. Their wants were few, and easily satisfied; and their cares were only for to-day; the bounds of their calculations for future comfort not extending to the incalculable uncertainties of to-morrow.¹²

Before this paper will proceed to describe the actual decision-making of the Iroquois in the Revolutionary War, it begins by discussing the time before the conflict and the events leading up to it. This chapter will mainly focus on the Iroquois’ wish to remain neutral in the American Revolution. The way they approached, and the way they were approached by, the Americans and British before the war illustrate how alliances were eventually made. This early contact shaped the Iroquois’ decision-making process. This chapter will first present important background information about the Iroquois that is crucial to understanding the internal relations of the tribes, as well as their external relations with the Americans and British. It is important to note that the Iroquois lived a relatively peaceful existence among each other and next to the American settlers, until they became involved in the Revolutionary War. In order to set the context for the following chapters, this chapter will therefore discuss the background of the Iroquois, as well as the peace that was present among the Six Nations. This will provide insight into early contact with the Nations and how alliances could eventually be formed. The Iroquois found the dispute between the English and the Americans unnatural and because it did not directly concern themselves, they wished to remain neutral. However, despite their wish for

¹² James E. Seaver, *Narrative of the Life of Mary Jemison: White Woman of the Genesee* (New York: American Scenic & Historic Preservation Society, 1824), 64.

Mary Jemison was captured by the Seneca when she was twelve and spent most of her life with them. Even after she was released she remained among the Seneca voluntarily. She became part of the Native Americans in a way almost impossible to achieve otherwise. Her accounts provide descriptions of multiple different important events for the Seneca and herself. Seaver, *Narrative of the Life of Mary Jemison*, title page.

neutrality, they came into contact with both the English and Americans who were already, although at this point not yet explicitly, pressuring the Iroquois into certain forms of alliances.

The Iroquois League was a league that initially consisted of five, and later six different groups of Native Americans, who spoke related languages. The Iroquois lived in the land of Iroquoia, the part of America that is now partly “upstate New York, between the Mohawk and Genesee River valleys.”¹³ In this area lived the Mohawk, “the people of the flint”; the Oneidas, “the people of the standing stone”; the Onondagas, “the people on the mountain”; the Cayugas, “the people at the landing”; the Seneca, “the people of the great hill”, and the latest addition to the Iroquois Confederacy, the Tuscaroras, most probably meaning: “those of the Indian hemp.”¹⁴ Together, the Iroquois for a long time held the most influential position among all Native Americans.¹⁵ However, due to colonial invasions, around the time the Revolutionary War broke out, there were only around 2000 Iroquois left in the area, most of whom were Seneca.¹⁶

The Iroquois Confederacy was known under many different names, among which “Haudenosaunee”, meaning “the long house.” They were also often called the “Great League of Peace and Power.” To them, this meant power as a

spiritual and temporal force marshaled by alliances among the people, kin groups, and villages of the League. And *peace*, too, was more than a word. It not only united the Five Nations, but exemplified relations among fellow villagers and permeated the political structures through which the Iroquois would respond to the European invasion.¹⁷

¹³ Daniel K. Richter, *The Ordeal of the Longhouse: The Peoples of the Iroquois League in the Era of European Colonization* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 1.

¹⁴ Richter, *The Ordeal of the Longhouse*, 1.

¹⁵ Lewis Henry Morgan, *League of the Ho-dé-no-sau-nee, or Iroquois* (Rochester: Sage & Brother, 1851), 3.

¹⁶ Gordon S. Wood, *The American revolution: A History* (New York: Modern Library, 2002), 10.

¹⁷ Wood, *The American Revolution*, 30.

Alliances and peace were of significant importance to the Iroquois. Even though power was crucial to the Iroquois as well, they established this power by means of alliances and not necessarily by means of violence. Although violence did not define their existence and they lived together in peace, their dealings, mainly with outsiders such as other groups of Native Americans, were in fact violent. The Iroquois were widely feared for their warfare,¹⁸ and had a “long-standing reputation among their native neighbors.”¹⁹ This shows a paradox in Iroquoian dealings with power and peace. On the one hand, they were feared among other Native American tribes and held a reputation of being vicious in terms of warfare. On the other hand, the fact that they preferred to resolve any conflict or disagreement by means of alliances and treaties exemplifies that diplomacy played an important role for the Iroquois.²⁰ Francis Jennings contends that with their use of diplomacy the Iroquois had “a truly civilized talent for giving it a self-serving twist every now and then.” Furthermore, he argues that the Iroquois were fully aware of their “oversized reputation”; it contributed to the fact that they were often called the “Iroquois Empire.”²¹

The most important aspect of diplomacy among the Iroquois and the English before the Revolutionary War is probably the Covenant Chain. According to Jennings, the Covenant Chain can be seen as part of the “so-called Iroquois empire”.²² The chain was created in 1677, starting with two treaties in Albany, but led to a confederation with a series of treaties between the British colonies and the Iroquois. Jennings argues that the Chain served as a means “for eliminating violence and reducing conflict between Indians and Englishmen.” Furthermore, Jennings argues that the chain contributed to the notion that the “Covenant Chain Indians

¹⁸ Neta C. Crawford, “A Security Regime among Democracies: Cooperation among Iroquois Nations.” *International Organization* 48, no. 3 (The MIT Press, 1994), 346.

¹⁹ Crawford, “A Security Regime among Democracies,” 31.

²⁰ Timothy John Shannon, *Iroquois Diplomacy on the Early American Frontier* (New York: Viking, 2008).

²¹ Francis Jennings, “The Constitutional Evolution of the Covenant Chain,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 115, no. 2 (American Philosophical Society, 1971), 88-96.

²² Francis Jennings, *Ambiguous Iroquois Empire: The Covenant Chain Confederation of Indian Tribes with English Colonies from Its Beginnings to the Lancaster Treaty of 1744*, (Norton, 1984).

pioneered, secured, and financed the Englishman's way to the trans-Appalachian west,"²³ indicating that the English were already using the Nations in order to benefit their own cause.

The Chain was temporarily broken in 1753, until 1755 when William Johnson²⁴ renewed the Chain. The new treaties were seen as "the first links of a 'silver' chain of friendship, in contrast to the older 'iron' chain."²⁵ The wish for the British to re-establish the Chain is perhaps best explained by Jennings's claim that

The English conceived Covenant Chain Indians as legally subject to English sovereignty whether the Indians knew it or not, and that view has prevailed in the histories written by the descendants of Englishmen. The Indians, however, conceived the Chain as an organization of peers, unequal in power and status, but equal in the right of each to govern itself. In their view, instead of the Chain's being part of the British Empire, the Empire's colonies were part of the Chain.²⁶

For the Iroquois the Chain thus meant an alliance in which both parties could retain their self-governance. For the British, however, the Chain meant a new body of subjects they could consult whenever they pleased. This is important considering the pressure put upon the Iroquois, since the British could use this early alliance as a form of leverage. However, more important for the argument of this thesis, the Iroquois did not see themselves as subjects of the British and considered themselves equal in their right to make their own decisions.

While diplomacy was a central aspect of the Iroquois existence in terms of establishing treaties and alliances with others in order to exert power, the Covenant Chain shows that they were in turn also often used as subjects in British and American diplomacy. The Iroquois thus

²³ Jennings, *Ambiguous Iroquois Empire*.

²⁴ William Johnson was the British Superintendent of Indian Affairs and husband of Molly Brant, who will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

²⁵ Trigger and Washburn, *The Cambridge History*, 422.

²⁶ Francis Jennings, "The Constitutional Evolution of the Covenant Chain," 93.

clearly had different perspectives about the use and outcome of diplomatic efforts. While for the Americans and British diplomacy meant recruiting the tribes to solve part of their problems, for the Iroquois it meant forming alliances in which they were to a certain extent equal in their rights. Another example in which diplomacy played a crucial role for the Iroquois and in which it becomes clear that they had different views on diplomacy was in 1710, when four Native American kings were brought to London by Peter Schuyler, mayor of Albany, New York, and Francis Nicholson, another colonial official, to meet Queen Anne. The kings were initially brought to London to recruit the Iroquois in the efforts to invade French Canada. According to Timothy J. Shannon, “the Iroquois controlled the territory between Albany and Canada, and Nicholson and Schuyler could not expect to move an army through there without Iroquois cooperation.”²⁷ The fact that the Iroquois had this key position raises the question whether they were “dupes or partners in Nicholson’s and Schuyler’s poker game.”²⁸ For Nicholson and Schuyler this was again clearly a case of recruitment of Iroquois support, while for the Iroquois it was more a meeting to become familiar with the people who had come to their land.

An important note Shannon makes, is that the sources on this meeting are very one-sided, since there is only the account from the British side and not from the Iroquoian side. However, there was an Iroquois speech during the meeting, which is perhaps the only Native American source from that side of the event. Yet another problem arises in considering this speech, since neither of the kings spoke English and the speech has therefore been interpreted by an Englishman. This makes the source considerably unreliable, considering that not every aspect may have come from the kings themselves, but may have been added by either Schuyler, Nicholson or any of the other people involved. Nevertheless, the most important point in this speech according to Shannon is that the kings “requested that the queen send a missionary to

²⁷ Trigger and Washburn, *The Cambridge History*, 2.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

live among them, lest their people be seduced by French priests into leaving their homes to live among other Iroquois who had converted to Catholicism and resettled in Canada.”²⁹ He argues that it is likely that this idea originates from the four kings themselves, because they felt that the French priests were a real threat to them and the queen might be a reasonable ally with the means to protect them from this danger. Although they had different perspectives on these diplomatic efforts, an early bond between the British settlers and Native Americans was forged, because both sought each other’s support: they had the French as a common enemy.

Schuyler and Nicholson show in what ways the Iroquois and the British were already making an effort to establish alliances with other parties. However, it is hard to determine who the Iroquois were forming ties with at this moment of time. The meeting took place half a century before the Revolutionary War broke out, making it hard to determine whether this was an act of creating an alliance with the Queen or with the Americans Schuyler and Nicholson. Although this somewhat complicates the issue, it clearly indicates that even in this early period efforts were made in order to get on good terms with the Iroquois. On the other hand, it also shows in what ways these colonists were trying to persuade the Iroquois to choose their side in the conflict they were in. The meeting shows that the efforts of winning over the Iroquois date back to far before the Revolutionary War broke out, to the time when the settlers were still in conflict with the French.

While the meeting between the Native American Kings and the English Queen can be seen as a way of forming alliances, the Covenant Chain can be seen as a way to establish and preserve the peace among the Iroquois and the British Crown in an even more explicit manner. Both the English Crown as well as the American settlers tried to establish alliances even before the Revolutionary War broke out. It was also in this time that the American colonists and

²⁹ Ibid., 6.

English Crown were not as hostile towards each other as they were during the Revolution itself, so it is important to note that during this time both sides tried to establish alliances, but were not actively working on setting the Iroquois up against the other party (also because the line between the colonists and the Crown was a fine one). Furthermore, these two specific cases discuss the Iroquois in a more general manner, while the tribes also had individual contacts with the Americans and British themselves. These instances will be discussed in the next paragraphs, because they will provide insight in the question why the different tribes chose different sides in the conflict.

One important example of individual contact with the Americans and British was the contact with missionaries. These missionaries were often very much welcomed into the communities of the Nations. As I previously mentioned in the introduction, one of these missionaries is Samuel Kirkland. Kirkland eventually came to play a crucial role in the decision to pick sides in the case of the Oneidas and the Tuscaroras; moreover, his documents are an important piece of Native American history. The Kirkland Papers include an extensive collection of documents concerning the Oneidas and Tuscaroras but also the Iroquois more generally. These serve as an important source in this thesis, because they shed a light on who these Nations came to support, as well as their motivations. The papers also contain multiple letters to other people beside Kirkland himself. These provide substantial information on who the Nations got into contact with regarding the American Revolutionary War. The letters show that before the War broke out, the Iroquois wished to remain neutral. Furthermore, the British and Americans also expressed their wish for the Iroquois to stay out of the conflict. An important letter in which the Iroquois's wish is expressed, is for example an Oneida letter to Jonathan Trumbull³⁰, Governor of Connecticut:

³⁰ The Oneidas refer to Governor Trumbull as "Jonathan Trumble".

Now we more immediately address ourselves to our Brothers – the Governors and Chiefs of New England

Brothers – possess your minds in peace respecting us Indians – we cannot intermeddle in this dispute between two Brothers. The quarrel seems to be unnatural – you are two Brothers of one blood. We are unwilling to join on either side of such a contest, for we love you both – old England and new. Should the great King of England apply to us for our aid – we shall deny him – and should the Colonies apply – we shall refuse. The present situation of you, two Brothers, is new to us. We Indians cannot find or recollect from the traditions of our ancestors any like case.³¹

This passage shows that the Oneidas desired to remain neutral and did not want to get involved in the fighting, or in the conflict in general. Not only did they try to establish peace between themselves and the American settlers, the Oneidas also expressed their concerns over the quarrel in a broader sense. They warned the American colonists that they should retain their ties to “old England” and that the “quarrel seems to be unnatural”. This was also the case because in Native American tradition the family is incredibly important; their concept of family goes further than just blood relations with the concept of extended family.³² Supporting a quarrel between two brothers or two groups of brothers, blood-related or not, would go against their beliefs and traditions.

Furthermore, the Oneidas also asked the American colonists to remain peaceful towards the rest of the Iroquois League. This was a matter the Oneidas pressed from the moment the American Revolutionary War began, as can be seen from the first declaration of neutrality

³¹ “Letter from the Chiefs of the Oneida Nation to the Inhabitants of New England,” March 14, 1777, *Samuel Kirkland papers*, (Hamilton College), <http://contentdm6.hamilton.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/arc-kir/id/832/>

³² “Native American Cultures: Family Life, Kinship, and Gender,” *Encyclopedia of the American West*. 4 vols. (Macmillan Reference USA, 1996), <http://www.salesianlibrary.org/faculty/babcock/culture.pdf>

issued on the American continent. It was written by one of Samuel Kirkland's pupils to the people of New England: "We are altogether for Peace, and not only we of the Onoida nation. But other nations with whom we are connected. Our desire is to be neutrail in these critical times – in these times of great confusion: we desire not to meddle with any disputers that are now in agitation."³³ The letter shows how much the Oneidas valued their neutrality, not only of themselves, but also of the other Iroquois Nations, as can be concluded from other letters, in which they repeat their request to leave them and the other Nations alone: "Brethern- as we have declared, we are for peace. We desire you would not apply to our Indian Brethern in New England for their assistance. Let us Indians be all of one mind, and live in peace with one another – and you white people settle your own disputes."³⁴

The Oneidas appealed to the American rebels to remain peaceful; vice versa, the American rebels did the same. In a letter from Philip Schuyler³⁵ to the Sachems of the Six Nations, he writes:

You are too wise to give ear to any person, who shall advise you to break the treaties you have made with us, for you could gain nothing by it, and might lose much – a'Tho your assistance would be powerful yet we shall never ask it, first because we do not wish to involve you in a war, and secondly because we are capable of defending ourselves against our enemies.³⁶

³³ "Oneida Declaration of Neutrality," June 1775, *Samuel Kirkland Papers* (Hamilton College), 1. <http://contentdm6.hamilton.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/arc-kir/id/733>. While the letter addresses the people of New England, it is likely to be a more general letter to the American settlers, since the Oneidas referred to England as old England, and to America as new England, meaning that new England does not necessarily have to mean the New England region in the upper North-East of the United States, unlike the source information of Hamilton College notes. It would make more sense that the Oneidas are referring to America and its settlers in a more general sense, since the Oneida nation was located on the other side of present-day Michigan, in what is now the state of Wisconsin.

³⁴ Joseph Johnson, "Oneidas to the New England Provinces," in *To Do Good to My Indian Brethren: The Writings of Joseph Johnson, 1751-1776*, ed. Laura J. Murray (University of Massachusetts Press, 1998), 262-263.

³⁵ Schuyler was a General in the Continental Army and served as US Senator.

³⁶ "Letter from Philip Schuyler to the Sachems of the Six Nations," January 1777, *Hamilton College*, <http://contentdm6.hamilton.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/arc-kir/id/828/rec/1>

It becomes clear that the Americans did not wish for the Iroquois to take up the hatchet, but asked them to adopt a neutral stance. The presupposition that they could handle their enemies may have been right, but the Native American tribes turned out to be invaluable for this victory. However, while the Americans ask in this letter that the Iroquois remain neutral in the conflict, the letter continues awarding barrels of rum to each of the Six Nations: “Wishing you to drink Health, Peace and Liberty to your American Brethern and everlasting Friendship between you and them.”³⁷ It therefore seems that the American settlers did indeed want them to remain neutral, but with a benevolent attitude towards to the American cause. The American rebels understood the importance of gift giving as a Native American tradition. The fact that the Americans asked the Iroquois to remain neutral also shows that the rebels feared that the Six Nations were likely to join the side of the British Crown. This assumption proved not to be wrong considering the extensive support of the Nations on the British side.

Another important figure in this discussion about choosing sides in the American Revolution was Governor Blacksnake. Blacksnake was a Seneca and a nephew of Cornplanter and Handsome Lake and was also related to Red Jacket³⁸ All three were famous Seneca, who played important roles in negotiations with the rebels and the loyalists. Cornplanter in particular is one of the most famous Seneca during this time period. He was a war chief and was responsible for most of the negotiations and peace making with the Americans after the Revolutionary War. What makes Governor Blacksnake so important in this regard is the fact that the relation between a child and its mother’s brothers was extremely important among the Seneca. This bond was almost as important as the relationship between oneself and one’s own

³⁷ “Letter from Philip Schuyler to the Sachems of the Six Nations.”

³⁸ Ibid., Cornplanter refers to Redjacket as Red Coat Man. Cornplanter was a war chief, Handsome Lake was a leader and prophet and Redjacket an orator and chief.

children.³⁹ This relationship between Blacksnake and his uncle put him in the position to witness many of the decisive events his uncles organized or were invited to.⁴⁰

One example of one of these important moments Governor Blacksnake witnessed as a young Seneca was a meeting between the American rebels and the Seneca. Blacksnake was only fourteen years old when the Americans called for a convention in Pittsburgh. Blacksnake claimed in his memoir that “Cornplanter and Redjackett was the head men among the Seneca Chiefs and other nations of Indians connected with the Iroquois” and that “Both had considerable influence amongst all other tribes and they concluded themselves it would be Necessary for them to attend the Pittsburgh convention according to invitation.”⁴¹ As with the Oneidas and their encounter with the American rebels, at this convention it becomes quite clear that the American rebels as well as the Seneca speaking for the entire Iroquois League wanted the Iroquois to remain neutral in the conflict.

The Americans in turn delivered speeches in which they expressed their desire for the Iroquois to remain neutral as well:

this is a family quarrel Between us and old England, you Indians, are not concerned in it, we Don't wish you to take up the hatchet the King's troops, we Desire you to Remain at home, and not join Either side But keep the hatchet buried Deep, in the name and behalf of all our people, we ask and Desire you to love peace and maintain it and love and Sympathize with us in our troubles that the path may be Kept open with all our people and yours, to pass and Repass without molestation.⁴²

The speech addresses two important issues: the American wish for the Iroquois to remain neutral in the conflict and their request for the Iroquois to cooperate when it was most

³⁹ Thomas S. Ablar, *Governor Blacksnake*, 2.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 50.

convenient for the Americans. They ask the Native Americans to remain peaceful when the American rebels want to cross their land. This shows how the forming of alliances not only took the form of convincing the Iroquois to support the, in this case American, cause, but started in a more subtle way. It also shows that these original efforts were peaceful and that the Iroquois lived to a certain extent in harmony with the colonists, and already had strong ties and longstanding alliances with the British Crown. All parties agreed that the Iroquois would remain neutral, since it was a quarrel between Old England and New.

However, while the British and Americans did indeed often arrange meetings in order to persuade the Iroquois to join their side, the Iroquois in turn also arranged meetings with both parties.⁴³ This shows that it was not only up to the Americans and British to persuade the Iroquois, but that they themselves also took matters into their own hands. This reinforces the notion that the Iroquois were fully aware of the power they had in the conflict. It also shows that their involvement in British and American issues was not only due to the fact that both parties put pressure on the tribes, but also that it was more a deliberate choice on the tribes' part to get involved than is often assumed in the existing literature.

The Iroquois' wish for neutrality can be explained by past experience. Prior to the Revolutionary War, the French-and-Indian War took place. Since this war only ended two years before the Revolutionary era started, this was still a fresh wound in the minds of many Native Americans. The French-and-Indian War was the war between the British Americans and the French. Because the French were outnumbered by 60,000 against 2 million, they relied heavily upon Native American support. Despite this support, the French and thereby also the Native Americans, were defeated and suffered heavy losses. Even though the Iroquois were the only group of Native Americans who supported the British, seeing a similar conflict arise most likely

⁴³ William L. Stone, *Life of Joseph Brant, Thayendanegea* (Albany, NY: J. Munsell, 1865), 11-12.

contributed to the fact that they did not immediately provide aid to the Americans and the British. However, despite their wish to remain neutral, this early contact and the use of diplomacy laid the foundations for the actual decision-making during the Revolutionary War. The events and contact discussed in this chapter are therefore crucial for the broader context of the following chapter, in which it will be discussed how the Iroquois Nations eventually picked a side. All these instances contributed to the decision to side with either the British or the Americans.

Chapter 2: Establishing Alliances

After the discussion of the Iroquois' situation before the American Revolution, this chapter tries to identify the ways in which the Iroquois eventually picked sides during the Revolution with either the British or the American side. Both tried to convince the Nations that the other cause was wrong and that their own victory would prove to be the best possible outcome of the conflict. The Nations based their decision to participate, and whose side to participate on, on different aspects, such as longstanding relationships with the British or Americans, or their loyalty to missionaries. Next to efforts to keep the Native Americans neutral, the loyalists and rebels started to initiate conventions in which they tried to involve the Nations in the conflict. This chapter will function as an indication of the complex relationship between all parties involved and will show how the Nations vowed their loyalty to the participating parties in the conflict. Despite the Iroquois' wish for neutrality that has been presented in chapter 1, the Iroquois tribes eventually joined forces with either the British or Americans. This was not only due to the location of their land, as is often argued in existing literature, but also a deliberate choice of the Iroquois themselves, as well as the result of persuasive efforts of the conflicting parties.

Each Nation will be discussed individually, in order to emphasize the fact that each Nation made their own decision, depending on which cause or side of the conflict appealed most to them. This chapter will sketch how each of the Six Nations decided which side to pick. Even though there is a general scarcity of sources, some of the Nations or their companions documented more than other Nations. The more well-known or bigger Nations have more sources – which perhaps explains why they are better known – such as the Seneca, Mohawk and Oneidas. The other three Nations, the Tuscaroras, Cayugas and Onondagas, had less documentation and correspondence that is still available today. Despite this scarcity of sources, it is possible to illustrate who these Nations sided with in the American Revolutionary War and

to give possible explanations for this choice, by using reports of conventions or documentation of other Nations.

Among the Iroquois, there were only two Nations that eventually supported the American cause: the Oneidas and the Tuscaroras. Although these Nations also tried to remain neutral, they have one important aspect in common when it comes to their decision in supporting the American rebels' side: Samuel Kirkland. Kirkland worked as a missionary among both the Oneidas and Tuscaroras. As the introduction showed, Kirkland also provided many useful resources for this research project, such as correspondence and reports on various topics. The letters and documents Kirkland gathered give a clear image of the Nations' feelings toward the Americans and British.

Even though the Americans and the Oneidas both explicitly stated their wish for the Iroquois Nations to remain neutral, as has been discussed in the previous chapter, the Oneidas as well as the Tuscaroras did eventually join the Americans in their battle against the British Crown. This becomes clear in the letters sent to both nations by the American colonists:

We have experienced your love, strong as the oak, and your fidelity, unchangeable as truth. You have kept fast hold of the ancient covenant-chain, and preserved it free from rust and decay, and bright as silver. Like brave men, for glory you despised danger; you had stood forth, in the cause of your friends, and ventured your lives in our battles.⁴⁴

This letter describes how the Nations participated in battles, which will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter. Furthermore, the American colonists continue to argue that "Our cause is just"⁴⁵, and that the British cause is not. The letters also seem to try to add more fuel to the fire by arguing against the British Crown. They argue that the British "feel their own

⁴⁴ Library of Congress, "A Century of Lawmaking for a New Nation: U.S. Congressional Documents and Debates, 1774-1875," *Journals of the Continental Congress 9, 1777* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1907), 996.

⁴⁵ Library of Congress. "A Century of Lawmaking for a New Nation," 996.

weakness” and question why else they would not have “left our Indian brethren in peace, as they promised[...].” They also ask the Oneidas and Onondagas why else “have they endeavoured by cunning speeches, by falsehood and misrepresentation, by strong drink and presents, to embitter the minds and darken the understandings of all our Indian friends on this great continent[...].”⁴⁶ The Americans blame the English for wrongs they did to the Iroquois as well, while pursuing the same goals. While they tried blaming the English for giving drinks and presents to the Iroquois, Americans engaged in these same activities as well.

That using missionaries was a popular way of gaining trust and creating bonds with Native American tribes, can be explained by the spirit of the times. According to John Herbert Lennox, “a revival of interest in Indian Missions followed the Religious Awakening of New England (1741-1745).”⁴⁷ This triggered an interest in recruiting young Native Americans in order to train and teach them. One of the main figures in taking in these young Native Americans and training them was Eleazar Wheelock, an American minister. He obtained pupils from neighboring tribes, the Delawares, but most importantly, the Iroquois. He eventually officially opened the Indian Charity School at Lebanon, Connecticut. Wheelock hoped to have these trainees become schoolmasters on Iroquois territory.⁴⁸ It becomes clear in Wheelock’s own work about his project, *A Plain and Faithful Narrative of the Original Design, Rise, Progress and Present State of the Indian Charity-School at Lebanon, in Connecticut*⁴⁹, that working together with Native Americans proved to be a good way of forming alliances. Wheelock argued:

⁴⁶ Ibid., 997.

⁴⁷ John Herbert Lennox, *Samuel Kirkland's Mission to the Iroquois* (University of Chicago, 1935), 1.

⁴⁸ Lennox, *Samuel Kirkland's Mission to the Iroquois*, 1.

⁴⁹ Eleazar Wheelock, *A Plain and Faithful Narrative of the Original Design, Rise, Progress and Present State of the Indian Charity-School at Lebanon, in Connecticut* (Boston: Printed by Richard and Samuel Draper, 1763), 11.

there is good Reason to think, that if one half which has been, for so many Years past expended in building Forts, manning and supporting them, had been prudently laid out in supporting faithful Missionaries, and Schoolmasters among them, the instructed and civilized Party would have been a far better Defence than all our expensive Fortresses, and prevented the laying waste so many Towns and Villages.⁵⁰

Wheelock thought that working together with Native Americans was a better way of defense than actual warfare or protection by means of fortresses and other defense buildings. This was not only a better way, but also a far cheaper one, he argues. Wheelock was ahead of his time, but by the time the Revolution started, the settlers understood very well that it was better to be on good terms with the Iroquois during a conflict like this, than having to force their will upon them by violence.

Wheelock preferred Native American pupils, since they were more likely to become accustomed to the other Nations, or were already accustomed to their own. Furthermore, this made the process of teaching and training them much shorter and according to Wheelock also four times less expensive than it would be for an Anglo-American. Despite this preference, shortly after the opening of the Indian Charity School in 1760, Wheelock found a non-Native American student: Samuel Kirkland. Even though it may have cost more effort for Kirkland to integrate into the Oneida community than it would have cost a Native American missionary, he still succeeded in successfully becoming part of this community. He was eventually even adopted by the sachem of the Oneidas:

Brothers, this young white brother of ours has left his father's house, and his mother, and all his relations. We must now provide for him a home. I am appointed to you and to our young white brother, that our head sachem adopts him into his family. He will be

⁵⁰ Eleazar Wheelock, *A plain and Faithful Narrative*, 11.

a father to him, and his wife will be a mother, and his sons and daughters his brothers and sisters.

The head sachem then arose and took me by the hand, and called me his son, and led me to his family.⁵¹

This quote and other documents⁵² show to what extent missionaries, in this case Kirkland specifically, were accepted and integrated into Native American Communities.

But it was not only the Oneidas who appreciated Kirkland for his efforts among the Nations. The Tuscaroras felt the same way about adopting an American minister in their community. This was mostly the case because Kirkland introduced them to Christianity, which they accepted without reluctance. Furthermore, Kirkland also introduced them to education and more advanced agricultural techniques. That is why the Tuscaroras petitioned for Kirkland to become a regular schoolmaster and catechist in their community. His relation to both the Oneidas and Tuscaroras was reinforced by the fact that Kirkland cared for them on a personal level as well. Members often came to Kirkland, asking for food when they were low on sustenance. Kirkland willingly responded to these requests, providing them with food when necessary and sometimes even loaned money in order to buy them food.⁵³

Barbara Graymont therefore also stresses the role of Samuel Kirkland in the decision of the Oneidas and the Tuscaroras to eventually support the American cause in the American Revolution.⁵⁴ It is no coincidence that the Oneidas and the Tuscaroras are the only two of the

⁵¹ As cited in Lothrop, *Life of Samuel Kirkland*, (Boston: C.C. Little and J. Brown, 1848), 167.

⁵² "Copy of Indian petition to Samuel Kirkland," May 27, 1802, *Samuel Kirkland Papers*, (Hamilton College), <http://contentdm6.hamilton.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/arc-kir/id/2453/rec/13>. After Kirkland left the Oneidas as their minister, they got a new one appointed. The Oneidas request Samuel Kirkland to come back after this minister has passed away. The Oneidas express their gratitude towards Kirkland for their knowledge of their language and customs and even explicitly writing: "We now declare that we are desirous that you should resume your charge of us."

⁵³ Barbara Graymont, *The Iroquois in the American Revolution* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1972), 41.

⁵⁴ Graymont, *The Iroquois in the American Revolution*, 41.

Six nations who supported the American side in the conflict. While the other Nations supported the British Crown, hoping that their victory would prove to be the best outcome for them in the conflict, the Oneidas and Tuscaroras remained loyal to their connections with the American rebels. The influence of Kirkland is best shown in the fact that both Nations he was active in supported the Americans. The other Nations all supported the British.

The British also often offered the Oneidas goods such as rum and money in order to win their support and the Oneidas gladly welcomed those gifts. However, they would not commit to the loyalists' cause. John Butler, a loyalist war leader, recognized the Oneidas' fondness of Kirkland and in turn sent emissaries in order to win them over. However, these efforts were in vain, because the Oneidas had already vowed their loyalty to the rebels, mainly because of their bond with Kirkland.⁵⁵ It shows that, despite what is often argued, the Nations were not just open to the highest bidder, but made more elaborate decisions based on, for example, personal relations.

The fact that these missionaries were happily welcomed by the Nations is also exemplified in a letter of two Native Americans who lived among the Oneidas and worked closely with the Iroquois. They make clear that they do not wish to sell the land, but have no problem with missionaries living among them. They write that they

have no thought of selling our Land to any that come to live among us; for if we should sell a little more & so our Land would go by Inches till we should have non to live upon – yet as those who come to Instruct us must live, we have no objections against their improving as much Land as they please; yet the Land shall remain ours.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Isabel Thompson Kelsay, *Joseph Brant, 1743-1807, man of two worlds* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1984), 180.

⁵⁶ Isaac Dakayensere and Adam Waonwanoron, "Letter to Eleazar Wheelock" (The Occom Circle, 1765 July 31), <https://collections.dartmouth.edu/occom/html/diplomatic/765431-diplomatic.html>

They thus accepted the instructions on how to live and considered help as a way to improve their land. The interest in the Iroquois' land here is explained by the Americans' and British' conception that the land was "wasted upon Indians."⁵⁷ They rather would have claimed the land as they had often done in the history of America, arguing that they would make better use of the land than the Native Americans would.

It is therefore very reasonable to assume that Wheelock was right and that forming alliances in the form of sending out missionaries was a more effective way of maintaining peace and order than by means of violence and defense. It also reinforces the assumption that the Iroquois, or in this specific case the Oneidas, were living a peaceful existence and were not always hostile to American colonists, unlike what is often assumed. Alliances like these may have shaped the making of choices of whom to side with in the American Revolution, even before the Revolutionary War had started. It also shows that the Nations knew that the Americans and British were actively trying to obtain them as allies, a situation of which the Nations gladly made use and which put them in a more controlling position than is often argued. It also shows that the decision to join in the conflict was not just due to the fact that the Iroquois happened to reside in the key area for the conflict, but was actually a more deliberate choice the Iroquois made based on their loyalty or ties to either the loyalists or rebels.

The British Crown was well-aware that the American colonists were trying to recruit the Native Americans who were first on the side of the British, by for example missionaries. It is safe to say that the British were not happy seeing their allies forging bonds with their enemy. Dartmouth wrote in a letter to Colonel Gage that

the time might possibly come when the King, relying upon the Attachment of his faithful allies, the Six Nations of Indians, might be under the necessity of Calling upon them for

⁵⁷ Alan Taylor, *The Divided Ground*, 55-75.

their Aid and Assistance in the present State of America. The unnatural Rebellion now raging there, calls for every Effort to suppress it and the Intelligence His Majesty has received of the Rebels having excited the Indians to take part, and of their having actually engaged a body of them in Arms to support their Rebellion, justifies the Resolution His Majesty has taken of requiring the Assistance of his faithful adherents the Six Nations.⁵⁸

His letter shows that the British were upset that their allies chose the rebels' side in the conflict and also shows that they wanted to regain their support. The letter therefore reinforces the idea that the Iroquois, or perhaps Native Americans in general, made use of the situation they were in, picking the side which was most beneficial for them. However, despite this power, the British and Americans still often treated them as subjects.

The fact that the Iroquois were seen as subjects by the British is even more stressed by Lord Tryon. In a report in which he describes the New York area, he actually argues that the Nations were not mere allies of the British, but rather actual subjects. He contends:

Soon after the English conquered this Country from the Dutch, pursuing their System of Policy, they entered into a strict Alliance with the Natives who by Treaties with this Colony, subjected themselves to the Crown of England, and their Lands to its protection, and from this period were always treated as Subjects, and their Country considered by this Government as part of the Province of New York.⁵⁹

This quote shows that the British considered the Iroquois as their subjects and expresses their desire to possess the Iroquois' land. The fact that the settlers did not see a problem in taking land from the Iroquois is perhaps best explained by Alan Taylor, who argues that the "American

⁵⁸ "Dartmouth to Colonel Guy Johnson," *Report concerning Canadian Archives for the year 1904 Public Archives of Canada* (Ottawa: S.E. Dawson, 1905), 345.

⁵⁹ E.B. O'Callaghan, "Report of his Excellency William Tryon, Esquire," *The documentary history of the state of New-York* (Albany, Weed, Parsons & Co. 1850), 503-505.

settlers coveted that vast hinterland, which they regarded as wasted upon Indians and properly rededicated to their own farm-making.”⁶⁰ It becomes clear that even though the Iroquois did not consider themselves to be subjects, the settlers surely did and thereby concluded that the land would be in better hands if it was theirs.

Although the Iroquois did not consider themselves subjects, the British received serious support from the Nations. This had multiple reasons. According to Thomas S. Abler, the British Crown was in a more advantageous position than the American rebels were, when it came to their relations with Native Americans and, in this case, the Iroquois in particular. The first advantage Abler mentions, is the fact that the British superintendent of Indian Affairs in New York, William Johnson, was married to the Mohawk Molly Brant, sister of the famous Joseph Brant.⁶¹ Molly, or Mary, Brant “was a female clan leader among the matrilineal Iroquois, but she also served the British as an intercultural broker and loyalist diplomat.”⁶² Brant, being a powerful woman, was feared for her capability to influence the other Mohawk. Lieutenant Colonel Tench Tilghman remarks in his memoir, that “the Indians pay her great respect and I am afraid her influence will give us some trouble, for we are informed that she is working strongly to prevent the meeting at Albany⁶³, being entirely in the interests of Guy Johnson⁶⁴, who is now in Canada working upon the Cachnawagers, as it is supposed.”⁶⁵ Her efforts to help

⁶⁰ Alan Taylor, “The Divided Ground: Upper Canada, New York, and the Iroquois Six Nations, 1783-1815,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 22, no. 1 (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 55-75.

⁶¹ Joseph Brant was a Mohawk leader and war chief; Thomas S. Abler and Benjamin Williams. *Chainbreaker: The Revolutionary War Memoirs of Governor Blacksnake*.

⁶² Katherine M.J. McKenna, “Mary Brant (Konwatsi’tsiaienni Degonwadonti): ‘Miss Molly,’ Feminist Role Model or Mohawk Princess?” *The Human Tradition in the American Revolution*, ed. Nancy L. Rhoden and Ian K. Steele (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources, 2000), 183.

⁶³ According to Lieutenant Colonel Tench Tilghman’s memoir, on July 13, 1775, congress “appointed three commissions to form treaties: one for the Six Nations, and other tribes towards the north; a second for the Creeks or Cherokees towards the south; and a third for the intervening tribes towards the west.” Samuel Alexander Harrison and Oswald Tilghman, *Memoir of Lieut. Col. Tench Tilghman, Secretary and Aid to Washington : Together with an Appendix, Containing Revolutionary Journals and Letters, Hitherto Unpublished* (Albany: J. Munsell, 1876), 87; This meeting was almost certainly the meeting Tilghman refers to of which he is afraid that Molly Brant will influence the Mohawk.

⁶⁴ Guy Johnson was not coincidentally the cousin and son-in-law of Sir William Johnson.

⁶⁵ S.A. Harrison, *Memoir of Lieut. Col. Tench Tilghman*, 20.

the Iroquois, but more specifically the Mohawk to remain faithful to the loyalists during the Revolution, were praised by many British commanders. Brant even received a “handsome British pension” at the end of the Revolutionary War.⁶⁶ Furthermore, her husband Sir William Johnson also did his best to win over the Iroquois. He did not only try to persuade the Mohawk to support the British cause, but broadened his focus on the other Nations as well. According to Graymont, “Johnson used every political and theological argument available to appeal to the Oneidas to bring them more closely into an alliance with the British Government.”⁶⁷ His theological arguments were as relevant as his political arguments, because Christianity was important to the Iroquois as well, mostly because of the missionaries who lived among them.

Not only William Johnson made efforts to persuade the Iroquois, but so did the rest of his family. William Johnson, his son Guy Johnson, and their cousin John Johnson all had connections with the Iroquois, and were actively trying to win their support. These efforts already started long before the American Revolution, when the American colonists were fighting the French. The Johnsons expected to be received in a friendly manner by the Native Americans, after the “recent British conquest of French Canada.”⁶⁸ Taylor argues that “with the French banished, from North America, British officials expected easily to control the Indians.”⁶⁹ However, this proved to be a misconception. The Native Americans, and among them even the Mohawk, who were loyal allies of the British during the French War, suffered losses to such an extent that they blamed the British Crown and demanded protection.⁷⁰

William Johnson’s strong bond with the Mohawk was damaged after this. They threatened to move further into Native lands, and Johnson was about to lose his position among

⁶⁶ McKenna, “Miss Molly”, 183.

⁶⁷ Barbara Graymont, *The Iroquois*, 44.

⁶⁸ Alan Taylor, *The Divided Ground Indians, Settlers and the Northern Borderland of the American Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007), E-book, Chapter 1, 2.

⁶⁹ Taylor, *The Divided Ground Indians*, Chapter 1, 2.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

the Mohawk. He therefore shifted his attention to the Oneidas. However, they complained about “encroaching settlers” as well.⁷¹ This shows that the Iroquois were not happy to be part of the games played by the American colonists and the British Crown. It also shows that the trust that took so long to build was more easily damaged than the British assumed.

The Johnson papers shed an interesting light on the relationship between the Onondagas and the British. In one of the papers, Sir William Johnson describes a meeting with the Onondagas during the Seven years’ War, in which the Native Americans emphasize their loyalty to the British and their “inclination to serve the English”: “assuring you that you may always depend on our remaining true Allies to the English”⁷² The statement indicates the longstanding friendship and loyalty between the Onondagas and the British. The relationship between the Six Nations – and the Onondagas in particular – and Sir William Johnson remained good until his death. After his death, his nephew, Guy Johnson, who had been in the picture for a considerable amount of time by now, followed his uncle in his role as new chief. Guy Johnson was received with open arms among most of the Iroquois, but by the Onondagas in particular. One of the Onondaga Sachems proclaimed that they were “the particular friends of your Father in Law⁷³, our Late Superintendant, who are now here and rejoice to see one of his family, whom they so much regard, and respect, acting in his place, we hope will long continue to take care of our affairs.” But it was not only Guy Johnson who they vowed their loyalty to: it was also the British Crown in a more general sense they proved to be loyal to again: “it being our earnest Desire that the Peace & Friendship between us, may always continue, and never be interrupted.”⁷⁴ The Covenant Chain Belt had also been brought to this convention, to reinforce the long-standing relationship between the Iroquois and the English Crown. The Iroquois

⁷¹ Ibid., 3.

⁷² William Johnson, *The Papers of Sir William Johnson* (Albany: Univ. of the State of New York, 1921), 445.

⁷³ Guy Johnson was both Sir William Johnson’s Nephew and Son in Law; Barbara Graymont, *Iroquois in the American Revolution*, 51.

⁷⁴ John Romeyn Brodhead and Berthold Fernow, *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York*, Vol. 8 (Parsons and Co. New York, Albany, 1816), 500.

assured Guy Johnson and his peers that the Belt was “kept clean from rust, and held fast in our hands,”⁷⁵ proving their loyalty and willingness towards the English cause.

The fact that the Onondagas were not persuaded by, for example, American missionaries, but stayed true to their alliance with the British Crown, becomes clear from one of the meetings between Colonel Johnson and the Iroquois. Several Iroquois Sachems delivered speeches during this meeting to Johnson and his men. The Onondaga speaker criticized Samuel Kirkland in particular. He argues that – among other accusations - Kirkland had burned one of their letters sent to Colonel Johnson. However, Graymont argues that this accusation was false and that:

The letter in question was written by an Onondaga Indian to Johnson, informing him that the Onondaga council had some disagreement with the superintendent’s plans regarding the Shawnees. The Onondaga chiefs managed to intercept this letter and had an Oneida interpret it to them. When they discovered the contents, they ordered the letter burned. Kirkland knew nothing about the affair until two days later.⁷⁶

Even though this might not have been true, it does show the Onondagas attitude towards Kirkland as an American missionary. The assumption that they even lied to place Kirkland in a bad light emphasizes their hostile attitude towards him. Furthermore, they argued that they found Kirkland “to be a very busy Man, and a Man interested in Trade and things which we always thought unbecoming the character of a Clergyman.”⁷⁷ According to the Onondaga, ministers were not supposed to meddle in other affairs than the ones related to religion.

Not only Mary Brant and her husband were of great influence on the Iroquois, so was Joseph Brant. Like his sister, he was also very committed to the loyalists. The British kept track

⁷⁵ As quoted in Barbara Graymont, *Iroquois in the American Revolution*, 50.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁷⁷ *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State New York*, 536.

of the people who were either loyalists, or who proved valuable to their cause. They collected this information and documented it in notebooks, including titles. Striking is that the notebooks showed that the loyalists even received cash rewards for their efforts.⁷⁸ The Haldimand Papers, collected by the British military officer Sir Frederick Haldimand, contain some of these documents with lists of loyalists. One prominent member of the loyalists, it becomes clear from the papers, was Brant himself. From the documents, it appears that Brant was well known among the loyalists for his services. While to the other names on the list often long explanations are added why these persons proved to be valuable to the loyalist cause, Brant's name did not need explanation. His name is placed on the "List of Officers Belonging to the Indian Department at Niagara" and under the section "Remarks" it simply states for Brant: "His services well known."⁷⁹ This remark shows that Brant was a loyal supporter of the British Crown who had already proven himself as a loyal ally and was well-known among the loyalists.

Brant's role also shows that the Iroquois did indeed deliberately use diplomacy in their relations with the British and Americans. Elizabeth Hutchinson, for example, argues that Brant, having posed for at least 39 portraits during his life, "carefully manipulated contemporary visual codes of identity to present himself as both modern gentleman and native diplomat."⁸⁰ By doing so, Brant tried to show power. His prominent position among the British is perhaps partly due to this positioning and it shows that the Iroquois were not just unwilling subjects of either the British or Americans, but were actively engaged in diplomatic efforts. Brant thought that a

⁷⁸ "An Account of Cash Received for the Use of Officers and Others Belonging to the Queen's Loyal Rangers," *Haldimand Papers B-167, H1655*, 376, http://heritage.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.lac_reel_h1655/63?r=1&s=6.

⁷⁹ "An Account of Cash Received"; "List of Officers Belonging to the Indian Department at Niagara," *Haldimand Papers B-167, H1655*, 371, http://heritage.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.lac_reel_h1655/58?r=0&s=6

⁸⁰ Elizabeth Hutchinson, "'The Dress of His Nation': Romney's Portrait of Joseph Brant," *Winterthur Portfolio* 45, no. 2/3 (The University of Chicago Press, 2011), 209.

stronger alliance with the British was “the best way to uphold Iroquois autonomy,”⁸¹ which explains his efforts to persuade the rest of the Iroquois.

Joseph Brant, like his sister Mary, also used his powerful position in order to persuade his fellow tribe members and the other Iroquois to support the British and not the Americans. He made remarks that he “hop’d they would not put the least confidence in the rebbles, as he Knew Them to be A Cowardly Deceitfull People.” Not only did Brant try to persuade them to support the British in general, he also took upon himself the task to make the Iroquois ready to cooperate with the British during the Revolution itself.⁸² But not only did Brant try to persuade his fellow Iroquois to join him in his fight against the American rebels, Brant also made demands from the British, which showed that he was not merely a subject or pawn in the game of the Crown. He for example requested from Frederick Haldimand assurances that the Iroquois would have land in Canada to flee to, if the British were to lose.⁸³

With Joseph Brant as Mohawk leader and War Chief as well as devoted loyalist, it becomes quite clear why the Mohawk specifically supported the British in this conflict. Also Brant’s sister Molly being married to Sir William Johnson exemplifies why some of the Nations would support a specific cause in the conflict. It shows that important people, of all parties involved, could play an important role in picking a side during the American Revolution. It shows that connections such as marriages and missionaries often proved to be important factors for tribes to establish alliances.

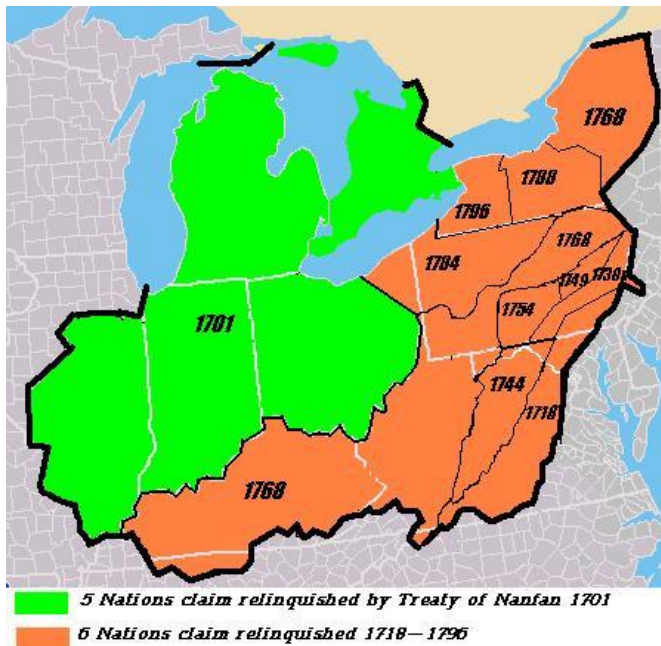
Another reason Abler provides to explain why the British had an advantage in forming alliances with Native Americans over the American rebels was the fact that the British Crown had greater resources. This proved to be helpful, since a large part of Indian diplomacy consisted

⁸¹ Caitlin A. Fitz, “‘Suspected on Both Sides’: Little Abraham, Iroquois Neutrality, and the American Revolution,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 28, no. 3 (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 302.

⁸² Isabel Kelsay, *Joseph Brant, 1743-1807, man of two worlds*, 184.

⁸³ Michael Johnson and Jonathan Smith, *Tribes of the Iroquois Confederacy* (N.Y.: Osprey Publishing, 2003), 16.

of giving and receiving presents. Abler also argues that while the British Crown was eager to give presents to the Native Americans in order to win them over, the American rebels had their hand in taking, rather than giving. The fact that the rebels “openly coveted Indian lands lent considerable support to the arguments of representatives of the Crown.”⁸⁴



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This map shows how much land the Iroquois lost even before the American Revolutionary War by means of treaties. It is therefore no surprise that the Iroquois were fed up with treaties and their mistreatment. Furthermore, it also makes the fact that it was a hard choice for the Native Americans to pick sides in the conflict more understandable. However, according to Abler, the Iroquois blamed the American settlers, rather than the British Crown, for the loss of their land. This was another contribution to the more advantageous position of the British, and caused for more resentment towards the American settlers.

Next to Governor Blacksnake, who has been discussed in the previous chapter, another important figure in documenting the meetings between the Seneca and either the British or the

⁸⁴ Thomas S. Abler, *Chainbreaker*, 35.

⁸⁵ “5 Nations Cession,” *Wikimedia*, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:5NationsCession.jpg>, accessed Nov. 18, 2018.

Americans was Marie Jemison. She was captured at a young age by the Seneca and spent almost her entire life among them. Even though she was eventually in the position to leave, she chose to stay with them. In her captivity narrative, she describes the way in which alliances were formed and also describes the decision-making process in the clearest way possible. Jemison first describes a meeting between the Americans and the Seneca, in which the rebels ask the Nation to remain neutral and not fight them in the upcoming war, stating:

The Pipe of peace was smoked, and a treaty made, in which the Six Nations solemnly agreed that if a war should eventually break out, they would not take up arms on either side; but that they would observe a strict neutrality. With that the people of the states were satisfied, as they had not asked their assistance, nor did not wish it.⁸⁶

However, about one year after this meeting, a meeting takes place with the British loyalists. Instead of requesting Seneca neutrality in case war would break out, the British actually requested them to take up arms against the Americans and fight along the British loyalists. The Seneca were experiencing peaceful times, as Jemison writes that: “About a year passed off, and we, as usual, were enjoying ourselves in the employments of peaceable times.”⁸⁷ The entire goal of the meeting was “to engage their assistance in subduing the rebels, the people of the states, who had risen up against the good King.” But even more interesting about the meeting is what happens next:

The Chiefs then arose, and informed the Commissioners of the nature and extent of the treaty which they had entered into with the people of the states, the year before, and that they should not violate it by taking up the hatchet against them.

⁸⁶ James E. Seaver, *Narrative of the Life of Mary Jemison: White Woman of the Genesee*, (New York: American Scenic & Historic Preservation Society, 1824), 65.

⁸⁷ Seaver, *Narrative of the Life of Mary Jemison*, 65.

The Commissioners continued their entreaties without success, till they addressed their avarice, by telling our people that the people of the states were few in number, and easily subdued; and that on the account of their disobedience to the King, they justly merited all the punishment that it was possible for white men and Indians to inflict upon them; and added, that the King was rich and powerful, both in money and subjects: That his rum was as plenty as the water in lake Ontario: that his men were as numerous as the sands upon the lake shore: - and that the Indians, if they would assist in the war, and preserve in their friendship to the King, till it was closed, should never want for money or goods. Upon this the Chiefs concluded a treaty with the British Commissioners, in which they agreed to take up arms against the rebels, and continue in service of his Majesty till they were subdued[.]

It shows that the decision on whom to side with was often not only influenced by, for example, the use of missionaries, but was also often a decision made when a better option was presented to the Nations. The way the British approached the Seneca in the described event is also a form of bribery. The British promised goods to the Seneca if they agreed to support the loyalists. After having made their vows to the loyalists' cause, the Seneca received all sorts of goods from the British, including weapons, food and drinks.

The previous chapter has already shown the importance of Blacksnake in the meetings that took place between the Iroquois and the loyalists and rebels, which were initiated by both of them, as well as by the Iroquois themselves.⁸⁸ This is relevant because it shows that the contact the Iroquois had with both parties was not only initiated by the Americans and British. It shows that they had a more active role than often assumed. However, the fact that Blacksnake witnessed meetings with Americans concerning the neutrality of the Iroquois during the

⁸⁸ Thomas S. Ablar, *Chainbreaker*, 68.

Revolutionary War did not mean that they eventually remained neutral. Despite their negotiations with the American rebels, the Seneca eventually chose the side of the British, as most of the Iroquois did. Blacksnake recalls that the British tried to persuade the Iroquois to join their side during a convention similar to the American conventions. However, while the Americans initially expressed their demand for the Iroquois to remain neutral, the British did not. They had two main arguments in order to convince the Iroquois of their cause: that the American cause was wrong, for they rebelled against their “father” as “disobedience children,” but more strikingly, they emphasized their own economic and military advantage over the Americans:

But the father is Rich Every thing is planty around his country – and now here American is very poor he has no mean to forced it forward, and will Soon give it up for has no armorials to force against British army, and not only well arms, But it is great any in Number of men to against America they cannot Do anything with the British.⁸⁹

So, not only did they ask the Iroquois to support them in ways such as asking them to remain peaceful when trespassing Iroquois land, the British also specifically asked them to fight on their side, promising them to provide their warriors with armory: “our father will Support you all the Necessarys Such war utensils gun and powder and leade and Tomahawk and Sharp Edges and provisions.”⁹⁰ This not only shows that the British were trying to persuade the Iroquois to join their fight against the rebels, it also shows that they provided the Iroquois with the required equipment. Even though the Nations had a reputation for being ferocious warriors, the British did think that their own weapons would prove to be more useful in their battle against the Americans. Furthermore, this passage of Blacksnake’s memoir shows that the British were fully aware of their advantageous position in respect to the Americans.

⁸⁹ Blacksnake, *The Revolutionary War Memoirs of Governor Blacksnake*, 73.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

Blacksnake continues to describe the discussions that followed the request of the British. The Iroquois leaders could not agree on whom to side with and this discussion perhaps describes the struggle of picking sides in the conflict best of all. The Chiefs get into a discussion with each other, in which they express their wish to remain neutral, but most come to the conclusion that that is no longer possible. After some thinking and discussing, a few leaders express their feelings towards the English' request. For example, as Blacksnake states:

the Cornplanter Spoke and Says, every Brave man Show himself Now hereafter fore we will find are many Dangerous times During the actions of the war, for we will See a many Brave man amongseth american Soldiers which we Shall meet, with theirs Sharp adge Stools, I therefore Say you must Stand like good Soldier against your own white Brother Because just as soon as he fined ou out that are against him he than will Show you his wit no mercy on you on us.⁹¹

Cornplanter is fully aware that an alliance with the British would destroy the peaceful co-existence with the American settlers, but also concludes that they must stand strong, for he predicts that the Americans rebels were not going to show mercy.

Blacksnake also describes Brant's reaction. Even though Brant was already supporting the loyalist cause, he was also present at this convention, still considering the choices that were presented to them. His loyalty to the British Crown eventually made him contribute to the discussion. Brant, as a Mohawk, spoke for his people and expressed their concern for who was actually right in this conflict. Brant argues that:

although we have been communicated with the america commissioner in Relation to your own Brother Difficulties, the american Says the King of England greatly misuse the america, if so he is title from Deserve punishment, But if the america is acturally

⁹¹ Ibid., 77-78.

Done or Doing wrong to his father Rules without cause he liable to be punish as I said before.⁹²

The Mohawk thus felt they did not know who was right and were not sure who they agreed with. This was also the case, as becomes clear from the following passage in Blacksnake's memoir, because the Nations did not know what the quarrel was actually about. Brant continues to discuss the matter, but eventually concludes his speech, saying that they "will now take up the offered, for we have supposed the america acturally Disobeyed the fathers laws and if so he is title and Deserved punishment."⁹³

The Iroquois who vowed to serve the British cause after this convention, immediately prove their loyalty by committing themselves to the British, asking what they would want them to do first: "But now is your Dudy to give us instruction what first coarse to take, for we think now is your Dudy to appoint what first to Do and we Shall Do, as you Directed to it, for we shall think your protection and our protection to Each other, this is all at Present."⁹⁴ However, Brant also expresses his concern and uncertainty over whether they are about to serve the right cause, fearing God's judgement over their decision to support the British. Brant concludes that if they have made the wrong choice according to God, it would result in their defeat in the War. The convention was closed by the British thanking the joining Nations for their support and, unsurprisingly, by drinking together.⁹⁵

The last Nation to be discussed is the Cayuga Nation. There are remarkably few primary sources to be found from their part. Even secondary sources are hard to find on the Cayugas. However, Brandon and Josephy argue that the Cayuga fought both on the American as well as

⁹² Ibid., 79.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 80.

the British side.⁹⁶ This shows that even within the Nations there was division and no real consensus on what the right decision was during this time. Furthermore, other sources report that the Cayugas showed a preference for the British cause and also fought alongside the loyalists.⁹⁷ This tendency might be explained by the fact that George Washington appointed two generals, John Sullivan and James Clinton, in order to end a streak of Iroquois attacks on American villages. This expedition came to be called the Sullivan Expedition. It eventually destroyed many Iroquois villages, most of which were on Cayuga territory.⁹⁸ George Washington, who eventually became the first American president after the Revolutionary War, expressed in a letter the ultimate goal of the expedition:

The objects of this expedition will be effectually to chastise and intimidate the hostile nations, to countenance & [en]courage the friendly ones, and to relieve our frontiers from the depredations to which they would otherwise be exposed. To effect these purposes it is proposed to carry the war into the heart of the country of the six nations—to cut off their settlements destroy their next year's crops, and do them every other mischief which time and circumstances will permit.⁹⁹

These words show the seriousness and aggressiveness of the expedition and show in what ways the Americans responded when the Nations rebelled against them. The expedition undoubtedly caused resentment among the Nations that were struck hardest, among which were the Cayugas.

⁹⁶ William Brandon and Alvin M. Josephy, *American Heritage Book of Indians* (New York: American Heritage, 1961), 205.

⁹⁷ Thomas S. Ablor, "Cayuga," *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, accessed Nov. 16, 2018, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/cayuga>. (June 6, 2011).

⁹⁸ Colin G. Calloway, *The American Revolution in Indian Country*.

⁹⁹ "From George Washington to Major General Horatio Gates, 6 March 1779," *Founders Online, National Archives*, last modified June 13, 2018, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-19-02-0391>. [Original source: *The Papers of George Washington, Revolutionary War Series*, vol. 19, 15 January–7 April 1779, ed. Philander D. Chase and William M. Ferraro. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009), pp. 377–379.]

This may have contributed to the fact that the Nations, and especially the Cayugas, abandoned their wish to remain neutral and developed a preference for the British cause.

But it was not only Cayuga territory that the expedition threatened to ravage. Mary Jemison writes in her narrative that:

in the fall of 1779, intelligence was received that a large and powerful army of the rebels, under the command of General Sullivan, was making rapid progress towards our settlement, burning and destroying the huts and corn-fields; killing the cattle, hogs and horses, and cutting down the fruit trees belonging to the Indians throughout the country.¹⁰⁰

It shows that this expedition targeted large parts of Iroquois territory and shows that this expedition is a perfect example of why the Iroquois Confederacy shifted from a peaceful and benevolent community into a war-faring, divided league.¹⁰¹ Even though the expedition killed many of the Iroquois, ravaged large parts of their land and destroyed many of their resources, it helped fuel the Iroquois' willingness to fight in the Revolutionary War. It took time for them to recover, but when they did, many of the Iroquois were to be found at the frontier once again.¹⁰²

So while most of the Iroquois, as well as the British and Americans, initially wished for the Nations to remain neutral, it soon became clear that this was not an option. This was partly the case because of the pressure put upon the Nations from both sides. Both the British and the Americans planned conventions in order to persuade the Nations of their righteous cause, and tried to convince them that the other side either disobeyed, in the case of the English, or that

¹⁰⁰ Mary Jemison, *Narrative of the Life of Mary Jemison*, 69.

¹⁰¹ Robert S. Allen, "Brant, Molly (1736–16 April 1796), Mohawk, Loyalist, and Anglican," *American National Biography* (2000), accessed Dec. 27, 2018.

¹⁰² George F. Scheer and Hugh F. Rankin, *Rebels And Redcoats: The American Revolution Through The Eyes Of Those That Fought And Lived It* (New York: The World Publishing Company, 1972), 353.

the motherland did not treat them right, in the case of the Americans. What proved to be even more important were the longstanding alliances, such as the Covenant Chain which represented a bond with the British. Missionaries played a similar role. Additionally, these missionaries also proved to be important keepers of the correspondence between the Nations and the other parties involved. Many of the alliances and bonds were also created during conventions. The British and Americans, but also the Iroquois arranged these meetings, which shows that the decision to join in the conflict was not only due to the pressure of the British and Americans. The decision of the Iroquois to join in the conflict was a deliberate choice. Each Nation decided for itself who to side with, all for their own reasons, whether that was because of their bond with missionaries or longstanding alliances. However, the documents have shown that the decision-making process was not an easy one and that even though the Nations desired to remain neutral and keep the hatchet buried initially, they eventually decided to actively support either the British or Americans. The majority of the Nations, the Seneca, Mohawk, Onondaga and Cayuga, vowed their loyalty to the British, while only two of the Nations, the Oneidas and Tuscaroras, supported the American rebels.

All the examples in this chapter show in what ways the British and Americans were trying to win the trust of the Iroquois and, more importantly, recruit them as allies. The ways in which to achieve this goal was most often not by using violence. This shows that even though in existing literature there is too much emphasize on the Iroquois' involvement in the conflict because of the location of their land, this only partly justified. This chapter demonstrates that the Iroquois and their diplomatic efforts played an active role in the decision to form alliances and that their involvement in the American and British issues was a deliberate choice rather than just tragic fate.

Chapter 3: Switching Sides?

Our Indians went, to a man; but contrary to their expectations, instead of smoking and looking on, they were obliged to fight for their lives, and in the end of the battle were completely beaten, with a great loss in killed and wounded. Our Indians alone had thirty-six killed, and a great number wounded. Our town exhibited a scene of real sorrow and distress, when our warriors returned and recounted their misfortunes, and stated the real loss they had sustained in the engagement. The mourning was excessive, and was expressed by the most doleful yells, shrieks, and howlings, and by inimitable gesticulations.¹⁰³

After the Six Nations had decided who they were supporting during the American Revolution, they eventually did take up the hatchet against and alongside the British and Americans. This chapter therefore explores the role of the Iroquois during the Revolutionary War itself and will thereby shed a light on whether the tribes were going to switch sides, or remain loyal to their already established alliances. Furthermore, this chapter will also highlight how the Nations' relationship with each other changed due to differences in opinion on the conflict. This will all be discussed while focusing on Iroquois agency. This chapter will aim to contribute to the already existing literature on Native American history by arguing that agency played a big role for the Iroquois in the American Revolution and that they were not mere pawns who did not have any say in their participation. However, while this issue should receive more attention, this chapter does not argue that this agency is absolute. Other factors, such as pressure from the British and Americans, did indeed play a role as well. This chapter therefore tries to seek a balance between these two viewpoints. While doing so, it will argue that despite the fact that the Iroquois had already picked sides before the actual war began, the decision-making process

¹⁰³ James E. Seaver, *Narrative of the Life of Mary Jemison: White Woman of the Genesee* (New York: American Scenic & Historic Preservation Society, 1824), 68.

did not end there. Many Iroquois switched sides, basing their decision on outcomes of battles, promises made to them, or the way they were treated.

The year 1777 was a monumental year during the American Revolution, not only for the conflicting parties, but also for the Iroquois. The events that took place this year were decisive for the warfare and outcome of the American Revolutionary War according to Michael Logusz. He labels this year as the “Wilderness War of 1777.”¹⁰⁴ He argues that this year was monumental, because it showed “a vicious struggle fought through-out the entire frontier wilderness of New York and its adjoining colonies, by men on both sides wielding the tomahawk, musket, rifle, knife, bayonet, spear, war club, and bow and arrow.” And he notes that “the fighting of 1777 would affect every single man, woman, and child living in and around the raging inferno.”¹⁰⁵ Like Graymont, Logusz emphasizes that the location of the Iroquois territory is crucial for understanding their participation in the War.

Although the argument is often overly emphasized in earlier works, this thesis does not try to argue that the location of the Iroquois’ territory was completely irrelevant for their participation in the war. Obviously, if the Iroquois were not located in that particular place, they would not have been in so much contact with the rebels and loyalists and would likely not have been involved to the same extent as they actually have. This thesis does argue, however, that if the Iroquois tribes truly desired to remain neutral, they could have steered clear of the conflict. Another but closely related issue that is too often overemphasized in the existing literature is the pressure put upon the Nations by the British and Americans. This has already been mentioned in the previous chapters while discussing the contact before the actual war began. However, even after the fighting had started, the Nations experienced pressure from the Americans and British. This can be easily understood, because in battle it became clear to the

¹⁰⁴ Michael O. Logusz, *With Musket and Tomahawk: The Mohawk Valley Campaign in the Wilderness War of 1777* (Havertown, PA: Casemate, 2012), 13.

¹⁰⁵ Logusz, *With Musket and Tomahawk*, 13.

Americans and British how valuable the warfare knowledge and support of the Iroquois actually was. There are many reports on warfare during this time, also concerning the input of Native Americans.

The Native Americans' involvement in battles during the early stage of the war is perhaps best described by General Burgoyne, a British army officer and by the *Colbraith Journal*. Both provide a detailed account of the events leading up to the Siege of fort Stanwix - one of the most important battles during the war. Bourgoyne writes, for example:

The next measure must depend upon those taken by the enemy, and upon the general plan of the campaign as concerted at home. If it be determined that General Howe's whole forces should act upon Hudson's River, and to the southward of it, and that the only object of the Canada army be to effect a junction with that force, the immediate possession of Lake George would be of great consequence, as the most expeditious and most commodious route to Albany; and should the enemy be in force upon that lake, which is very probable, every effort should be tried, by throwing savages and light troops round it, to oblige them to quit it without waiting for naval preparations.¹⁰⁶

Burgoyne laid out his tactics before the House of Commons. In this he explained that, when necessary, the British would be “throwing savages and light troops round it.” This clearly indicates the importance of the support of the Nations and Native Americans in general. It shows that the alliances that have been considered in the previous chapter did have important meaning to the Nations, as well as to the rebels.

While fighting, the Iroquois tribes were therefore devoted allies of the British and Americans. Whereas Burgoyne mainly gives insight in to what extent the Native Americans were in a way used in battles, the *Colbraith Journal* gives an insight in their way of fighting. It

¹⁰⁶ “Letter to St. Leger,” v.

is evident that the Native Americans did not show mercy upon their enemies and that their dealings with captives were vicious. Even before the Siege of Fort Stanwix the Native Americans attacked their opponents with their traditional weapons.

June 25th – Capt. Grigg, with Corporal Maddeson of his company being between the Forts Newport and Bull, about 1 ¼ miles from Fort Schuyler, were attacked by a party of Indians who wounded and tomahawked them and scalped them. The captain was alive when found, but the corporal dead.

July 3rd -- Ensign Sporr, being in command of seven men cutting sods for the fort at Fort Newport, were attacked by a party of Indians, who killed and scalped one, wounded and scalped another, and took the ensign and four men prisoners.¹⁰⁷

The Colbraith Journal contains multiple accounts of Native Americans attacking their enemies. All involve the scalping of their victims.¹⁰⁸

However, perhaps even more striking than any of the accounts of Native American warriors killing, scalping and harming their enemies during battles is the following account by Moses Younglove. He described what happened when enemies were taken prisoner. From the accounts of Younglove it becomes clear that the Native Americans inflicted even worse harm upon their enemies than described before. Besides torturing their prisoners to such an extent that their cries could be heard from far away, they also allegedly ate their prisoners:

That Isaac Paris Esqr was also taken and led by the Savages the same Road, without receiving from them any remarkable Insult except stripping untill some Tories came up who kicked & abused him, after which the Savages thinking him a Notable Offender Murdered him Barbarously That those of the Prisoners who were delivered up to the

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ "Philip Conine Jr. to Leonard Bronck," *Letters from Home: Period Accounts* (Fort Schuyler, June 27, 1777), accessed Nov. 26, 2018, http://www.nyhistory.net/drums/Conine_to_Bronk_Stanwix_062777.htm.

Provost Guard were kept without Victuals for many Days and had neither Clothes Blankets Shelter or Fire while the Guards were ordered not to use any Violence in protecting the Prisoners from the Savages who came every Day in large Companies with Knives and feeling the Prisoners to know who was fattest That they Dragged one of the Prisoners out with the most Lamentable Cries, Tortured him for a long time and the Deponent was informed by both Tories and Indians, that they eat him as appeared they did another on an Island in Lake Ontario by Bones newly picked found there just after they crossed the Lake with Prisoners That the Prisoners who were not delivered up were Murdered in Considerable Numbers from Day to Day round the Camp some of them so nigh that their Shrieks were heard.¹⁰⁹

These passages show the merciless way in which the Nations fought their battles. It is no wonder that the American rebels and the British loyalists first tried to persuade the Nations to remain neutral in the conflict. Fighting against them as enemies proved to be tough, but above all sometimes very gruesome. This also explains why both parties continued to persuade the Nations to fight for their cause. They would prove to be helpful allies, but equally important was perhaps that convincing them to fight with them as allies would mean they would not have to fight them as enemies. This shows why the Americans and British continuously, and increasingly, pressured the tribes to support their side. On the one hand, their support and warfare were incredibly useful in battles. On the other hand, witnessing the violent warfare of the Iroquois also fueled the fear of fighting against them. This helps explain the continuing British and American efforts to persuade the tribes to switch sides.

However, this was not the only reason why the Iroquois were pressured; there were other crucial factors as well. The Iroquois' knowledge of the environment also proved to be incredibly

¹⁰⁹ "Moses Younglove Declaration," *Papers of the Continental Congress* (National Archives & Records Administration), M247-70 I57, 85-87, transcribed by Billy Markland 1-28-2001, accessed Nov. 26, 2018, <http://freepages.rootsweb.com/~familyinformation/history/transcripts/younglove.html>.

useful. *The Colbraith Journal* illustrates in what ways the Native Americans made use of the environment in their fighting when eventually on August 2, 1777 the Siege of Fort Stanwix began:

Aug 4th - A continual firing of small arms was this day kept up by the enemy's Indians, who advanced within gunshot of the fort, in small parties under cover of bushes, weeds and potatoes in the garden. Colonel Mellon and his party of 100 men, who came from Fort Dayton as a guard to the bateaux, was to have returned this day, but we were now besieged and all communications cut off for the present.¹¹⁰

They were familiar with the environment and took advantage of their position. By seeking cover in the natural environment, they were able to attack the opponents. For the Iroquois, their knowledge of the environment made them better in warfare; this advantage increased the value of their support. Because the Iroquois were much wanted as allies in the war, they were also well positioned to make their own decisions on the issue of whom to support and even whether to support at all.

The Fort Stanwix siege was eventually won by the Americans, mainly due to the fact that many Native Americans were discontent with the warfare and leadership of the British. This led many of the Native American warriors to abandon the camp.¹¹¹ But an important issue related to the event is the fact that the Iroquois could see that the British were in a stronger position than the Americans. Logusz contends that the British Army had far better weapons and provisions, but, above all, better support: exactly in terms of the number of Native American allies, the English were in a more advantageous position. Seeing how strong the British were fueled the willingness of the Iroquois to support the British cause. This also explains why most

¹¹⁰ *The Colbraith Journal, part 2*, "Letters from Home," 1777 – Journal of the most material occurrences preceding the siege of Fort Schuyler (formerly Fort Stanwix) with an account of that siege, etc, accessed Nov. 26, 2018, http://www.nyhistory.net/drums/colbraith_journal_part2.html.

¹¹¹ John S. Pancake, 1777, *The Year of the Hangman* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1992), 145.

of the Six Nations supported the British Crown in the conflict. The British made good use of their Native American allies in battles against the American army. Yet, while most Iroquois supported the British side, the American army consisted of a considerable number of Native Americans as well. According to Logusz: “In 1777, the Northern Army proved that whites and minorities could coexist and serve equally in an army. Racism was not entrenched and tolerance was the norm.”¹¹² Although the Americans likely thought of their Native American allies as savages, as they are often portrayed in American history, they treated them as equals in their armed forces. This shows that the Americans probably understood that they had to treat their allies as equals in order to keep them loyal. The way the Iroquois were treated was crucial for their decision making, and both parties were aware of that fact.

The Iroquois thus reached their conclusions about alliances based on performance in battles and the way they were treated by the British and Americans. When they were discontent because not treated well, the Iroquois did not hesitate to switch sides. It also proves the importance of their support. The Nations and their body of warriors could make or break the chances of victory. However, it also shows that the support of some of the Iroquois was not yet fixed and that even during the conflict itself they would switch sides.

Another important event that shows the importance of the support of the Nations in the battles during the Revolutionary War is the Battle of Oriskany. According to Robert S. Allen, this battle in particular tore the Confederacy apart, because of the size of the battle and the Iroquois support on both sides, with most Nations supporting the British, and especially the Oneidas and Tuscaroras supporting the rebels.¹¹³ This was against the Iroquois’ family values: it meant they had to fight their own brothers, whether they were blood related or not.

¹¹² Pancake, *1777, The Year of the Hangman*, 15.

¹¹³ Robert Allen, “Brant, Molly.”

In the following passage from a letter written by Nicholas Herkimer, an American General, to Philip Schuyler, Herkimer describes the events leading up to the Battle of Oriskany.

As it is no more in doubt, that the enemies will make an Attack in our Frontiers, very soon, and very likely a large number of disaffected Indians will join them.

No time nor care is to be spared to guard against it.

We are yet in a defenceless situation, as your Excellency will judge yourself, as the Indians will doubtless make an Incursion into our Settlements, which it is not very difficult to them to destroy or take possession thereof.¹¹⁴

This letter shows that not only the Native Americans who were initially supporting the British switched to the American side, but also apparently the other way around, for the exact same reason. Native Americans could become ‘disaffected’ because of their treatment, as the Americans recognized. Moreover, the Americans also realized that the Native Americans had thorough knowledge of the surroundings and perhaps warfare in general, by noting that it would not be hard for the Natives to take possession of, or destroy, their settlements.

During the battle, the Americans tried to free Fort Stanwix, but ultimately failed and suffered heavy losses. The American rebels, led by Herkimer himself and supported by the Oneidas and Tuscaroras during this battle, were ambushed by the British loyalists under the command of Barry St. Leger. Despite the support from the Oneidas and Tuscaroras, Herkimer acknowledged that they were nonetheless in a defenseless situation, because of the magnitude of Native American force on the British side:

¹¹⁴ “Nicholas Herkimer to Philip Schuyler on events prior to Oriskany,” “Letters from Home: Period Accounts” (Canajoharrie July 2, 1777), accessed Nov. 26, 2018, http://www.nyhistory.net/drums/herkimer_to_schuyler_070277.htm.

Gentlemen, we pray you will send us succor. By the death of most of our committee officers, the field officers and General being wounded, everthing is out of order; the people entirely disspirited; our county at Esopus unrepresented, so that we can not hope to stand it any longer without your aid; we will not mention the schocking aspect our fields do show. Faithful to our country, we remain.¹¹⁵

Herkimer's concern over Native American support on the British side does perhaps come forth from his personal relationship with Joseph Brant. According to Logusz, Herkimer and Brant were acquaintances and were on good terms with each other before the Revolutionary War. However, after Joseph Brant vowed his loyalty to the British cause, this friendly relationship turned into an antagonistic one. Despite this resentment, Herkimer still tried to persuade Brant to remain neutral, or even join the American cause.¹¹⁶ Herkimer's knowledge of Brant's importance among the Nations and his support for the British may have fueled Herkimer's fear of defeat. This fear may have been well-grounded, because Brant indeed fought together with St. Leger on the British side, with under them another 1000 Iroquois.¹¹⁷

The Battle of Oriskany was eventually won by St. Leger and the British army. However, this was just a minor victory, since the American rebels maintained control over the rest of the fighting in the area. The battles of Fort Stanwix and Oriskany were both part of the Saratoga campaign, in which the Americans were still in a more or less victorious position. They were placed in this position because Native Americans on the British side were disappointed in the promises the British had made beforehand. The British had promised that their own troops would do most of the fighting during the battle, while in reality the Native Americans eventually

¹¹⁵ "Tryon County Committee of Safety to Albany County Committe of Safety on Oriskany and the seige of Fort Stanwix," "Letters from Home: Period Accounts" (German Flats Committee Chamber), accessed 26-11-2018, http://www.nyhistory.net/drums/Tryon_COS_to_Albany_COS_Oriskany_080977.htm.

¹¹⁶ Michael O. Logusz, *With Musket and Tomahawk: Volume II*, 26.

¹¹⁷ George F. Scheer and Hugh F. Rankin, *Rebels And Redcoats: The American Revolution Through The Eyes Of Those That Fought And Lived It* (New York: The World Publishing Company, 1972), 267.

turned out to be the main fighting force.¹¹⁸ This promise, too, shows that the Iroquois' choice of who to side with was not yet fully determined. However, while most tribes in general continued their support for the side they had vowed their loyalty to, individuals often abandoned their troops. They switched sides because they felt they were taken advantage of, or because, due to war developments such as losses and victories, they thought the other party was going to win.

During the final battle at Saratoga, the British received a great amount of Native American support, to no avail. The reports of the British army officer John Burgoyne provide insight into the size of the British army:

I humbly conceive the operating army (I mean exclusively of the troops left for the security of Canada) ought not to consist of less than eight thousand regulars, rank and file. The artillery required in the memorandums of General Carleton, a corps of watermen, two thousand Canadians, including hatchet-men and other workmen, and one thousand or more savages.¹¹⁹

Burgoyne states that “one thousand or more savages” accompanied the British Army on their mission to attack the American Army at Fort Stanwix. The fact that Burgoyne refers to the Native Americans as “savages” indicates how the Native Americans were viewed in general at that time, but also reinforces the idea that Burgoyne and presumably many others feared the Native American ways of warfare.

¹¹⁸ Hoffman Nickerson, *The Turning Point of the Revolution, Or, Burgoyne in America* (Cranbury, NJ: Scholars Bookshelf, 2005).

¹¹⁹ John Burgoyne, *A state of the expedition from Canada: as laid before the House of Commons, by Lieutenant-General Burgoyne, With a collection of authentic documents, Written and collected by himself* (London: printed for J. Almon, 1780, Reproduced by: Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Library, 2011), <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/ecco/004877784.0001.000/1:25.1?rgn=div2;view=toc>, iii.

The impact of the Saratoga Campaign was exceptional. The following passage provides an indication of how many people were involved in the battle of Saratoga, as well as how it changed the course of the Revolutionary War.

Even of those great conflicts, in which hundreds of thousands have been engaged and tens of thousands have fallen, none has been more fruitful of results than this surrender of thirty-five hundred fighting-men at Saratoga. It not merely changed the relations of England and the feelings of Europe towards these insurgent colonies, but it has modified, for all times to come, the connexion between every colony and every parent state.¹²⁰

The battle was supposed to mark the end of the American Revolutionary War. The plan of the British was to separate New England from the rest of the United Colonies, convinced as they were that New England was the most subversive colony. Even though it did not necessarily mark the end of the war, the battle was crucial for the outcome of the war. Eventually, the British army and most of the Iroquois tribes under Burgoyne were defeated at Saratoga, due to his inexperience as well as his loss of Native American support. Edmund Morgan argued that it “was a great turning point of the war because it won for Americans the foreign assistance which was the last element needed for victory.”¹²¹ This foreign assistance included the support of the Iroquois. They saw that the Americans had the winning hand, which made more and more Iroquois switch sides. This was obviously because the Iroquois wanted to be on the winning team, especially if the winning team were to be the Americans, because those were the people they would have to share the land with and who they would be in most contact with after the war. Edward Creasy has also described the Battle at Saratoga as one of the fifteen most decisive

¹²⁰ Lord Mahon, as Cited in: Sir Edward Shepherd Creasy, *The Fifteen Decisive Battles of the World: From Marathon to Waterloo* (1851, reprint: Dover Publications, 2008).

¹²¹ Edmund Morgan, *The Birth of the Republic: 1763–1789* (1956), 82–83.

battles in world history in 1851.¹²² According to Stuart Murray the Battle at Saratoga was such an important turning point of the American Revolution, “for in the wake of the news, France soon declared war against Great Britain. No king’s troops ever again marched on Albany, and the British withdrew from the Champlain Valley.”¹²³ One of the most important reasons for his defeat was perhaps the fact that Burgoyne could not keep the Nations under control. This also becomes evident from the following quote by Major Ancrom, who served in St. Leger’s army:

it will be out of the power of the colonel to restrain the Indians, who are very numerous, and much exasperated, not only from plundering the property, but destroying the lives of, probably, the greater part of the garrison. Indeed the Indians are so exceedingly provoked, and mortified by the losses they have sustained, in the late actions, having had several of their favourite chiefs killed, that they threaten, - and the Colonel, if the present arrangements should not be entered into, will not be able to prevent them from executing their threats, - to march down the country, and destroy the settlement, with its inhabitants. in this case, not only men, but women and children, will experience the sad effects of their vengeance.¹²⁴

This shows how crucial the Nations’ support proved to be for the outcome of the Revolutionary War. It also shows that no matter how much pressure was put upon the Iroquois, they still made their own decisions: if they were not content with the course of events, they would change sides.

However, despite the fact that the Iroquois picked or changed sides based upon their own decisions, both the Americans, as well as the British, were still trying to persuade the Nations to join in on their side. Especially when the Revolutionary War and its battles actually began, both sides noticed the importance of the Nations in their goal for defeating their enemy.

¹²² Creasy, *Fifteen Decisive Battles of the World*.

¹²³ Stuart Murray, *The Honor of Command: General Burgoyne's Saratoga Campaign* (Vermont: Bennington, 1998).

¹²⁴ Major Ancrom, as cited in: Logusz, *With Musket and Tomahawk*, 180.

However, it is perhaps more striking that the Nations were trying to persuade each other to join in on the side they had chosen. This is remarkable because of their initial wish to remain neutral. Their wish probably came forth from their fear that this conflict could cause internal divisions within the Iroquois confederacy. Instances in which the Iroquois addressed each other to maintain the peace among the tribes appear to prove as much. The Oneida's in particular, who supported the Americans, tried to convince other Native Americans to do the same:

Some Oneida Indians arrived here with a flag from Canada, who informed the Colonel that they had been to Caughnawaga to request them not to take up the hatchet in favor of Great Britain and gave him assurance of that tribe being much inclined to keep the peace, that had for so long a time subsisted between them and their American brethren, and that some of the sachems would be here in eight days on their way for Albany to treat on this subject.¹²⁵

These occurrences took place before the Siege of Fort Stanwix or Fort Schuyler and represent the ongoing struggle for alliances during the War. It also indicates that even though the War had already begun, the decisions and perhaps even loyalty of the Native Americans to the cause were not yet definitive.

Fearful of internal division, Logusz argues, the Nations were nevertheless unable to prevent the destruction of the Iroquois Confederacy.¹²⁶ This destruction was mainly caused by disagreements with (and among) other Iroquois members. A good example of internal division within tribes are the Mohawk. While Brant and most of the Mohawk fought alongside the British because of Brant's strong ties with the Crown and the loyalists, the Mohawk were not united. Many also supported the Americans. There were even Mohawk, such as Little Abraham,

¹²⁵ *The Colbraith Journal, part 1*, "Letters from Home," 1777 – Journal of the most material occurrences preceding the siege of Fort Schuyler (formerly Fort Stanwix) with an account of that siege, etc., accessed Nov. 26, 2018, http://www.nyhistory.net/drums/Colbraith_journal_part_1.htm.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

who during the entire Revolution advocated for neutrality.¹²⁷ Another famous Mohawk who fought in the Revolutionary War was Colonel Louis Cook. But while Brant fought for the British, Cook fought in the Continental army. This example perfectly describes the situation of the Iroquois because it shows that disagreement about who to support led to cracks in the Iroquois Confederacy and even among the individual Nations as well. Brant and Cook had strong “unfriendly feelings” towards each other, but Brant continued to try to persuade Cook to support the British instead of the Americans.¹²⁸

The Six Nations not only addressed the other Nations, but also other tribes of Native Americans. This was not always in order to persuade them to pick a side or to remain neutral in the conflict, but rather to maintain the peace between them and the Six Nations:

Brothers and Nephews,

We desire you to continue to sit still and preserve the Peace and Friendship with all your Neighbours – remain firm and united with each other so as to be like one Man – We desire you to be strong and keep your Country in Peace.¹²⁹

The Iroquois were clearly concerned that the peace that had existed for so long would be affected by the Revolutionary War and the pressure from both the British and the Americans. Their concerns proved to be justified, considering the events that followed.

The council Graymont describes in which tensions arose among the American-oriented and British-oriented Iroquois offers a striking example of divisions and their consequences. The pro-American Oneidas and Tuscaroras expressed concern over the influence John Butler had over the Western Nations. They argued that “He has by threats and profers prevailed upon the

¹²⁷ Caitlin A. Fitz, “‘Suspected on Both Sides’: Little Abraham, Iroquois Neutrality, and the American Revolution,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 28, no. 3 (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 301.

¹²⁸ Reverend Eleazer Williams, *The Life of Colonel Louis Cook* (From the Papers of Franklin B. Hough, New York State Archives, 1851).

¹²⁹ As cited in Graymont, *Iroquois in the American Revolution*, 102.

greater part of the Seneca, Cayugas, and Onondagas to renounce the cause of the Colonies and engage on the King's side."¹³⁰ However, Graymont contends that this is a false accusation and that Butler was not as successful as the Oneidas and Tuscaroras claimed he was in convincing the other tribes. This nevertheless was "beginning to cause resentment and was shaking the tranquility and security of the Confederacy." She also argues that "there was a small but growing breach in the League, fracturing the unanimity and turning the members against one another."¹³¹

All of the above shows that the Nations not only vowed their loyalty to the British and the Americans, but also actively participated in their battles. The number of men they provided for battle proves the importance of the Nations in the Revolutionary War. But most importantly, the above shows that, even during the war, the Iroquois would switch sides. This was due to their disappointment caused by the bad treatment of the Iroquois in battle, such as the fact that the white commanders and leaders let the Native Americans do most of the fighting. Their disappointment in the way they were treated was not the only cause of their discontent, however; the discovery that the enemy was stronger, or had better supplies than they would make the Iroquois switch sides too. Furthermore, the tribes tried to persuade other Native Americans to either join or remain neutral, even during the conflict. Their efforts to maintain good ties with their allies and fellow Nations remained important. However, even though they tried, the Confederacy started to show cracks because of their disagreement on who to support. Most importantly, this chapter has shown that while the tribes in general stayed true to their initial alliances with either the British or Americans, many Iroquois often switched sides in the conflict due to disagreement and discontentment with the side they were fighting for. The Six Nations as a whole, on the other hand, in general stayed loyal to their initial alliances. The

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid., 101.

Nations had a strong role in the Revolutionary War and were in the position to make their own decisions. However, the question how powerful they would have been had they stayed united, is difficult to answer.

Conclusion

The American Revolution is one of the most important historical events that eventually shaped the United States as we know it. However, while the Revolutionary War is a multifaceted topic, the documentation, even in such basic matters as school books, is very one-sided. The conventional narrative is usually very much focused on the white masculine figures such as George Washington who played a major role. In reality, not only the Americans and British were affected by the conflict—and were the event’s protagonists. What often does not receive enough emphasis, is the fact that not only the British and Americans were affected by the conflict, but rather the entire continent, including Native Americans. And these Native Americans played a major role in the events as well.

The Iroquois Nations initially lived a relatively peaceful existence, even when the first settlers arrived. They tolerated the American settlers and British Crown, even to an extent that they were willing to engage in treaties and alliances with them. Among themselves, the Iroquois lived rather peacefully together as well. The Five and eventually Six Nations were a confederacy, known for their power and use of diplomacy. The powerful position of the Iroquois had its benefits as well as its disadvantages: the British and Americans needed their assistance and pressured them to form alliances.

When tensions arose between the American rebels and the British loyalists, the initial wish was for the Iroquois to remain neutral in the upcoming conflict. This was both stressed by the Nations themselves, as well as by the British and Americans. The two conflicting parties argued that it was a “family quarrel Between us and old England” and that “you Indians, are not concerned in it.”¹³² The Iroquois in turn argued that they “cannot intermeddle in this dispute

¹³² Blacksnake and Benjamin Williams, *Chainbreaker: The Revolutionary War Memoirs of Governor Blacksnake as Told to Benjamin Williams*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 50.

between two Brothers,”¹³³ requesting to be left alone, because to them the dispute seemed to be an “unnatural”¹³⁴ one. However, as chapter one shows, the Iroquois quickly came into contact with both English and Americans representatives who tried, although modestly, to persuade the Iroquois into early forms of alliances.

Despite the wish to remain neutral, the Nations eventually did decide to pick sides. Both the Americans as well as the British were aware of the importance of having the Nations as allies - either for the location of their land, or for their support in actual warfare. They therefore actively tried to persuade the Nations to join the conflict on their side. An important and subtle way of acquiring the individual Nations as allies was the use of missionaries such as Samuel Kirkland among the Oneidas and Tuscaroras. The Nations’ decisions to participate were also influenced by other important figures and their personal relationship with the Nations. The most famous example of an alliance that had been established by means of such a relationship was Joseph Brant’s dedication to the British Crown. His sister Mary Brant also played an important role in this respect, with her marriage with William Johnson. Furthermore, there were meetings that took place in order to establish alliances with the Nations. The conflicting parties tried to convince the Nations that the other cause was a wrong one and that their side would have a better chance at victory. Awarding supplies, such as food, weapons and alcohol proved to be another successful way of establishing alliances.

However, even though both sides did indeed pressure the Iroquois to participate on their side in the conflict, the decisions and behavior of the Nations show that their participation was more than just a tragic coincidence because their land was located in the warzone. The decision to participate was a well-considered choice and each Nation had its own reasons to support

¹³³ “Letter from the Chiefs of the Oneida Nation to the Inhabitants of New England,” March 14, 1777, *Samuel Kirkland papers*, (Hamilton College), <http://contentdm6.hamilton.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/arc-kir/id/832/>

¹³⁴ “Letter from the Chiefs of the Oneida Nations”

either the British or Americans, whether out of loyalty to certain persons such as missionaries, or because of longstanding alliances. As a result it does not come as a surprise that all Nations eventually picked a side in the quarrel between the English and the Americans. It was only the Oneidas and Tuscaroras who supported the American rebels, while the other Nations, the Seneca, Mohawk, Onondagas and Cayugas, supported the British cause. This led to a lot of discussion and sometimes even rivalry among the Nations. The Iroquois Confederacy was starting to show cracks and the once so powerful Iroquois Empire was set up against itself. Furthermore, the fact that the Nations eventually participated in the battles of the loyalists and rebels also meant that they had to fight each other, which further contributed to this rift in the confederacy.

Furthermore, the fighting of the Nations was unlike what the rebels and loyalists were used to. The Nations used different tactics, mostly because they were familiar with the area and knew how to approach their enemies in the best of ways. They also used different weapons, even though they were often provided with weapons in exchange for their support. Also the way in which they dealt with their prisoners or enemies in general was something that was feared by their opponents. It does therefore not come as a surprise that the Americans and British eventually changed from demanding neutrality, to encouraging them to pick up the hatchet on their side in the Revolutionary War. The Nations could prove to be helpful allies in their warfare and it would be better to fight alongside them than fight against them. This made the position of the Iroquois even more powerful and allowed them to make their own decisions for picking a side in the conflict.

In almost all important battles during the Revolutionary War, the Nations played a role. Both parties relied heavily upon Native American support and large parts of either army existed of Native Americans. Fighting in both armies also contributed to internal rivalries within the Nations: they had to fight each other and, in doing so, suffered great losses. However, the fact

that the Iroquois as well as other Native American tribes made up such a considerable part of both armies, also put them in a more commanding position and shows that they were not just a minority subject to the rule of either the loyalists or rebels: they were rather of great importance and in a more powerful position than might perhaps be expected. Furthermore, it also shows that despite the fact that the Iroquois had already picked sides before the actual war began, many Iroquois switched sides during the Revolutionary War itself, basing their decision on outcomes of battles, promises, or the way they were treated.

The scarcity of sources sometimes makes it hard to follow the entire process of Native American decision making, as well as their contributions in the battles themselves. This makes it in some cases necessary to rely upon sources coming from the rebels and the loyalists. Furthermore, many of the sources are only available in archives located in the United States in (or around) the area which was formerly Iroquois territory. However, the available sources useful for writing this thesis provide an interesting insight into a part of the Revolutionary War often not found in conventional history books.

The role of the Iroquois in the American Revolution is an important part of Native American history as well as of American and British history. Their role has shaped the conflict to what it turned out to be, but more importantly, the conflict shaped the existence of the Iroquois. It shows that the British and Americans were actively trying to convince the Nations to fight on their side. However, this essay has shown that even though both sides made these efforts, the fact that the Iroquois eventually actively participated in the Revolutionary War was most importantly their own decision. Despite their initial wish for neutrality, the Nations did not see any other option than to eventually pick a side and take up arms against the other side. Each Nation had its own reasons for supporting the loyalists or rebels, based on their own experiences, contacts, and alliances. However, disagreement among the Six Nations about the issue eventually led to cracks in the Iroquois Confederacy and ended their peaceful existence.

Furthermore, this thesis has shown that existing literature has too often described their role in the American Revolution in terms of a tragic fate, as if they were incapable of making their own choices in the conflict. Previous literature has too often contended that the Iroquois only participated in the Revolutionary War because the British and Americans wanted them to. This is, however, unjust. The involvement of the Iroquois in the American Revolution was no unfortunate coincidence because of the location of their land, or due solely to the fact that the loyalists and rebels wanted them to participate, but it was rather a deliberate choice, in order to protect themselves and their position. Their choices were eventually based on longstanding alliances and thoughtful consideration. However, although the Iroquois participated mainly in order to enhance their own position, the Revolutionary War only caused the Nations to drift apart and set them up against each other. Had the Nations remained united, who knows what their impact could have been.

The assumption that the Iroquois only participated in the Revolutionary War because of the location of their land and the pressure from the British and Americans is often too much emphasized in existing literature. This thesis does not aim to undermine the importance of these factors, but it does recognize that agency played a bigger role for the Iroquois than often assumed in the historiography on the issue. In arguing so, this thesis also acknowledges that this agency should not be exaggerated and that pressure and previous contacts indeed played a role for the Iroquois' participation in the American Revolution as well. This acknowledgment is an important part of this thesis, because it is a problem often encountered in historiography: scholars often argue one extreme position or the other—absolute agency or the complete absence thereof. It is therefore important to give a voice to minorities such as the Iroquois and acknowledge their agency, without neglecting other, external factors that in this case influence their involvement in the war. This thesis argues that the involvement of the Iroquois in the American Revolution was no unfortunate coincidence due to the location of their land, but

rather a deliberate choice based on longstanding alliances and thoughtful considerations. By doing so, it contributes to existing literature, which often overemphasizes the location of the Iroquois' land, without acknowledging Iroquois agency.

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