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American Indians and the American Revolution, 1775–1783

On the one hand we are forgotten, abandoned; on the other hand we are solicited and at times threatened by the English; in such a situation what can we do, what ought we to do?

—Indians in the Great Lakes region
to French emissary Godfrey de Linctot, 1780¹

That event was for us the greatest blow that could have been dealt us, unless it had been our total destruction.

—Indian Leaders to Spanish Governor Cruzat, St. Louis, 1784²

Scholars of Indian history have often neglected the impact of the American Revolution on American Indians, preferring to lump the Revolution together with the other wars and calamities of the late eighteenth century and pointing out that replacing King George III with President George Washington meant little to Indian peoples whose struggle to preserve their lands and cultures continued. But the Revolution was a devastating experience for many Indian people and marked the beginning of a new era in their history.³

The outbreak of the American Revolution took many Native Americans by surprise. At first, most tried to keep out of it, regarding it as a family quarrel between the king and his children. As each side pressed them to get involved, however, Indians often found that they had to choose sides. In general, most tribes eventually supported the British: The British had more of the trade goods on which they had become dependent, they had an Indian department whose personnel were experienced and well connected among the tribes, and they had demonstrated in the past that they would try to restrain trespass onto Indian lands. The

¹Clarence W. Alvord, ed., *Kaskaskia Records, 1778–1790*, in *Collections of the Illinois State Historical Society* (1909): 5:163–65.

²Lawrence Kinnaird, ed., *Spain in the Mississippi Valley*, vol. 3, pt. 2, 117, in *Annual Report of the American Historical Association* (1945).

³Colin G. Calloway, *The American Revolution in Indian Country: Crisis and Diversity in Native American Communities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

Americans, by contrast, were frequently short of supplies and could do little to stop their backcountry settlers encroaching on Indian lands. In fact, American militia, who apparently regarded all Indians as "savages," murdered influential Indian leaders like White Eyes of the Delawares and Cornstalk of the Shawnees who had been working for peace, thereby driving their people into the arms of the British.

Not all Indians joined the British cause, however. Indians from Stockbridge, Massachusetts, enlisted as minutemen in the American army; the Oneidas of New York fought for the Americans even though that entailed fighting against relatives in other Iroquois tribes; the Mi'kmaq, Passamaquoddies, and Penobscots of Maine and Nova Scotia supported the Americans, as did the Catawbas of South Carolina. Even in tribes that allied with the British, there were pro-American factions and plenty of people who just wanted to keep out of it. The Revolution split the ancient unity of the Iroquois Confederacy, turning Mohawks, Onondagas, Cayugas, and Senecas against Oneidas and Tuscaroras; the Cherokee Nation divided along generational lines, with older chiefs trying to preserve peace and friendship with the Americans while younger warriors joined the British in an effort to win back their lands. Just as colonial society split into Loyalist and Patriot factions, with perhaps a majority of people trying to remain neutral, so, throughout the length and breadth of Indian country, the Revolution divided tribes and communities.

Indian warriors raided the American frontier in New York, Pennsylvania, Kentucky, Georgia, and the Carolinas, sometimes in company with British troops and Loyalist Rangers. Indian raids sapped American resources and diverted American energies, and stories of Indian "massacres," such as at Cherry Valley in New York in 1778, sent terror through American settlements. But the Revolution was also fought in Indian country. The Americans responded to Cherokee attacks in 1776 by dispatching expeditions from Virginia, Georgia, and the Carolinas to carry fire and sword through Cherokee country.

In 1779, in an effort to cripple the Iroquois war effort by striking at their home base, George Washington ordered invasions of Iroquois country that destroyed forty towns, burned countless crops, and cut down orchards. Homeless and hungry Iroquois fled to the British at Fort Niagara for food and shelter and ever after remembered George Washington as "Town Destroyer." Thomas Jefferson, who was governor of Virginia during the Revolution, urged a war of extermination against the Shawnees in Ohio, and the Shawnees saw their villages burned time and again by Kentucky militia who crossed the Ohio River. Armies and war parties crossed back and forth through Indian country. Individuals

and communities were caught up in the fighting, and neutrals sometimes suffered more than others: In 1782, at Gnadenhütten in Ohio, American militia murdered ninety-six Delaware Indians who had converted to the Moravian faith and as pacifists refused to participate in the fighting.

American Indians made great sacrifices and suffered great losses as a result of the American Revolution. White Americans remember the event as securing their liberty; for Native Americans it represented another step toward the loss of their freedom. At the end of the war, the British and the Americans signed the Peace of Paris, ignoring the Indians who had been their allies and their enemies. Britain handed Indian lands to the United States and left Indian people to confront the renewed American assaults on their land and culture. The Cherokee chief Keniteta, or Rising Fawn, making his peace with the Virginians in 1783, threw a handful of ashes into the air to symbolically cast off his allegiance to the British. “They have been the ruin of my People,” he said.⁴ Indians who had supported the American cause fared little better. While Mahicans from Stockbridge were away fighting with the American army, their lands continued to slip into the hands of covetous neighbors. By the end of the Revolution, Stockbridge ceased to exist as an Indian town. The Mahicans petitioned their former allies for help, but to no avail. They migrated first to New York and then to new homes in Wisconsin.

The selections in this chapter contain many themes familiar to Indians in colonial times—protests over loss of land, distrust of allies, and anguish at their people’s plight. They also show Indian people struggling to come to terms with a new era and new challenges. Although Indian people fought for their freedom, too, in the Revolutionary War, they would enjoy few liberties in the new society born out of that conflict.

⁴*Calendar of Virginia State Papers* 3:420–21.

The Oneidas Declare Neutrality

The Declaration of Independence implies that all Indians were willing and ruthless allies of a tyrannical king. (“He [the king] . . . has endeavoured to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian Savages, whose known rule of warfare, is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes, and conditions.”) In fact, most tried to stand apart from

what they saw as a "family" quarrel. As the following speech to Governor John Trumbull of Connecticut demonstrates, the Oneidas initially hoped to remain neutral. But the Revolution was a conflict that tolerated no neutrality. Eventually, owing in large measure to the efforts of their Presbyterian missionary Samuel Kirkland, most Oneidas decided to support the Americans. Their action split the Iroquois Confederacy as Oneidas clashed in battle with warriors from other Iroquois tribes, and their allegiance to the Americans caused them tremendous suffering. British and Iroquois war parties burned their villages in retaliation, and many Oneidas sought shelter in squalid refugee camps around Schenectady, New York.

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ONEIDA INDIANS

Speech to Governor Trumbull

1775

As my younger brothers of the New England Indians, who have settled in our vicinity, are now going down to visit their friends, and to move up parts of their families that were left behind—with this belt by them, I open the road wide, clearing it of all obstacles, that they may visit their friends and return to their settlements here in peace.

We Oneidas are induced to this measure on account of the disagreeable situation of affairs that way; and we hope, by the help of God, they may return in peace. We earnestly recommend them to your charity through their long journey.

Now we more immediately address you, our brother, the Governor, and the chiefs of New England.

Brothers: We have heard of the unhappy differences and great contention between you and Old England. We wonder greatly, and are troubled in our minds.

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 in such a contest, for we bear an equal affection to both you Old and New England. Should the great king of England apply to us for aid, we shall deny him; if the Colonies apply, we shall refuse. The present situation of you two brothers is new and strange to us. We Indians cannot find, nor recollect in the traditions of our ancestors, the like case, or a similar instance.

Brothers: For these reasons possess your minds in peace, and take no umbrage that we Indians refuse joining in the contest. We are for peace.

Brothers: Was it an alien, a foreign nation, who had struck you, we should look into the matter. We hope, through the wise government and good pleasure of God, your distresses may be soon removed and the dark clouds be dispersed.

Brothers: As we have declared for peace, we desire you will not apply to our Indian brethren in New England for their assistance. Let us Indians be all of one mind, and live with one another; and you white people settle your own disputes between yourselves.

Brothers: We have now declared our minds; please to write to us, that we may know yours. We, the sachems and warriors, and female governesses of *Oneida*, send our love to you, brother governor, and all the other chiefs in New England.

Joseph Brant Addresses His Majesty's Secretary of State

Joseph Brant, or Thayendanegea (1742–1807), was a Mohawk Indian who had been educated in Eleazar Wheelock's school and was a protégé of Sir William Johnson. He was instrumental in securing Mohawk support for the British war effort in the Revolution. In 1776 Brant, together with a warrior named Oteroughyanento, Colonel Guy Johnson, and other members of the British Indian department, sailed to England. There, Brant met the king and queen, enjoyed London's night life with the prince of Wales, and had his portrait painted by the well-known artist George Romney. (See Figure 4.) However, as shown by this letter to Secretary of State Lord Germain (to whom he gave the Iroquois name Gorah), Brant was in London on business of vital importance to his people.

JOSEPH BRANT

Address to Lord Germain

1776

Brother Gorah:

We have cross'd the great Lake and come to this kingdom with our Superintendant Col. Johnson from our Confederacy the Six Nations and their Allies, that we might see our Father the Great King, and joyn in informing him, his Councillors and wise men, of the good intentions of the Indians our bretheren, and of their attachment to His Majesty and his Government.

Brother: The Disturbances in America give great trouble to all our Nations, as many strange stories have been told to us by the people in that country. The Six Nations who always loved the King, sent a number of their Chiefs and Warriors with their Superintendant to Canada last summer, where they engaged their allies to joyn with them in the defence of that country, and when it was invaded by the New England people, they alone defeated them.

Brother: In that engagement we had several of our best Warriors killed and wounded, and the Indians think it very hard they should have been so deceived by the White people in that country, the enemy returning in great numbers, and no White people supporting the Indians, they were obliged to retire to their vilages and sit still. We now Brother hope to see these bad children chastised, and that we may be enabled to tell the Indians, who have always been faithfull and ready to assist the King, what His Majesty intends.

Brother: The Mohocks our particular Nation, have on all occasions shewn their zeal and loyalty to the Great King; yet they have been very badly treated by his people in that country, the City of Albany laying an unjust claim to the lands on which our Lower Castle is built, as one Klock and others do to those of Conijoharrie our Upper Viliage.¹ We

¹The Lower Mohawk castle or village was near Fort Hunter on the Mohawk River.

E. B. O'Callaghan, ed., *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York*, 15 vols. (Albany, N.Y.: Weed, Parsons, 1853-1887), 8:670-71.



Figure 4. *Joseph Brant*

Portrait of the Mohawk painted by George Romney when Brant was in London in 1776.

Joseph Brant, Chief of the Mohawks, 1742-1807, Romney, George (1734-1802) / National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada / Bridgeman Images.

have been often assured by our late great friend Sr William Johnson who never deceived us, and we know he was told so that the King and wise men here would do us justice; but this notwithstanding all our applications has never been done, and it makes us very uneasie. We also feel for the distress in which our Bretheren on the Susquehanna are likely to be involved by a mistake made in the Boundary we settled in 1768. This

also our Superintendant has laid before the King, and we beg it may be remembered. And also concerning Religion and the want of Ministers of the Church of England, he knows the designs of those bad people and informs us he has laid the same before the King. We have only therefore to request that his Majesty will attend to this matter: it troubles our Nation & they cannot sleep easie in their beds. Indeed it is very hard when we have let the Kings subjects have so much of our lands for so little value, they should want to cheat us in this manner of the small spots we have left for our women and children to live on. We are tired out in making complaints & getting no redress. We therefore hope that the Assurances now given us by the Superintendant may take place, and that he may have it in his power to procure us justice.

Brother: We shall truly report all that we hear from you, to the Six Nations at our return. We are well informed there has been many Indians in this Country who came without any authority, from their own, and gave much trouble. We desire Brother to tell you this is not our case. We are warriors known to all the Nations, and are now here by approbation of many of them, whose sentiments we speak.

Brother: We hope these things will be considered and that the King or his great men will give us such an answer as will make our hearts light and glad before we go, and strengthen our hands, so that we may joyn our Superintendant Col. Johnson in giving satisfaction to all our Nations, when we report to them, on our return; for which purpose we hope soon to be accomodated with a passage.

Dictated by the Indians and taken down by

Jo: CHEW. Sec^y

Struggling to Be Neutral in the Ohio Valley

The Shawnee and Delaware Indians in the Ohio Valley occupied a precarious position during the Revolution, caught between the British at Detroit with their Indian allies to the north and west and the Americans at Fort Pitt to the east. For a long time, Shawnee and Delaware leaders tried to preserve their neutrality, and they cultivated good relations with George Morgan, the American Indian agent at Fort Pitt.

The Shawnee chief Cornstalk led his warriors against the Virginians in Lord Dunmore's War, but after a day-long battle at Point Pleasant in 1774 he made peace and agreed to cede Shawnee lands south of the Ohio River. When the Revolution broke out, Cornstalk and other

Shawnee chiefs tried to remain neutral and disavowed the actions of young warriors who took up their hatchets against the Americans. At the Treaty of Fort Pitt in the fall of 1776, Cornstalk asked Morgan to write down his words and send his speech to the Continental Congress in Philadelphia, telling them the cause of the Shawnees' complaints against the Americans.

The war party was gaining in strength in Shawnee villages and Cornstalk could not restrain his warriors. A year later, Cornstalk visited the American garrison at Fort Randolph on the Kanawha River. The post commander took him hostage to try to prevent the Shawnees from joining the British. When Indians killed a young man near the fort, the soldiers of the garrison murdered and mutilated Cornstalk in retaliation. Most Shawnees joined the British. The Delawares were no more successful in maintaining neutrality. White Eyes and other Delaware chiefs signed a treaty with the United States at Fort Pitt. In return for the right to cross Delaware lands, the Americans guaranteed the territorial rights of the Delawares and even suggested the possibility of an Indian state with representation in Congress. But after American militia murdered White Eyes, most Delawares, like most Shawnees, made common cause with the British.

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CORNSTALK

*Message to Congress**November 7, 1776*

The Corn Stalk desiring to speak to me I listened whilst he spoke as follows—which he desired me to commit to Writing and forward to Congress.

Brothers,

You have several times desired our Chiefs to inform you what occasion of uneasiness we and other Nations complain of against our white

"Letter Book of George Morgan 1776," Pennsylvania Historical Commission, Harrisburg; reprinted in *Early American Indian Documents: Treaties and Laws, 1607–1789*, ed. Alden T. Vaughan, 20 vols. (Bethesda, Md.: University Publications of America, 1994), 18:147.

Brethren of the United States—We always thought your Wise men could see into the causes thereof, but since they desire to know I will now tell you—When God created this World he gave this Island to the red people and placed your younger Brethren the Shawnese here in the Center—Now we and they see your people seated on our Lands which all Nations esteem as their and our heart—all our Lands are covered by the white people, and we are jealous that you still intend to make larger strides—We never sold you our Lands which you now possess on the Ohio between the Great Kenhawa and the Cherokee River, and which you are settling without ever asking our leave, or obtaining our consent—Foolish people have desired you to do so, and you have taken their advice—We live by Hunting and cannot subsist in any other way—That was our hunting Country and you have taken it from us. This is what sits heavy upon our Hearts and on the Hearts of all Nations, and it is impossible for us to think as we ought to do whilst we are thus oppressed with your . Now I stretch my Arm to you my wise Brethren of the United States met in Council at Philadelphia—I open my hand and pour into your hearts the cause of our discontent in hopes that you will take pity of us your younger Brethren, and send us a favourable Answer, that we may be convinced of the sincerity of your Professions.

Cherokees Fight for Their Survival

Indian peoples who fought on the British side in the Revolution did so for their own reasons rather than as pawns of the British. In 1776, British Indian agents tried to restrain the southern Indians until they could coordinate their attacks with British campaigns. However, when a delegation of northern Indians carrying a nine-foot war belt spoke in the council house at the "beloved town," or capital, of the Overhill Cherokees at Chota in eastern Tennessee, younger warriors seized the moment and went to war against colonists who had settled their lands illegally. The Americans responded quickly and decisively with devastating invasions of Cherokee country, burning towns and crops and forcing the Cherokees to petition for peace. A young Cherokee chief named Dragging Canoe continued the fight and accused those Cherokees who made peace of becoming "Virginians," a derogatory term in Cherokee eyes. However, at the treaty talks held at Fort Patrick Henry near Long Island on the Holston River in

1777, some of the older chiefs continued their own resistance in words. Having made peace with Virginia, the Cherokee chief Corn Tassel, or Old Tassel, turned to answer the North Carolinians' request for land, returning their wampum belt to them in symbolic rejection of their proposals. As Tassel points out, preserving Cherokee lands and hunting culture was essential to Cherokee survival and identity.

Corn Tassel suspected that North Carolina demanded so much land knowing that the Cherokees would refuse, giving the colonists an excuse to go to war against the Indians again. He asked the commissioners to send a letter to General Washington informing him what was happening, but the North Carolina delegation said it was a matter between the Cherokees and North Carolina alone. At the Treaty of Long Island of Holston in 1777, the Cherokees were forced to give up their land in western North Carolina and upper eastern Tennessee. Nevertheless, Corn Tassel continued to work for peace right up to his death: negotiating under a flag of truce, he was murdered by Tennessee militia in 1788.

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CORN TASSEL

*Speech at Treaty Talks with Virginia
and North Carolina*

1777

Now the beloved men of North Carolina shall hear my reply to what they said to me last night. The talks you gave me came from the Governor to make a path from your Country to mine and was verry good till you came to talk of the boundary line. My beloved man and the beloved man of Virginia have taken hold of each other fast high up the arm.

It may be the same by my brothers of North Carolina. But by their asking so much land it seems as if they want to see what we would say, that we might refuse something, and they might catch us in a trap for an excuse. I left people both at home and in the woods far beyond there, who are waiting and listening to hear what I do. As you are talking of

much land I dont know how they would like that part of your proposal. As I said before the beloved men are here together. My beloved Man has been to see the Great beloved man of Virginia who I suppose wrote to your Great beloved man to send you here, and talk about making Peace. I want to know whether he wrote anything to him to require so much land as you seem to do. I am talking to my Brothers so I call you all. as to land I did not expect any thing on that subject; but only concerning peace. The man above hath ordered it so that the white benches shall be set down for us, and I hope nothing will enter either of our hearts but good thoughts. I would leave it to the beloved man of Virginia to settle all things (about Lands) between us. I am talking with my elder Brothers on a subject I cannot clearly comprehend. I did not expect it would have been put to me at this time; for my elder Brothers have imposed much on me in the land way. If this and another house was packed full of goods they would not make satisfaction. But I will leave the difference between us to the great Warrior of all America. It seems misterious to me why you should ask so much land so near me. I am sensible that if we give up these lands they will bring you more a great deal than hundreds of pounds. It spoils our hunting ground; but always remains good to you to raise families and stocks on, when the goods we receive of you are rotten and gone to nothing.

Your stocks are tame and marked; but we dont know ours they are wild. Hunting is our principle way of living. I hope you will consider this and pity me. Here is my old friend the Elk (meaning Col^o. Preston)¹ and two particular from Virginia hearing the answer I make to my brothers of North Carolina. you require a thing I cannot do, for which reason I return you the string of Beads to consider upon again.

In my talks at Chote Town house there shall be nothing bad towards my elder Brothers. I will hold them fast and strong. I have been often told that my elder Brothers were naked and had nothing. I said if so I will be naked also. I looked for nothing but to raise my children in peace and safety. My former friend who is now my Brothers enemy told me if I listened to you I should wear hickory bark shirts; but that Talk I do not mind.

returned the String

¹Colonel William Preston, one of Virginia's Indian commissioners.

The Revolution through the Eyes of a Seneca Woman

The life story of Mary Jemison, the white woman who spent most of her life with the Senecas, affords a rare glimpse into the impact of the Revolution on the Indians' home front, as seen through the eyes of a wife and mother (Mary gave birth to a daughter in the first year of the war). Mary Jemison saw the Iroquois delegates return from the German Flats council in 1775 believing they were secure in their neutrality; she observed the shift toward hostilities after the Oswego council in 1777; she saw Seneca warriors return from the bloody battle at Oriskany near Fort Stanwix in 1777; and she saw General John Sullivan's army march through Iroquoia destroying towns and crops in 1779. The American Revolution, celebrated in the nation's history and mythology, meant something different for Indian women who lived and suffered through it.

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MARY JEMISON

A View of the Revolution

1775-1779

Thus, at peace amongst themselves, and with the neighboring whites, though there were none at that time very near, our Indians lived quietly and peaceably at home, till a little before the breaking out of the revolutionary war, when they were sent for, together with the Chiefs and members of the Six Nations generally, by the people of the States, to go to the German Flats, and there hold a general council, in order that the people of the states might ascertain, in good season, who they should esteem and treat as enemies, and who as friends, in the great war which was then upon the point of breaking out between them and the King of England.

James Seaver, ed., *The Narrative of the Life of Mary Jemison* (1824 and various editions).

Our Indians obeyed the call, and the council was holden, at which 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. The Indians returned to their homes well pleased that they could live on neutral ground, surrounded by the din of war, without being engaged in it.

About a year passed off, and we, as usual, were enjoying ourselves in the employments of peaceable times, when a messenger arrived from the British Commissioners, requesting all the Indians of our tribe to attend a general council which was soon to be held at Oswego. The council convened, and being opened, the British Commissioners informed the Chiefs that the object of calling a council of the Six Nations, was, to engage their assistance in subduing the rebels, the people of the states, who had risen up against the good King, their master, and were about to rob him of a great part of his possessions and wealth, and added that they would amply reward them for all their services.

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.

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 persevere 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 the service of his Majesty till they were subdued, in consideration of certain conditions which were stipulated in the treaty to be performed by the British government and its agents.

As soon as the treaty was finished, the Commissioners made a present to each Indian of a suit of clothes, a brass kettle, a gun and tomahawk, a scalping knife, a quantity of powder and lead, a piece of gold, and promised a bounty on every scalp that should be brought in. Thus

richly clad and equipped, they returned home, after an absence of about two weeks, full of the fire of war, and anxious to encounter their enemies. Many of the kettles which the Indians received at that time are now in use on the Genesee Flats. . . .

Previous to the battle at Fort Stanwix, the British sent for the Indians to come and see them whip the rebels; and, at the same time stated that they did not wish to have them fight, but wanted to have them just sit down, smoke their pipes, and look on. Our Indians went, to a man; but contrary to their expectation, 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.

During the revolution, my house was the home of Col's Butler¹ and Brandt, whenever they chanced to come into our neighborhood as they passed to and from Fort Niagara, which was the seat of their military operations. Many and many a night I have pounded samp for them from sun-set till sun-rise, and furnished them with necessary provision and clean clothing for their journey. . . .

At that time I had three children who went with me on foot, one who rode on horse back, and one whom I carried on my back.

Our corn was good that year; a part of which we had gathered and secured for winter.

In one or two days after the skirmish at Connessius lake, Sullivan and his army arrived at Genesee river, where they destroyed every article of the food kind that they could lay their hands on. A part of our corn they burnt, and threw the remainder into the river. They burnt our houses, killed what few cattle and horses they could find, destroyed our fruit trees, and left nothing but the bare soil and timber. But the Indians had eloped and were not to be found.

Having crossed and recrossed the river, and finished the work of destruction, the army marched off to the east. Our Indians saw them move off, but suspecting that it was Sullivan's intention to watch our

¹Colonel John Butler of the British Indian Department. Based at Fort Niagara, Butler and Joseph Brant made frequent forays against the American frontier.

return, and then to take us by surprize, resolved that the main body of our tribe should hunt where we then were, till Sullivan had gone so far that there would be no danger of his returning to molest us.

This being agreed to, we hunted continually till the Indians concluded that there could be no risk in our once more taking possession of our lands. Accordingly we all returned; but what were our feelings when we found that there was not a mouthful of any kind of sustenance left, not even enough to keep a child one day from perishing with hunger.

The weather by this time had become cold and stormy; and as we were destitute of houses and food too, I immediately resolved to take my children and look out for myself, without delay. With this intention I took two of my little ones on my back, bade the other three follow, and the same night arrived on the Gardow flats, where I have ever since resided. . . .

. . . The snow fell about five feet deep, and remained so for a long time, and the weather was extremely cold; so much so indeed, that almost all the game upon which the Indians depended for subsistence, perished, and reduced them almost to a state of starvation through that and three or four succeeding years. When the snow melted in the spring, deer were found dead upon the ground in vast numbers; and other animals, of every description, perished from the cold also, and were found dead, in multitudes. Many of our people barely escaped with their lives, and some actually died of hunger and freezing.

The Revolution through Captain Pipe's Eyes

Although he attended the Treaty of Fort Pitt in 1778, Captain Pipe, or Hopocan, became one of the principal Delaware advocates of siding with the British. He was not, however, a pliant tool of King George, as he demonstrated in this speech to Colonel Arent Schuyler DePeyster, the British commander at Detroit, in November 1781. In fact, Pipe made it clear that he regarded the British as usurpers to the title of "Father," which rightly belonged to the French, and that only economic necessity drove the Delawares to take up arms in a "white man's" war.

The Revolution was a disaster for the Delawares. Those who had converted to the Moravian faith tried to sit out the war at their village of Gnadenhütten, only to be murdered in cold blood by American militia who suspected them of carrying out raids. At the same time, Indians who supported the Crown were regarded as expendable by their British allies. As Pipe realized, the Indians had much to lose and little to gain by getting involved in this war.

The Moravian missionary John Heckewelder, who recorded this speech, was extremely impressed with Pipe's oratorical power. Given his own pro-American sympathies, however, it is likely that Heckewelder was most impressed by the anti-British sentiments expressed by one of Britain's Indian allies, and he may have embellished the anti-British tenor of the speech.

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CAPTAIN PIPE

*Speech to British Colonel DePeyster**November 1781*

Father! I have said *Father*, tho indeed I am ignorant of the cause for so calling him having never known of any other Father than the French, and considering the English as Brothers. But as *this* Name is now also imposed upon us, I therefore make use of it and say:

Father! Some time ago You put a War hatchet into my hands, saying: take this Weapon, and try it on the heads of my Enemies, the Long Knives (the American People) and let me afterwards know if it was sharp and good.

Father! Altho at the time You gave me this Weapon, I had neither cause nor inclination to go to War against a People who had done me no injury: yet out of obedience to You, who say You are my Father, and call me your child, I received the Hatchet, well knowing, that if I did *not* obey, he would withhold from the necessaries of life, without which I could not subsist, and which were not elsewhere to be procured and had, but at the House of my Fathers!

Father! Withal You may perhaps think me a fool, in risking my life at your call! and in a cause too, by which I have no prospect of gaining any thing; for it is *your* cause, and *not* mine to fight the Long Knives

(the Virginians or American People). You both have raised the quarrel within yourselves; and by right, you ought to fight it out *Yourselves* and *not* compel Your Children, the Indians, to expose themselves to Danger for *Your* sake!

Father! Many lives have already been lost on *your* account! Nations have suffered and been weakened! Children have lost Parents, brothers, and relatives! Wives have lost Husbands! It is not known how many more *may* perish before *Your* war will be at end!

Father! I have said: that You may perhaps think me a fool, rushing thoughtless on Your Enemy! Do *not* believe this *Father!* Think not that I lack sense *sufficient to convince me*, that altho You *now* pretend to keep up a perpetual enmity to the Long Knives (American People); you may, e'er long, conclude a Peace with them!

Father! You say you love your children the Indians! This You have often told them; and indeed it is your interest to say so to them, in order to have them at your service!

But Father! who of us can believe, that you could love a People differing in Colour to that of Yours, more than those (of such) who have a *white* Skin like unto that of Yours!

Father! Pay attention to what I now shall say! While *You!* *Father!* are setting me on Your Enemy, much in the same manner as a hunter sets on his Dogs at the game — while *I* be in the act of rushing *on* this Enemy of Yours, with the bloody destructive Weapon You gave me: I *May perchance* happen to look back, from whence you started me: and *what may I see?* I shall probably see my *Father* shaking hands with the Long Knives. *Yes!* with *those very People* he now calls his *Enemys!* *and* while doing this: he may be laughing at *my* folly, and having *obeyed* him and am *now* risking *my* life at his command. *Father!* keep what I have said in remembrance!

Now *Father!* *here* is what hath been done with the Hatchet you gave me! (The Pipe hands DePeyster the stick with the one scalp attached) I have done what you bid me to do with the Hatchet, and found it sharp. Nevertheless I did *not* do all what I *might* have done! *No!* I did *not!* my *heart* failed me! I felt compassion for *Your* Enemy! Innocence has *no* share in *Your* quarrels; therefore I distinguished! I *spared!* I took some live flesh (prisoners) which, while bringing on to You, I espied one of Your large Canoes on which I put the same for You! In a few days You will receive this flesh, and find, that the Skin is of the same colour as Yours!

Father! I hope you will not destroy what I have saved! You! *Father!* have the means of keeping *alive* what with me would have to *starve for want!* The Warriors Cabin is generally empty! *Your House is always full.*

Adjusting to New Realities: The Chickasaws' Revolution

The Chickasaw Indians controlled an important strategic location on the banks of the Mississippi River in northern Mississippi. Throughout the eighteenth century they had been firm allies of the British, who had armed and supported them against the French and their Choctaw allies. During the Revolution, the Chickasaws conducted small-scale operations, mainly patrolling the banks of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers. When the Americans sent them a message in the spring of 1779 threatening destruction if they did not make peace, the Chickasaw chiefs Mingo Houma, Payamataha, and Tuskau Pautapau sent a defiant reply:

We desire no other friendship of you but only desire you will inform us when you are Coming and we will meet you half Way, for we have heard so much of it that it makes our heads Ach[e]. Take care that we dont serve you as we have served the French before with all their Indians, send you back without your heads. We are a Nation that fears or Values no Nation as long as our Great Father King George stands by us for you may depend as long as life lasts with us we will hold him fast by the hand. . . . This is our Talk to you and we desire that you may not keep it hid but have it printed in your News Papers that all your people may see it and know who it was from; We are men & Warriors and dont want our Talks hidden.¹

During the Revolution, Spain won West Florida from the British, and the geopolitical landscape of the Mississippi Valley took on a very different appearance. Instead of unquestioned support from the British, the Chickasaws now found themselves without allies in the midst of competition among Spain, the new United States government, and several states. Different factions within the Chickasaw Nation cultivated relations with Spaniards and Americans in an attempt to secure the trade Britain previously had supplied. Realizing that the end of the Revolution meant the beginning of a new era, the formerly defiant and independent Chickasaw chiefs attempted to mend diplomatic fences by sending the following message to Congress.

¹Papers of the Continental Congress, National Archives, item 51, vol. 2, 41-42.

CHICKASAW CHIEFS

*Message to Congress**July 1783*

**To His Excellency the President of the Honorable Congress of
the United American States**

Friend & Brother,

This is the first talk we ever sent you—we hope it will not be the last. We desire you to open your Ears to hear, and your heart to understand us, as we shall always be ready to do to your talks, which we expect will be good, as you are a great and wise man.

Brother,

When our great father the King of England called away his warriors, he told us to take your People by the hand as friends and brothers. Our hearts were always inclined to do so & as far as our circumstances permitted us, we evinced our good intentions as Brothers the Virginians can testify—It makes our hearts rejoice to find that our great father, and his children the Americans have at length made peace, which we wish may continue as long as the Sun and Moon, And to find that our Brothers the Americans are inclined to take us by the hand, and Smoke with us at the great Fire, which we hope will never be extinguished.

Brother,

Notwithstanding the Satisfaction all these things give us we are yet in confusion & uncertainty. The Spaniards are sending talks amongst us, and inviting our young Men to trade with them. We also receive talks from the Governor of Georgia to the same effect—We have had Speeches from the Illinois inviting us to a Trade and Intercourse with them—Our Brothers, the Virginians Call upon us to a Treaty, and want part of our land, and we expect our Neighbors who live on Cumberland River, will in a Little time Demand, if not forcibly take part of it from us, also as we are informed they have been marking Lines through our

hunting grounds: we are daily receiving Talks from one Place or other, and from People we Know nothing about. We Know not who to mind or who to neglect. We are told that the Americans have 13 Councils Compos'd of Chiefs and Warriors. We Know not which of them we are to Listen to, or if we are to hear some, and Reject others, we are at a loss to Distinguish those we are to hear. We are told that you are the head Chief of the Grand Council, which is above these 13 Councils: if so why have we not had Talks from you, — We are head men and Chiefs and Warriors also: and have always been accustomed to speak with great Chiefs & warriors — We are Likewise told that you and the Great men of your Council are Very Wise — we are glad to hear it, being assured that you will not do us any Wrong, and therefore we wish to Speak with you and your Council, or if you Do not approve of our so Doing, as you are wise, you will tell us who shall speak with us, in behalf of all our Brothers the Americans, and from whare and whome we are to be supplied with necessaries in the manner our great father supplied us — we hope you will also put a stop to any encroachments on our lands, without our consent, and silence all those People who sends us Such Talks as inflame & exasperate our Young Men, as it is our earnest desire to remain in peace and friendship with our Br: the Americans for ever.

Brother,

The King our Common father always left one of his beloved Men among us, to whom we told anything we had to say, and he soon obtained an answer — and by him our great Father, his Chiefs & headmen spoke to us.

Our great father always gave him goods to cover the nakedness of our old men who could not hunt, our women and our children, and he was as one mouth, and one tongue between us, and was beloved of us all. Such a man living among us particularly at this time, would rescue us from the darkness and confusion we are in. By directing us to whom we should speak, and putting us in the right Path that we should not go wrong.

We have desired our Br. Mr. Donne, who brought talks from General Clark,² and has been some time among us, to deliver this talk to you, and speak it in our behalf to your Grand Council, that you may know our want, and as you are wise, that you may direct us what to do for the best. He has Promised, at our desire to take it to your great council fire &

²George Rogers Clark had sent John Donne as an emissary to the Chickasaws to arrange peace between them and Virginia.

to bring as your answer, that you may be no more in the dark—believe what he tells you from us; we have told him all that is in our hearts.

Brothers, we are very poor for necessities, for Amunition particularly. We can supply ourselves from the Spaniards but we are averse to hold any intercourse with them, as our hearts are always with our Brothers the Americans. We have advised our young men to wait with patience for the answer to this talk, when we rest assured of having supplies, and every thing so regulated that no further confusion may ensue. We wish that this land may never again be stained with the blood of either white or Red men, that piece may last forever and that both our women and children may sit down in safety under their own shade to enjoy without fear or apprehension the Blessing which the good Spirit enriches them with. Brother, we again desire you and your chiefs to Listen to what we say that we shall not have to Repeat it again, and as you are all Wise, you will know what to do.

Done at Chuck-ul-issah our Great Town the 28th Day of July, 1783.

Minghoma,
Pyamathahaw,
Kushthaputhasa,
Pyamingoe of Christhauthra,
Pyamingo of Chuckaferah.³

³Kushthaputhasa is probably a garbled spelling of Tuskau Pautaupe, Payamataha's brother. Piomingo of the town of Tchoukfala emerged as the leader of the pro-American party in the Chickasaw Nation after the Revolution.

Brant Demands the Truth

At the Peace of Paris in 1783, British diplomats recognized the independence of their thirteen former colonies and ceded to the new United States all territory between the Atlantic Ocean and the Mississippi River, from north of Florida to the Great Lakes. Florida, which had remained loyal to Britain, was transferred to Spain. Despite the fact that most of this territory was still Indian country, Britain made these concessions without any reference to or discussion with her Indian allies, who would be devastated by the changes in sovereignty. As rumors of the peace terms filtered into Indian country, Native Americans reacted in anger, bewilderment, and disbelief. Joseph Brant sent a long message to Governor Frederick Haldimand of Quebec, reminding him of the Mohawks' longstanding loyalty