

A LONGHOUSE DIVIDED: ONEIDA AGENCY, IROQUOIS DISUNITY, AND THE
ONEIDA-AMERICAN ALLIANCE

by

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I. INTRODUCTION

The ‘People of the Standing Stone’ (*Onyota’a:ka*) or Oneidas are one of the five original nations or tribes of the Iroquois Confederacy (hereafter just “Confederacy”), the other four being the Mohawks, Onondagas, Senecas, and Cayugas. The Oneidas allied themselves with the Patriots during the American Revolution.¹ They participated in various functions throughout the war, most often as spies, interpreters, and guides for American troops. Oneida warriors partook in two major pitched battles, at Oriskany (August 6, 1777) and Saratoga (September 19, 1777). In the last thirty years, several works have emphasized (perhaps overemphasized) the Oneidas’ role as America’s first allies in the Patriots’ victory. These works have all focused exclusively on the larger military narrative or the individual accomplishments of the Oneidas.² However, an important question remains unanswered: why did the Oneidas forego their relations with their confederate brethren in favor of an alliance with the Americans? This thesis is an attempt to answer that question.

Since the Confederacy’s inception in the sixteenth century, the individual nations of the Iroquois had enjoyed periods of dominance within modern New York State. An interest in European manufactures and wars between France and England fought in North

¹ The Iroquois admitted the refugee members of the Tuscarora tribe into the confederacy in 1713 following the conclusion of the Tuscarora War. This move was sponsored by the Oneidas. The Oneidas agreed to provide the Tuscaroras with a plot of land at the southern edge of Oneida territory. Consequently, the Tuscaroras, as the unofficial wards of the Oneidas, followed the Oneidas lead on nearly all political decisions. For this reason, many historians have chosen to focus exclusively on the actions of the Oneidas during this period.

² Joseph Glatthaar and James Kirby Martin, *Forgotten Allies: The Oneida Indians and the American Revolution* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2006); Karim Tiro, *The People of the Standing Stone: The Oneida Nation from the Revolution through the Era of Removal* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2011); David J. Norton, *Rebellious Younger Brother: Oneida Leadership and Diplomacy, 1750-1800* (Northern Illinois University Press, 2009).

America gradually drew the Iroquois into a European orbit. The Six Nations of the Iroquois managed to maintain unity throughout each continental war prior to the American Revolution. The Oneidas' alliance with the Americans in 1777, however, proved disastrously divisive for the Iroquois, effectively ending the Confederacy's viability in the Mohawk Valley.

Following their political union in the sixteenth century, the five tribes of the Iroquois adopted the name Haudenosaunee, or "People of the Longhouse." This name referenced a metaphorical longhouse that sheltered and protected its constituent members.³ During the seventeenth century, the French named them "Iroquois." The Haudenosaunee occupied territory in modern-day New York State extending south from Lake Ontario. The Hudson River marked the eastern Iroquoian boundary and Lake Erie the western one. The Iroquois divided tasks by gender: men hunted, fished, and waged war, whereas women cultivated crops, foraged, and reared children. Organized into matrilineal clans, clan matrons dictated many facets of Iroquoian life. Most notably, matrons elected accomplished men to represent their clans as civil chiefs (often referred to by the Algonkian term "sachem" in European sources) at the village and confederate levels. In total, fifty sachems were elected to represent the five nations of the Haudenosaunee. During the fall of every year, the sachems gathered at the Grand Council at Onondaga village to deliberate foreign policy and mediate inter-tribal disputes. Grand Councils were structured around the moieties.⁴ Moieties divided the nations into elder

³ The longhouse was the most conspicuous feature of Iroquois villages. Often two hundred feet in length, longhouses housed six to ten Iroquois families; William N. Fenton, *The Great Law and the Longhouse: A Political History of the Iroquois Confederacy* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), 23.

⁴ Although the term moiety has been used to reference clan kinship at the local and confederate levels, here the term will denote political differences between the individual nations of the Iroquois as implemented at meetings of the Grand Council.

and younger groupings. The Mohawks, Onondagas, and Senecas occupied the elder distinction; the Oneidas, Cayugas, and (later) Tuscaroras, the younger. Each moiety performed a specific role in the mediation and implementation of confederate issues. Typically, the elder moiety presented issues for mediation while the younger offered resolutions.⁵

Competing with the desire to maintain unity, factionalism was ubiquitous among the Haudenosaunee, especially among those residing near European settlements. Divisions at the tribal and village levels remained a constant for the Iroquois. During the turn of the eighteenth-century, the Iroquois attempted to remove themselves from European conflicts in order to maintain their sovereignty and autonomy by playing the Europeans against one another. Consequently, they promoted pro-British and pro-French factions.

The Iroquois attempted to reconstitute their Confederacy after the American Revolutionary War. At odds with their confederate brethren, the Oneidas made strides towards repairing relations. However, given the inability of the pro-British Iroquoian nations to mediate favorable terms with the Americans, efforts at reconstitution were short-lived. As the American Revolution drew to a close in 1783, the Oneidas hoped that their attachment to the Americans would prove fruitful and limit land encroachment by colonial settlers. By 1790, however, many Iroquois had been forced out of their traditional homeland in New York. Some Oneidas resided on a small parcel of land within their traditional homeland, but totally surrounded by American settlements. Most

⁵ For a more detailed accounts of the Haudenosaunee consult: Glatthaar and Martin, *Forgotten Allies*; 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, 1992); Dean R. Snow, *The Iroquois* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1994).

Iroquois, Oneidas included, ended up moving to new settlements west of the Mississippi River or to the newly-kindled council fire at Grand River in Canada.

Scholars have often circumscribed the genesis of the Oneida-American alliance to the aftermath of the Seven Years' War. Partly a result of the relative scarcity of earlier sources, historians who have studied the alliance tend to rely on documents produced by Anglo officials who resided among the Iroquois after 1763.⁶ Consequently, interpretations of the origins of the alliance have centered on the influence of figures such as Sir William Johnson, Britain's first Superintendent of Indian Affairs, and Samuel Kirkland, Presbyterian missionary to the Oneidas and Indian advisor to the Continental Congress. This limited view of the birth of the Oneida-American alliance ignores a larger narrative that begins with the formation of the Confederacy in the sixteenth century.

The specific motivations that led to the Oneida-American alliance can be grouped into several larger developments. First, dating back to the sixteenth century and the founding of the Confederacy, the Oneidas (and their Iroquois brethren) embraced factionalism as a means of balancing the interests of their warrior and civil chiefs. Dissensions divided Iroquoian society into multiple factions: pro-British and pro-French, acculturated and traditionalist, etc. However, the most common confrontations occurred between warriors and civil chiefs, who frequently vied for influence and authority. As Europeans entered the fold, internal rivalries, especially between warriors and civil chiefs, became exacerbated. At the same time, with the introduction of European technologies and the influx of Christian missionaries, traditionalist and Europeanized factions emerged throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. These avenues for

⁶ Barbara Graymont, *The Iroquois in the American Revolution* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1975); Norton, *Rebellious Younger Brother*, 132.

strife among the Iroquois effectively prepared the Oneidas for divisions within their ranks during the American Revolution. . A small band of Oneidas inclined to embrace European technologies and Protestantism had formed a separate community: Kanonwalohale. By 1775, Kanonwalohale representatives spoke for the majority of the Oneidas and played a critical role in structuring the Oneida nation's relationship with the Americans.

While factionalism was a pervasive Iroquoian problem, the Oneidas' low status within the Confederacy hindered them politically. One of the principal sources of such inequality was the structure of the Confederacy, which was divided into two moieties, grouping the elder and younger member nations of the confederacy. Despite being one of the first nations to join the confederacy, the Oneidas were relegated to a relatively minor role in Iroquois politics. As a member of the junior moiety (in addition to the Cayugas) they were only able to offer on guidance specific issues.

The Iroquois' League Legend, however, offered eighteenth-century Oneidas a source of pride and strength –much as the views of the Founding Fathers have informed twenty-first century Americans. The League Legend explains the founding of the Confederacy by the prophet Deganawi:dah. Faced with the prophet's indifference towards the Oneidas, their chief Odatshedeh impeded his journey, metaphorically laying a log across the path, and demanded inclusion in the newly-founded confederacy. This narrative informed the goals of the eighteenth-century Oneidas, who hoped to draw attention to themselves as a nation of consequence.

Oneida attempts at self-empowerment, however, did not occur until the conclusion of the Seven Years' War. During this post-war period, new opportunities for

economic gain presented themselves to the Oneidas. Historians have focused on Anglo officials residing among the Iroquois as the key actors that ultimately dictated the formation of pro-Patriot and pro-British factions during the American Revolution. This preference, however, is overly simplistic and ignores Oneida agency. Where some historians have viewed Kirkland and Johnson as dictating the nature of Oneida policy, it is more likely that the Oneidas utilized Kirkland and, at times, Johnson as patrons to improve their standard of living as well as their status within the Confederacy.

Open conflict between Britain and her American colonies in 1775 did not immediately compel the Oneidas to side with the Patriots. In fact, the Oneidas actively sought Iroquoian neutrality when the war broke out. Given the Iroquois' colonial and British ties, neutrality offered more lucrative prospects than military participation. British officials residing in the Mohawk Valley, however, refused to allow the Iroquois to maintain their neutralist stance. Throughout 1775 and 1776, agents associated with the British office of Indian Affairs preyed on Iroquois fears of colonial encroachment and offered promises of riches in the hope of persuading them to join the British in the war. Slowly, these attempts proved productive for the British. Eager warriors abandoned neutrality and began aiding the British in battle. In 1777, the confederacy's unity dissolved when the Senecas and Mohawks openly renounced their neutralist policy and allied themselves with the British.

Even at this juncture, the Oneidas hoped to preserve neutrality. The Oneidas were unwilling to wage war against their American neighbors. As a result, the British and pro-British members of the Iroquois viewed the Oneidas as their enemies. Violent retaliations by their brethren forced the Oneidas to form defensive alliances with the Tuscaroras and

the Kahnawakes, native neighbors in today's Canada. By 1777, the only feasible option for the Oneidas to maintain a semblance of autonomy and preserve their relations with the colonists was an alliance with the Patriots. Two centuries of inequalities and factionalism within the Iroquois Confederacy predisposed the Oneidas to recognize the political and economic opportunities that such an alliance with the American patriots offered, enticing them ultimately to forego their ties to other Iroquois and to Great Britain in favor of the fledgling American nation.

The following work is an attempt to offer a comprehensive explanation for the origins of the Oneida-American alliance. Chapter 1 explores the roots of Iroquois factionalism, and the divisive nature of inter-tribal relations during the American Revolution. Factionalism was not exclusive to the Oneidas. It is crucial to understand that it helped balance Iroquois politics from the Confederacy's inception in the sixteenth century through the eighteenth century. As the Haudenosaunee found themselves between French and English forces during the eighteenth century, factionalism, as a strategy for balancing European interests, preserved the Confederacy's viability and simultaneously assured its future dissolution.

Chapter 2 examines the Oneidas' attempts to utilize Anglo officials to for their own benefit from 1763 to 1774, an issue that has received the attention of several scholars. Whereas other historians have focused on the influence of Kirkland and Johnson on the Oneidas, I argue that the Oneidas actually used them to improve their standing in relation to their confederate brethren as well as among their colonial neighbors. This chapter also traces the origins of the Mohawk-Oneida rivalry. The Mohawks strengthened their preeminent position within the confederacy through their

ties to Johnson, the British Superintendent of Indian Affairs, setting an example for the Oneidas' relationship with Kirkland.

Chapter 3 focuses on the inability of the Oneidas to maintain a unified policy of neutrality during the American Revolution, and the violent dissolution of the Confederacy, highlighting the factors that compelled the Oneidas to forego confederate unity in favor of an alliance with the Americans.

II. CULTURAL ROOTS OF THE ONEIDA-AMERICAN ALLIANCE

Significant throughout the Confederacy's history, the narrative of Iroquoian factionalism began with the League Legend. This legend was a pivot of Iroquoian culture. Set during the sixteenth century, the legend follows the prophet Deganawi:dah as he unites the warring Iroquoian tribes. In this narrative, the autonomous Oneidas exert their authority despite being ignored by Deganawi:dah. The legend offered a reminder of Oneida authority and autonomy. Thus, as the eighteenth-century Oneidas watched their confederate brethren pursue a course that did not suit their interests, one source they turned to as a point of strength was the League Legend.

Contact with Europeans activated dormant conflicts among the nations of the Haudenosaunee. As European colonists encountered the Iroquois during the seventeenth century, the Iroquois responded by rejecting European traders and Christian missionaries. Opposition eventually yielded to the lucrative possibilities of European trade. As they became reliant on European goods, the Iroquois allowed traders and missionaries to reside at nearby settlements. Participation in the European commercial marketplace led to Iroquoian military involvement in a long string of conflicts between the French and the British. Initially, Iroquois warriors and civil chiefs functioned harmoniously. European rivalries offered opportunities for wealth and glory. The acquisition of manufactures during these conflicts strengthened the influence of the warriors. A similar phenomenon occurred as Christian missionaries flooded the Mohawk Valley and, over time, divided Iroquoian communities into traditionalist and Christian communities.⁷

⁷ Christopher Vecsey, "The Story and Structure of the Iroquois Confederacy" *Journal of American Academy of Religion* 54, no. 1 (Spring, 1986), 92.

Iroquoian traditions suggest, however, that political tensions among the Haudenosaunee date from much earlier than the seventeenth century. Blurring the lines between history and myth, the founding narrative of the Iroquois Confederacy shaped Iroquoian cultural identity. The League Legend offered (and in many ways still offers) a means of perpetuating the political and social tenets of the Great Law, the Iroquois “constitution” established by the prophet Deganawi:dah (“The Great Peacemaker”). Fundamentally, it also explains the story of the spiritual and physical intervention of Deganawi:dah to pacify and unite the warring Iroquois tribes.⁸

Within the larger context of the Oneida-American alliance, the intricacies of the League Legend may seem altogether insignificant. On the surface, the legend explains the historical roots of Iroquoian political unity. A closer analysis reveals that factionalism was an integral element of the Confederacy since its sixteenth-century foundation. Moreover, factionalism prevailed until the eighteenth century and contributed to the strife between the Oneidas and their confederate brethren. The League Legend influenced the actions of eighteenth-century Oneidas who, recognizing the inequalities within their political system, charted the course of action that they deemed most favorable for themselves.⁹

⁸ Despite some versions of the League Legend which emphasize Deganawi:dah’s role in the founding of the Iroquois Confederacy, it has become common for scholars to credit it to Hiawatha. However, both figures may have been more fictional than historical. Vergil’s *Aeneid* draws similar comparisons. Considering the period in which most narratives were taken from Indian sources (late-nineteenth century), it is highly likely that such classical analogues remained in the forefront of the transcribers’ minds.

⁹ The literature covering the Iroquois League Legend is extensive. The following are the works most concerned with discerning fact from fiction: Fenton, *The Great Law and the Longhouse*; Richter, *The Ordeal of the Longhouse*; Snow, *The Iroquois*; Anthony Wonderley, *Oneida Iroquois Folklore, Myth, and History: New York Oral Narrative from the Notes of H.E. Allen and Others* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2004); Nancy Bonvillain, ed., *Studies on Iroquois Culture* (Occasional Publications in Northeastern Anthropology No. 6, 1980).

The League Legend is set during the sixteenth century. At the time, the indigenous population of what would become the colony of New York, endured a period of rampant murder, cannibalism, and tribal warfare. Amidst this fierce backdrop, the prophet Deganwi:dah was immaculately conceived and born to a young Huron woman who resided north of Lake Ontario.¹⁰ Upon reaching manhood, Deganawi:dah left his family to spread a message of peace and power. This message formed the basis of the Iroquoian constitution known as the Great Law. The prophet's code rested on three key concepts – righteousness, civil authority, and peace. Accepting Deganawi:dah's peace entailed a cessation of hostilities and extending kinship ties to "all men of all nations on earth."¹¹

Eventually Deganawi:dah's travels brought him to the land of the Onondagas. While there, the prophet encountered an Onondaga headman grieving over the deaths of his three daughters. Resolved to ease the aggrieved father's mind, Deganawi:dah conveyed his message of peace to him. The Onondaga chief accepted the message and was given the name Hiawatha. Indebted to Deganawi:dah, Hiawatha bound himself to the prophet and promised to follow him on his mission.¹²

Settled at the eastern edge of what would become Iroquois territory, the Mohawks were the first nation to receive Hiawatha and Deganawi:dah. Once the proselytizing pair was formally welcomed among the Mohawks, Deganawi:dah recounted the miraculous

¹⁰ Deganawi:dah's role is often combined with that of Hiawatha and, in some narratives, removed from the narrative altogether. In the Cornplanter narrative, Hiawatha initially appears as "Tarenyawagon," an immortal who only after fulfilling his role as prophet becomes Hiawatha, a mortal, and resides among the Iroquois. William Canfield, *The Legends of the Iroquois told by "The Cornplanter"* (Port Washington: Ira J. Friedman, Inc., 1902).

¹¹ Fenton, *The Great Law and the Longhouse*, 95.

¹² Ibid; J.N.B. Hewitt, "Legend of the Founding of the Iroquois League," *American Anthropologist* 5, no.2 (1892), 133.

influence of the message of peace and power on Hiawatha. As one of the principal tribes of the region, the Mohawks had experienced firsthand the effects of tribal warfare. Hence, they accepted the prophet's code, agreeing to cease all hostilities against those who likewise accepted the Great Law.

Hiawatha and Deganawi:dah traveled to each of the five Iroquoian nations, conveying the same message. One by one, each nation complied until only the Onondagas remained opposed. As Deganawi:dah and Hiawatha recognized, the sorcerer Tadodaho was to blame. Hiawatha and Deganawi:dah returned to the Onondagas together to confront the sorcerer Tadodaho, and pacified him through the same ritual of condolence performed on Hiawatha. Once Tadodaho's machinations were at an end, the Onondagas finally accepted the Great Law and joined the Confederacy.¹³

Additionally, the League Legend reveals the earliest contention between the Oneidas and their Iroquoian brethren. Although a seemingly minor moment in the larger narrative of Deganawi:dah's journey, the brief episode helps to explain the mentality of the Oneidas. After settling the Mohawks and convincing them to accept Deganawi:dah's code, Hiawatha and Deganawi:dah continued on their journey westward, intent on confronting Tadodaho. Before they could do so, they encountered the Oneida headman Odatshedeh. Fully aware of the significance of their journey, Odatshedeh stopped them and said, "I place myself like a great tree trunk in the path of Deganawi:dah, so that whatever he may intend to do he will find me in his path, lying there, so that he must take me with him in his enterprise."¹⁴ The metaphorical log across the path hindered Hiawatha

¹³ Fenton, "The Lore of the Longhouse: Myth, Ritual, and Red-Power," *Anthropological Quarterly* 48, no. 3 (1975), 140; Richter, *The Ordeal of the Longhouse*, 39.

¹⁴ Hewitt, "Legend of the Founding of the Iroquois League," 136; Graymont, *The Iroquois*, 28-29.

and Deganawi:dah, forcing the inclusion of the Oneidas in the Confederacy. In practical terms, the Oneidas' inclusion guaranteed the Iroquois security from further attack, as well as the protection of a unified defensive front against any enemies. Symbolically, considering the conditions under which they joined the Confederacy, this episode demonstrates the Oneidas' sense of self-pride.

Although many elements of the narrative have likely been fabricated or exaggerated, this brief moment served as an historical landmark for subsequent generations of Oneidas, especially when confronted with inequality and injustice within the Confederacy. The Oneidas' demand for inclusion served as guidance as eighteenth-century Oneidas demanded respect, inclusion, and recognition from the other nations of the Iroquois.¹⁵

Marginally mythical in nature, however, the League Legend does little to explain the tangible, real-world political organization formed between the five nations of the Iroquois. The political structure created following the Confederacy's inception left the Oneidas at the bottom rung of the confederate hierarchy. Symbolically, Deganawi:dah's message of peace remained at the forefront of political practices. Composed of culturally similar yet not identical peoples, unity at the national (and village) level was more often an ideal than a reality. As anthropologist William Fenton has suggested, "the basis of the League was more a mutual nonaggression pact than a political union." The key force opposing Iroquois unity was the pervasive problem of factionalism. As representatives at the national and village levels, the sachems, most often, dictated confederate policy.

¹⁵ Hewitt, "The Legend of the Founding of the Iroquois League," 136; Fenton, "The Lore of the Longhouse: Myth, Ritual and Red Power," 131-32; Vecsey, "The Story and Structure of the Iroquois Confederacy," 81.

Unified policies, however, were often difficult to enforce. Many local leaders, confronted with the prospect of profitable European connections, often ignored confederate designs in favor of a more lucrative path. Consequently, divisions between the more traditionalist sachems and some of their acculturated brethren complicated politics to the detriment of the Confederacy.¹⁶

Pride in their political system afforded the Haudenosaunee a cultural mooring that went beyond the obvious benefits of political unity. Coming out of the sixteenth century, the nations of the Iroquois had been divided and hampered by widespread acts of inter-tribal violence. Political and military unity provided a solution that benefited and protected those dwelling underneath the metaphorically extended longhouse.¹⁷ Furthermore, the cultural tenets established in the League Legend fostered a sense of cultural unity. Addressing the English colonial governor of New York during the early-eighteenth century, the Onondaga headman Canasatego noted that the Five Nations were a “powerful confederacy” and that “we heartily recommend union and good Agreement between you our Brethren...Our wise Forefathers established Union and Amity between the *Five Nations*; this has made us formidable; this has given us great Weight and Authority with our neighboring nations.”¹⁸

At the confederate level, Iroquois politics was the sphere of civil chiefs, often referred to as sachems. Clan matrons chose sachems to represent their clan, village, and nation in the Grand Council. Locally, the appointed sachems were responsible for

¹⁶ Fenton, *The Great Law and the Longhouse*, 61-62.

¹⁷ Designed to emulate local kinship relations, the extended longhouse of the Iroquois was supported by sachems from each nation and sheltered its inhabitants from all external threats.

¹⁸ Julian P. Boyd, ed., *Indian Treaties Printed by Benjamin Franklin, 1736-1762*, Philadelphia: Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 1938, 78.

maintaining order and meeting the needs of their constituents. At the confederate level, these same men acted as representatives of their village.¹⁹ The Grand Council required unanimity in all decisions. This, however, necessitated cooperation and compromise—two features often absent from Iroquois politics. As a result, complete unanimity was often unattainable. Accordingly, the five nations were free to act independently provided that their actions did not bring any harm to their confederate brethren. This flexibility allowed for the continued viability of the Confederacy into the seventeenth century.²⁰ As the Haudenosaunee became entwined in European commercial networks, the sachems, one of whose alleged goal was to ensure peace and order within the Confederacy, were unable to match their interests with those of the warrior chiefs.²¹ As a result, alliances and treaties, often painstakingly crafted by other village leaders, were often undone.²²

Central to the success and efficiency of Iroquoian politics was the creation of the system of moieties as a means of differentiating one nation's duties from another.²³ Physically separated from one another, each moiety sat on different sides of the council fire. On one side, the Mohawks sat with the Senecas. On the other, the Oneidas sat beside the Cayugas. At the head of the fire, the Onondagas presided as fire-keepers. Iroquoian moieties imitated the kinship system at the local level. Three nations were designated

¹⁹ Composed of fifty sachems, the Grand Council ensured peaceful cooperation among its constituent members. The Grand Council also reserved the right to declare war and to adopt and accept emigrants into the Iroquois Confederacy (the most notable example being the Tuscaroras). Representation in the Grand Council was based on population. The Mohawks and Oneidas both received 9 representatives each, the Onondagas 14, the Cayugas 10, and the Senecas 8.

²⁰ Snow, *The Iroquois*, 61, 65.

²¹ Warrior chiefs were typically younger as martial engagements required the fittest and physically-able of the Iroquois men. When a warrior chief became too old or feeble to continue their warrior duties, they often transitioned to a civic role.

²² Richter, *The Ordeal of the Longhouse*, 41-45.

²³ The Iroquoian moiety model was created to structure Iroquois politics at the confederate level. Imitating traditional kinship structures at the local level, moieties placed nations in specific roles to facilitate the discussion and mediation of international and intertribal issues.

elder brothers (the Mohawks, Onondagas, and Senecas) forming a senior moiety. The Oneidas and Cayugas, as younger brothers, composed a junior moiety. The senior moiety addressed the younger with the title *kheya?tawenh*, “our offspring,” and the junior referred to the senior as *akatu:nih*, “our paternal relatives.” Elaborate procedures were implemented allowing for the mediation of matters between the sides of the council fire until, ideally, consensus was reached. As the original promoters of the Confederacy, discussion of all matters began with the Mohawks. After an issue was proposed, the Mohawks discussed it with another member of the senior moiety, the Senecas. If consensus was reached within the senior moiety, the matter was passed across the fire to the junior moiety, where it was received by the Cayugas. The Cayugas then discussed the matter among themselves and consulted with the Oneidas until a unanimous decision was reached on how best to resolve the matter. Once both moieties were in agreement, the resolution was passed to the Onondagas for their final approval. At any point, a given resolution could be disputed, modified, or outright vetoed. Should a motion be vetoed the process began anew.²⁴

Confederate politics operated in this manner for the better part of two centuries. Although the system was collaborative in nature, the senior moiety maintained the largest stake in the political process. Among the junior members, the Cayugas had the larger role in modifying a suggested issue. Considering that the Oneidas were the second nation to accept the Great Law of Deganawi:dah, the Oneidas’ diminished political role proved a divisive issue. This point was all the more frustrating considering that Hiawatha had

²⁴ John Heckewelder, *History, manners, and customs of the Indian nations* (Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 1876), 96-97; Fenton, *The Great Law and the Longhouse*, 54; Gail MacLeitch, *Imperial Entanglements: Iroquois Change and Persistence on the Frontiers of Empire* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 41.

designated the Oneidas as the “second nation” on account of their “wise council.”²⁵

Oneidas’ frustration with their role in Iroquois politics emerged upon the conclusion of the Seven Years’ War in 1763.²⁶

Military, economic, and religious ties to European colonists exacerbated factionalism. The gradual acculturation to European lifestyles ran its course for the better part of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries with pockets of success among open-minded indigenous groups. Most notably, natives utilized European weapons, tools, and clothing for their technological advantages. Exposure to European markets was essential for Europeans to bring the Iroquois within their realm of influence. Through Iroquois participation, Europeans hoped to draw on the rich natural resources of the continent in exchange for easily attainable and manufactured goods.²⁷

Once significant portions of Iroquoian society became involved in European trade, diplomatic ties shortly followed. For the Iroquois, diplomatic relations were linked to the cultural practice of gift giving. Dubbed a model of “upside-down capitalism” by Daniel Richter, this economic and cultural system placed weight on the principle of redistribution rather than the acquisition of goods. Consequently, Iroquoian leaders were often distinguished not by their personal wealth but by their capacity for the distribution of goods. Having witnessed the significance of gift-giving first hand during the early eighteenth century, a Jesuit missionary commented on the utility of the act, “They dry up tears; they appease anger; they open doors of foreign countries; they deliver prisoners;

²⁵ Canfield, *The Legends of the Iroquois Told by “The Cornplanter,”* 46.

²⁶ Fenton, *The Great Law and the Longhouse*, 212-13.

²⁷ Timothy Shannon, “Dressing for Success on the Mohawk Frontier: Hendrick, William Johnson, and the Indian Fashion,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 52, no. 1 (January 1996), 536; MacLeitch, *Imperial Entanglements*, 4.

they bring the dead back to life; one hardly ever speaks or answers, except by presents. That is why, in the harangues of Indian leaders, a present passes for the world.” Aware of the cultural significance the Iroquois placed on gift-giving and their desire for European goods, Europeans who wanted to gain influence among the tribes utilized this important practice carefully. The nature of those exchanges, however, concerned the more conservative-minded among the Haudenosaunee. Thus, the arrival and integration of European goods, intrinsically politicized by European relations, into Iroquois society further diversified sentiments.²⁸

As the Iroquois became more entangled in European networks, traditional models of economic and cultural sustainability transitioned from an upside-down model of capitalism to a more traditional European model characterized by private property. Several historians have suggested that by the eve of the American Revolution, the Mohawks and Oneidas lived in a “world of haves and have-lesses.” The upside-down Iroquoian model of capitalism visibly demonstrated an individual’s commitment to his community. However, the gradual replacement of such a system by one characterized by the accumulation of goods suggested an anti-communal mentality that was concerning to many Iroquois.²⁹

In the long-term, Iroquoian interests and involvement in colonial markets situated the Haudenosaunee at the heart of European conflicts. As the rivalry between France and England escalated during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Iroquois attempted to balance the economic interests of the Confederacy with the physical toll

²⁸ Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents: Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries of New France, 1610-1791*, Vol. XXII, (Cleveland, Ohio: 1896-1910), 291-93; Richter, *Ordeal of the Longhouse*, 4, 22, 47.

²⁹ Glatthaar and Martin, *Forgotten Allies*, 56; Norton, *Rebellious Younger Brother*, 12-13.

their involvement in those conflicts placed on their warriors. The cultural significance of warfare was paramount to the viability and sustainability of the Confederacy. Iroquois raids not only developed masculine traits among their youths but also acted as a primary means of wealth accumulation. However, because individual action often superseded collective goals, warfare also functioned as a major source of factionalism among the Iroquois.³⁰

For the Haudenosaunee, as one observer noted, war was a “necessary exercise.”³¹ Those who returned from war with the most captives and scalps were rewarded with immediate recognition, better prospects for marriage, and a greater likelihood for upward mobility within the Iroquoian social hierarchy. Prior to the unification of the five nations, warriors were given free rein to raid and plunder their enemies. The Confederacy, however, was designed to stop this type of wanton violence. By limiting internal confrontations, the Iroquois prospered from a collective peace that gave them the power to wage wars more effectively on non-Iroquoians. Even when warriors acted without the approval of the civil leadership, Iroquoian custom demanded that the “young men should never be punished for deeds of bravery, even when they have forgotten the wise council of the old men, lest they become cowards.”³² At the heart of the success story of the Iroquois was the ambition and courage of Iroquois warriors. However, as Europeans threatened traditional Iroquoian cultural practices, factionalism between the civil leaders

³⁰ Richter, “War and Culture: The Iroquois Experience,” 430-31.

³¹ Joseph Francois Lafitau, *Customs of the American Indians Compared with the Customs of Primitive Times* (Toronto, 1974, 1977), 98-99.

³² Canfield, *The Legends of the Iroquois Told by “The Cornplanter,”* 32.

(sachems and clan matrons) and warriors prompted divisions on an unprecedented scale.³³

In what came to be collectively known as the Beaver Wars, the Iroquois put their collective might to the test against their native neighbors during the mid-seventeenth century. The Iroquois waged a series of campaigns through 1675 against their foes, primarily the Hurons, to secure access to more hunting grounds. Warring parties were often sponsored or outfitted by Europeans. Thus, the Iroquois found themselves tied to European colonists. Renowned for their successful raids during the Beaver Wars, the Haudenosaunee were often enlisted as auxiliaries in European conflicts on the continent. Wars with France and catastrophic epidemics, in addition to the physical toll placed on the Iroquois by the Beaver Wars, exhausted their military capabilities. By the end of the seventeenth century, the Iroquois sought an end to conflict with their European neighbors. From 1700 to 1701, they petitioned for a formal peace treaty which recognized their sovereignty and, more importantly, neutrality in European conflicts. Finalized in 1701, an accord was reached between the French, British and Iroquois which promised to remove the Iroquois from European conflicts.³⁴

The Grand Settlement of 1701 seemed to offer the Haudenosaunee precisely what they desired. The settlement formed the basis for a new system of cross-cultural interaction and mediation between the Iroquois, the French, and the British. The negotiations secured peace for the Iroquois with France and England and also guaranteed Iroquois hunting territories north of Lake Ontario. Furthermore, the stipulations promised

³³ Ibid; MacLeitch, *Imperial Entanglements*, 22, 38; Richter, "War and Culture: The Iroquois Experience," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 40, no. 4 (Oct., 1983), 430.

³⁴ Richter, *The Ordeal of the Longhouse*, 163; Glatthaar, *Forgotten Allies*, 37.

new markets with traders at Albany, and in Pennsylvania, New France, and New York. The Grand Settlement returned power to the civil chiefs, primarily due to a commitment to resolve political disputes with Europeans peacefully.³⁵

The Haudenosaunee believed that the Grand Settlement of 1701 would usher in a new era of Iroquois-European relations marked by the peaceful resolution of differences. The Iroquois' new policy of peace was based on the premise of balancing the influence of French and English factions. The reality, however, was quite different. Rather than abiding by a strict policy of neutrality, many Iroquois warriors accepted offers by the British or the French to act as auxiliary troops and in non-combatant roles. Warriors, thus, inhabited a tenuous grey area, which contradicted the pledge of neutrality given in 1701. However, because no official sanction was given to their actions, the sachems remained adamant in their professed neutrality. The difference between the word of the sachems and the actions of the warriors left its mark on Europeans' understanding of the roles of both groups.³⁶

Neither the British nor the French respected Iroquoian sovereignty or neutrality. Following the conclusion of the War of the Spanish Succession in 1713, the Treaty of Utrecht branded the Iroquois as British subjects and guaranteed the French the right to trade with them. Without the approval of the Iroquois, the treaty had sparked competition among the two European powers, prompting the creation of valuable economic and military outposts in Iroquoian territory; one built by the French at the junction between

³⁵ J.A. Brandao and William A. Starna, "The Treaties of 1701: A Triumph of Iroquois Diplomacy," *Ethnohistory* 43, no. 2 (Spring 1996), 209.

³⁶ *Ibid*; Richter, "War and Culture: The Iroquois Experience," 446-47.

Lakes Erie and Ontario, known as Fort Niagara, and another built by the English at Oswego, located on the southwestern edge of Lake Ontario.³⁷

As points of high trade traffic, these outposts strengthened and promoted the emerging pro-French and pro-British factions among the Iroquois. The presence of the British and the French swayed some Iroquois warriors to participate in combat during the War of the Austrian Succession (1740-48). Small parties from the Senecas sided with the French, while the Oneidas and Mohawks allied themselves with the British. However, the Iroquois maintained neutrality as a confederate policy; proving that, yet again, independent action was viable so long as it did not directly infringe on another nation. The sachems' continued belief that such a policy represented a viable policy for the Confederacy further undermined that group's legitimacy and political power. Making matters worse, the sachems were increasingly unable to control the actions of their warriors.³⁸ Soon after the conclusion of the War of the Austrian Succession, the Iroquois became entangled in yet another continental conflict between the British and French in 1754. During the Seven Years' War, the Senecas sided with the French; and the Mohawks, as a result of the proximity of the forts at Albany and Oswego, allied themselves with the British. Fearful of conflict in the interior of Iroquoia, the innermost nations (Cayugas, Onondagas, Oneidas, and Tuscaroras³⁹) checked their warriors and

³⁷ Glatthaar and Martin, *Forgotten Allies*, 44.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 44.

³⁹ Following the conclusion of the Tuscarora War (1711-13), the Tuscaroras migrated from the Carolinas to Pennsylvania and New York. In 1722, the Oneidas sponsored the Tuscaroras admission into the Iroquois Confederacy.

remained neutral until the British seemed destined to win. Only once the outcome was assured did the neutral nations join Mohawk and British forces.⁴⁰

Frequent contact with Iroquoian warriors convinced the French and British that those men were the principle representatives of the Six Nations. Whether indicative of reality or not, the mere impression of the warriors' preeminence reaffirmed that faction's belief that they wielded ultimate authority. As several Seneca warriors noted in 1762, "We are in fact the People of Consequence for Managing Affairs. Our Sachems being generally a parcel of Old People who say Much, but who Mean and Act very little." Again, in 1762, an Oneida chief, Thomas King addressed the Pennsylvania Governor and asserted the growing influence of the warriors: "counselors can do nothing unless the Warriors should give their Consent to it." Even the sachems themselves recognized their steadily decreasing power. As one Oneida sachem noted, "We are poor Creatures and have no strength and authority. If we say that which is good and right so far as we know, we are not regarded."⁴¹

Opportunities for advancement subsided after the conclusion of the Seven Years' War in 1763. However, the ambitions which had been kindled throughout the eighteenth century remained at the forefront of many Iroquoian minds. Over the next ten years, tensions between warriors and sachems stoked the fires of factionalism and primed the Confederacy for the divisive influence of British and colonial residents among the

⁴⁰ Journal of Warren Johnson, June 29, 1760 – July 3, 1761, *The Papers of Sir William Johnson*, 13:176, 181-83; Fred Anderson, *Crucible of War: the Seven Years' War and the Fate of the Empire in British North America, 1754-1766* (New York: Knopf Doubleday, 2000), 404-406.

⁴¹ Indian Proceedings, April 23, 1762, *The Papers of Sir William Johnson*, III: 698; Pilkington, Walter, ed., *The Journals of Samuel Kirkland: 18TH Century Missionary to the Iroquois, Government Agent, Father of Hamilton College*, (Clinton: Hamilton College, 1980), 67, 57.

Haudenosaunee, so often credited as the sole factor that led to the Oneida-American alliance in 1777.

Among the Oneidas, the growing warrior faction experienced a similar resurgence. Residents of the principle town of Old Oneida, many of whom were Oneida warriors, broke off and formed a new settlement named Kanonwalohale. Largely composed of younger Oneidas, Kanonwalohale became the most influential town by 1777 and its inhabitants did much to sway the course of the Oneida-American alliance. These cultural and political shifts and culturally-inclusive mentalities towards Europeanization predisposed some Oneidas to question the traditional framework of the Confederacy. As they did so, they often came to the conclusion that complete unanimity with their brethren was not always in their best interest. Factionalism within a single nation later translated to factionalism between separate nations.⁴²

While commercial prospects lured warriors into European networks, Christian missionaries divided the Iroquois in a similar fashion. Eager to convert the residents of the Mohawk Valley, Christian missionaries had flocked to Iroquois territory since the early seventeenth century. Furthermore, as the Jesuits encountered the competing efforts of English Protestants, pro-French and pro-British factions further divided the Haudenosaunee at the local and confederate levels to the detriment of any perceivable and sustainable Iroquois unity.⁴³

⁴² Glatthaar and Martin, *Forgotten Allies*, 105.

⁴³ Christian influence, especially among the Oneidas, has been cited by Barbara Graymont as one of the key factors behind the Oneida-American alliance. While religious factionalism primed the motivations and sentimentalities of the Oneidas (and to some degree the rest of the Six Nations), religious motivations often acted as a defense of those eager to wage war.

Prior to the mid-seventeenth century, the Iroquois had little direct exposure to the influence of the French Jesuits. As French settlers encroached on Iroquoian territory, many French realized that their native neighbors would serve as suitable converts. Even though driven by religious motivations, Jesuit missionaries acted as outposts and valuable resources for the French government on the continent. In fact, the ability of the Iroquois to grasp this nuance greatly influenced their fears and suspicions of the Jesuits' motives. Those fears were rooted in the teachings of Hiawatha who had purportedly advised the Iroquois not to "admit to your councils the people of other tribes, for they will plant among you the seeds of jealousy and trouble and you will become feeble and enslaved."⁴⁴

The Iroquois' first impressions of the Jesuits reveals much about their apprehensions towards the latter's suspect tactics. Fearing their own cultural degeneration, the Haudenosaunee depicted the Jesuits as sorcerers who covertly undermined the spiritual power of the community. Rumors of Jesuit priests as disease-bringers and murderers of children dissuaded the Iroquois from welcoming the Jesuits into their communities. However, as the Iroquois learned of the Jesuits' predisposition for allowing their converts to maintain their cultural heritage, provided that it was "holy and virtuous," they were more inclined to allow a select few to reside among them. Although the reality of this allowance was harsher than the Iroquois believed, some adopted Catholicism as a means of connecting themselves to new opportunities for trade. It was quite common for Jesuit missionaries to provide for those (both monetarily and religiously) who had accepted the Catholic faith. Furthermore, years of devastation by

⁴⁴ Canfield, *The Legends of the Iroquois Told by "The Cornplanter,"* 146-47.

smallpox convinced many to seek a higher power in the form of a new and more effective religion.⁴⁵

The slowly growing pro-French sentiment among the Haudenosaunee, however, was quickly met by an anti-French faction. Those who opposed the Jesuit missionaries believed they were being oppressed on account of European influence. To compound matters, Jesuit missionaries often encouraged their converts to resist the protestations of their pagan brethren. Well aware of their political duties to the French Crown, The Jesuits often warned the Iroquois of potential political repercussions should they not convert to Catholicism. When confronting the Mohawks, missionary Jean Pierron argued “as long as your minds do not embrace all our ideas concerning virtue and heaven, our hearts cannot be united...All the French will rejoice to know that you are their brothers, and where they meet you, they will bestow on you a thousand acts of friendship and a thousand endearments. All of France will take an interest in your good fortune, all the world will know of it it, and all of Heaven will be filled with joy.”⁴⁶ Even God himself would “not fail to prepare for the Mohawk, if he becomes a Christian.” It should be noted, however, that not all Iroquois were inclined to believe the illusion that the Jesuit missionaries occupied a strictly spiritual demarcation, but as representatives of New France. Most Iroquois tolerated the Jesuit presence despite ideological differences as they guaranteed protection against French attacks on their villages. Despite the persuasive

⁴⁵ Thwaites, ed., *Jesuit Relations*, LIII, 213-15; Richter, *Ordeal of the Longhouse*, 107-109.

⁴⁶ Jean Pierron, *Of the Missions of the Martyrs in the Country of the Mohawks, or the Lower Iroquois*, *Jesuit Relations* 53:200-237 in Alan Greer, ed., *The French Jesuit Relations: Natives and Missionaries in Seventeenth-Century North America* (Boston: Bedford, 2000), 144-45.

tenor of the French Jesuits, not all of the Iroquois were quick to abandon their traditional religion.⁴⁷

Arriving en masse in the last few years of the seventeenth century, Anglican missionaries offered a counter to the influence of the Jesuits.⁴⁸ Located on the eastern edge of the Confederacy's territory, the Anglican missionaries found success among those tribes closest to their outposts, namely the Mohawks and Oneidas. By 1667, the arrival of the English at Albany offered a strictly political and economic rival to the French. Since the English made no religious or cultural demands from the Mohawks, many of the formerly anti-French supporters sought an alliance with the Anglicans. The pro-British members of the Mohawks became so numerous that they forced many of the French-supporting Mohawks to resettle in French-Canadian settlements. Missionary influence declined as wars between the French and English escalated during the eighteenth century. However, following the French defeat in 1763 and French expulsion to their Canadian colonies, the English attempted to uproot the remaining Jesuit missionaries by flooding the region with Protestant missionaries.⁴⁹

By the end of the Seven Years' War the Haudenosaunee clung to a precarious union. Although severely tested during that conflict, Iroquois unity prevailed. Prior to European arrival, the League Legend promoted a vision of peace and prosperity that united the five nations of the Iroquois. The political confederacy established by Deganawi:dah and Hiawatha brought about peace among the five nations who accepted

⁴⁷ Richter, *Ordeal of the Longhouse*, 218.

⁴⁸ First assigned in 1704, Thoroughgood Moore was appointed by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel to live among the Mohawks. Although his tenure among the Mohawks was met with mixed results, he represented an important commitment on the part of the English to capitalize on the factionalism brewing among the Iroquois.

⁴⁹ Once ousted from their traditional homeland, the pro-French Mohawks established a prominent community near St. Louis at a town named Kahnawake; Greer, *Jesuit Relations*, 146.

the Great Law. Thus, the Iroquois focused their collective military might against those tribes unwilling to abide by the prophet's code throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, allowing the Confederacy to consolidate its power in the region. The Iroquois maintained the belief that their confederacy was based on peace. In reality, its viability was a by-product of the ferocity and renown of Iroquois warriors. Tension between the sachems and warriors remained dormant for nearly a century. However, as Europeans of diverse national and religious backgrounds progressed inland, encroached on indigenous territories, and incorporated the natives into their commercial and political schemas, Iroquoian factions intensified.

III. IN THE PATH OF DEGANAWI:DAH: ONEIDA AGENCY AND THE ORIGINS OF THE ONEIDA-AMERICAN ALLIANCE

On November 12, 1770, the Presbyterian minister, Samuel Kirkland composed a brief letter to his friend and associate, Andrew Oliver. The letter contained the usual report of expenses accrued, conversion narratives, and general anecdotes from Kirkland's ongoing mission among the Oneidas. The most striking news, Kirkland noted, was the recent surge in popularity of the Oneidas as a result of their central location "on the public rode [sic] thro' the Five Nations" and, more importantly (according to its author), Kirkland's residence among the Oneidas. Residing at the Oneida town of Kanonwalohale, Kirkland had established himself as one of the region's most successful ministers. In addition to his religious duties, he taught Oneidas new agricultural practices and provided for them during periods of poverty and famine. As his reputation grew, Kirkland and the Oneidas periodically hosted five hundred to a thousand Iroquois travelers. The enhanced attention given to the Oneidas not only augmented their social status within the Confederacy but also generated opportunities for economic gain. As Kirkland proudly noted, "Most of the Five Nations have their eyes fixed upon this place."⁵⁰

The Oneidas were delighted with their rising status within the confederacy. As one of the smaller nations of the Iroquois, they naturally wished to cultivate the continued interest in their nation. Capitalizing on their burgeoning notoriety, they sought to accumulate sufficient material wealth to reinforce their position in relation to their

⁵⁰ Pilkington, ed., *The Journals of Samuel Kirkland*, 60; Fenton, *The Great Law and the Longhouse*, 554, 556.

confederate brethren. During the winter of 1770, the Oneidas submitted two petitions to the British Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Sir William Johnson. They sought a blacksmith and a meetinghouse to address their civil and religious needs. Despite the legitimacy of the requests, Johnson denied both. This seemingly minor episode, ostensibly concerned with the commercial acquisition of goods and services, contributed to the foundation of the Oneidas' relationship with the Patriots.

Following the end of the Seven Years' War in 1763, the Oneidas' cultivated ties with colonial officials who, as conflict between Britain and her American colonies arose, remained sympathetic to the Patriot cause. Principal among these men was Samuel Kirkland. Historical claims crediting Kirkland with the Oneida-American alliance have drawn their credibility from contemporary British accusations of Kirkland's subversion of British mandates. Kirkland's translation of the proceedings of the Continental Congress ultimately framed the conflict between England and the colonies in a pro-Patriot light. Despite persistent denials by Kirkland himself, the mere impression of aiding the Patriot cause drew the ire of William Johnson and the British government. As conflict escalated into outright war, Kirkland remained one of the most influential ties between the Oneidas and the leaders of the Continental Congress. For more than a century, explanations of the Oneida-American alliance centered on Kirkland have dominated the historiography.⁵¹

⁵¹ Andrew Davis, *The Indians and the Border Warfare of the Revolution* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Company, 1888); Walter Mohr, *Federal Indian Relations, 1774-1788* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1933); Graymont, *The Iroquois in the American Revolution*; The most ardent attempt to rescue a Kirkland-centric focus has come from David Levinson, "An Explanation for the Oneida-Colonist Alliance in the American Revolution," *Ethnohistory* 23 (1976).

In reality, the groundwork for the Oneida-American alliance was the indirect result of an Oneida attempt to gain economic and political power within the region. Contrary to traditional explanations of the Oneida-American alliance, Anglo officials did not dictate indigenous loyalties but were used by the Oneidas as avenues for accruing wealth. Oneida economic interests, coupled with a reluctance of British officials to acquiesce to their requests, led the Oneidas to use Samuel Kirkland as a patron and economic resource. This use of Kirkland mirrored the relationship that the Mohawks had cultivated with their patron, Sir William Johnson. Politically linked to the Mohawks as a metaphorical younger brother, the Oneidas unsurprisingly compared their situation with that of their brethren. As a result, the Oneidas' trajectory for self-improvement was modeled after the Mohawks.⁵²

In the grand scheme of eighteenth-century Anglo-Indian diplomacy, no single man influenced the course of British-Iroquois relations more than Sir William Johnson. Raised in County Merth, Ireland, Johnson migrated to the Mohawk Valley in 1738, where he developed a profitable career as a tradesman. Well connected and amply funded, Johnson quickly climbed the ranks of British frontier society. During King George's War and the Seven Years' War, Johnson strengthened his relationship with the Mohawks who, as a result of a series of unlawful claims on their lands, were eager to earn the gratitude of British officials willing to intercede on their behalf in land negotiations. As his reputation skyrocketed, Johnson was named Britain's first Superintendent of Indian Affairs. As a

⁵² Politically, the Iroquois were divided into two *moieties*, composed of "elder" and "younger" brothers. Mimicking the council fires of local villages, the national Iroquois political system gave its two moieties specific functions. The elder brothers were tasked with dictating topics for discussion. On the one hand, the younger brothers were primarily tasked with discussing potential resolutions of said issue before returning their decision to the elder brothers who would debate their resolution and submit a final proposal; Heckewelder, *History, manners, and customs of the Indian nations*, 96-97; Fenton, *The Great Law and the Longhouse*, 54.

result of their involvement in his military expeditions, the Mohawks had secured the loyalty of the highest ranking British official in the Mohawk Valley. This relationship was cemented when Johnson married into a prominent Mohawk clan. Johnson's marriage to Molly Brant (*Konwatsi'tsiaienni*) strengthened his commercial ties to the village of Canajoharie Mohawks and earned the continued reliance of their civil and war chiefs, namely Brant's brother, Joseph Brant (*Thayendanegea*). As a staple of Johnson's tenure as Superintendent, he afforded a yearly allotment of goods to each nation of the Iroquois. Due to his close ties to the residents of Canajoharie, Johnson frequently provided more gifts for the Mohawks. Essentially, Johnson reoriented the focus of the Iroquois Confederacy away from the traditional seat of power at Onondaga and assisted the Mohawks' rise atop the Iroquoian hierarchy. Mindful of these cultural and economic shifts in the region, the Oneidas framed their power struggle in terms of long-standing cultural and political precedents.⁵³

Following the end of the Seven Years' War, Johnson consolidated his power base in the Mohawk Valley. A key part of this process required the removal of all traces of French influence from Iroquois territory. Although the majority of French forces retreated to Canada after 1763, a sizeable portion of the Jesuit missionaries remained active on the fringes of Iroquoian territory. Well aware of the Iroquois' tendency to play the British against the French, Johnson sought the immediate substitution of the Jesuits with

⁵³ Andrew Flick, ed., *The Papers of Sir William Johnson* (Albany: The University of the State of New York, 1921), 1:522; Shannon, "Dressing for Success on the Mohawk Frontier: Hendrick, William Johnson, and the Indian Fashion," in Peter C. Mancall and James H. Merrell, ed., *American Encounters: Natives and Newcomers from European Contact to Indian Removal, 1500-1850* (New York: Routledge, 2007); Francis Jennings, *Empire of Fortune: Crown, Colonies and Tribes in the Seven Years' War in America* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1988), 116-18; MacLeitch, *Imperial Entanglements*, 62; Anderson, *The War That Made America: A Short History of the French and Indian War*, 184; Isabel Kelsay, *Joseph Brant, 1743-1807: A Man of Two Worlds* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1984), 61, 63-66.

Anglican missionaries. However, due to a lack of available missionaries, the task fell to a group of Presbyterian ministers under the leadership of the Boston-based minister, Eleazar Wheelock. Like Johnson, Wheelock recognized the need to “counteract the influence of [the] Jesuits” in order to “induce [the Six Nations] to a cordial subjection to the British Crown” and believed in the acculturation of the natives. The two men disagreed, however, on the timing of such a project.⁵⁴

Theoretically, Johnson’s arrangement would rid the region of the Jesuit influence. In practice, however, clashing ideologies between Johnson and Wheelock limited the potential success of the endeavor. Unlike Johnson, Wheelock believed in the immediate acculturation of the Iroquois to the British way of life. In a private letter, Wheelock noted that “the savages of this Land must be cultivated or be destroyed and perish, and that very soon.” Although ideologically at odds, the two men enjoyed a tenuous business relationship for the better part of five years. The Johnson-Wheelock relationship reached its breaking point at the Fort Stanwix Treaty of 1768, when several of Wheelock’s protégés threatened to destroy Johnson’s design of establishing a definitive boundary between Indians and colonists. Considering their drastically different philosophies and Wheelock’s tendency to intervene in the Superintendent’s affairs, Johnson’s decision to end his relationship with Wheelock surprised few contemporaries. Fearful of similar sentiments among his protégés, Johnson recalled each of Wheelock’s missionaries from Iroquois territory and, in particular, Wheelock’s most successful protégé, Samuel Kirkland.

⁵⁴ Eleazar Wheelock to Sir William Johnson, May 27, 1761, and June, 1762, *The Papers of Sir William Johnson*, X: 272, 309.

The Oneidas, however, were unwilling to part with Kirkland. When he arrived at the Oneida town of Kanonwalohale in 1766, the Oneidas were on the brink of collapse. They had been unable to combat the rampant drunkenness, poverty, and famine plaguing their settlements. In his first few years among the Oneidas, Kirkland worked to remedy these issues. Three years after his arrival, he had managed to transform the very fabric of Oneida life. The problem of drunkenness had largely been relegated to the fringes of society. Similarly, famine and poverty had begun to recede. Kirkland's sincerity and generosity garnered him the respect and friendship of many Kanonwalohale residents. The genuine trust of the Oneidas eventually opened doors for Kirkland. Viewed as a village leader, he was often assigned to mediate and settle disputes; tasks that, in years past, had been reserved for the British Superintendent. Furthermore, Kirkland's advice became so useful to the Oneidas that they began inviting him to attend council meetings. In January 1771, Kirkland noted that his role among the Oneidas was "much more fatiguing than preaching ten Sermons a week" and that he was barely able to "provide for [his] family...without great trouble and expense." Similarly, Kirkland noted that seemingly "every little petty difference in family, or between Relations must be brot [sic] to me..."⁵⁵

Considering how prevalent Kirkland had become in the daily lives of the Oneidas, it is not surprising that they resisted Sir William Johnson's demands for Kirkland's removal in 1768. Kirkland not only looked after the spiritual well-being of the Oneidas, but also adopted many roles reserved for village elders. As his correspondence suggests, Kirkland portrayed his success as deriving from his religious teachings. While Kirkland's

⁵⁵ Pilkington, ed., *The Journals of Samuel Kirkland*, 14, 40, 66.

success as a minister cannot be doubted, religious leadership does not adequately explain the Oneidas' decision to resist Johnson's demand. Kirkland's continued presence among the Oneidas was a result of his secular capacities, namely his role as a mentor and, when his personal funds allowed, a willing patron.

By 1770, Kirkland had come to represent a legitimate threat to Johnson's authority. Ironically, it was precisely Johnson's persistent attempts to remove Kirkland that convinced the Oneidas of the latter's value. Within this context, many historians have viewed the 1770-1774 rivalry between Johnson and Kirkland as the basis for the divisions among the Iroquois during the American Revolution.⁵⁶ Looking westward, this contest of colonial patrons has tended to depict the Oneidas as mere props in their own play. Instead, Johnson's history of neglecting Oneida considerations strengthened the Oneidas' reluctance to relinquish Kirkland. However, a general unwillingness to part with Kirkland does not negate the Oneidas potential commitment to Johnson. In truly Iroquoian fashion, the Oneidas had developed a rival to Johnson in their midst and watched as both sides competed to earn their loyalty and affection.

Despite their fondness for Kirkland, the Oneidas frequently sought to dictate the frequency of his distribution of gifts. Since the late 1760s, they had watched as Anglican ministers among the Mohawks consistently and lavishly distributed gifts among their Anglican converts following baptisms. Although familiar with Kirkland's conservative Christian ethic, the Oneidas requested that Kirkland adjust his standard of baptism to align more closely with the Anglican missionaries.⁵⁷ An Oneida chief named Tagawaron

⁵⁶ During the American Revolution the Oneidas and their wards, the Tuscaroras, sided with the Patriots while the Mohawks, Onondagas, Senecas and Cayugas formed an alliance with the British.

⁵⁷ In the past, Kirkland's stance on baptism had resulted in a series of infants and elders dying before they were deemed worthy.

noted, “We don’t think that your way is wrong, nor do we say [that] the old way is wrong, but both right. However, we have chosen the old.”⁵⁸

At these requests, Kirkland refused to bend. Instead, he warned the Oneidas that, should they press the matter, he would be forced to leave them altogether. Fearful of losing the influence associated with Kirkland, the Oneidas yielded, noting that they had been miserable before Kirkland’s arrival and “had experienced no other kind of regeneration, repentance, and faith than was comprehended in the meer [sic] external sprinkling of water.” It is crucial to remember that, like his seventeenth- and eighteenth-century counterparts, Kirkland was quick to highlight his role as a religious instructor in much of his correspondence. In this instance, the Oneida request of a more frequent supply of gifts and food suggests that the Oneidas’ perspective on Kirkland was not limited to religion. However, the language of the Oneidas, who had coveted the material benefits of the Anglicans, illustrates their desire for a more lucrative and consistent flow of goods and services from Kirkland.⁵⁹

Prior to Johnson’s death in 1774, the Oneidas targeted two commodities: a Kanonwalohale-based blacksmith and meetinghouse. As the Oneidas came to rely on European technologies, namely pots, pans, axes, hoes, and firearms, the maintenance of tools became a prime concern. Unlike their confederate brethren, the Mohawks had been given use of Johnson’s private forge free of charge. To add insult to injury, the Mohawks had no qualms with reminding their neighboring brethren that their maintenance of a blacksmith reinforced their status as the leading member of the Iroquois Confederacy. With these contentious feelings in mind, the Oneidas at last submitted their petition to

⁵⁸ Pilkington, ed., *The Journals of Samuel Kirkland*, 74-75.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 67.

Johnson during the winter of 1770. When confronted with the proposition, Johnson effectively refused. Although he offered to pay for the service for a year, as he noted, such an arrangement would come at the expense of the Oneidas allotted yearly dole. Furthermore, Johnson told the Oneidas that the matter was not under his jurisdiction and that “the King, has put that into ye hands of ye several Govern[or]s.” Johnson had hoped that his opinion on the matter was final.⁶⁰

The Oneidas rejected the idea of replacing their yearly dole from Johnson in exchange for a blacksmith. Instead, they sent their petition through the channels Johnson had approved. In the following weeks, the Oneidas petitioned the funds from New York’s Royal Governor, the Earl of Dunmore. Give his cue, Kirkland rushed to the role of a willing advisor. He not only advised the Oneidas to appeal to the royal governor, but also translated their request into English:

We are at a great distance from the white people and almost an hundred miles from our Brother Sir William Johnson, where we are obliged to travel in order to get our hoes, axes and guns mended...now listen to us – we stand in great need of a blacksmith and work for us here at our own place.⁶¹

Fearing any intrusive intervention on his part, New York’s Governor alerted Johnson to the Oneidas’ request and sought his advice on a potential response. Johnson lied about any knowledge of the issue and placed the blame squarely on Kirkland’s

⁶⁰ Glatthaar and Martin, *Forgotten Allies*, 70; Alan Taylor, *The Divided Ground: Indians, Settlers, and the Northern Borderland of the American Revolution* (Vintage, 2007), 66.

⁶¹ Oneida petition to Lord Dunmore, Dec. 31, 1770, *The Papers of Sir William Johnson*, XIII: 498-99; Sir William Johnson to Dunmore, March 16, 1771, *The Papers of Sir William Johnson*, VIII: 265; The Oneidas at Kanonwalohale to John, Earl of Dunmore, Dec. 31, 1770, *The Samuel Kirkland Papers*.

shoulders. He noted that Kirkland “mistaking this matter, Instead of laying it before me, as he ought to have done, has Conceived that It became a Provincial Concern to Supply the Indn. Villages.”⁶² Johnson also questioned the sincerity of the Oneidas’ request, citing “some untruths” of their account. To this point, he noted that the Oneidas had little difficulty reaching him when presents were prepared for them. Although the matter ended when Johnson refused to provide the necessary funds, his disingenuous conduct further disillusioned the Oneidas. Johnson’s rejection was a reminder that he had consistently refused to validate Oneida concerns should the result come at the cost of his ability to single-handedly control the region. Reflecting on the matter, Kirkland recalled that the Oneidas had become dissuaded of Britain’s affection for them, that “they now begin to think their letter does not speak; that their words are gone to sleep.”⁶³

The second Oneida petition of 1770, for a Kanonwalohale-based meetinghouse, further illustrates Oneida motivations. The Oneidas prepared to petition the funds for the construction of a village meetinghouse, which on Sundays, as Kirkland noted, would double as a church. Considering the popularity of Kirkland’s sermons and the dilapidated state of the Kanonwalohale church, which was rotten at its foundation, this request was not unreasonable. Although Kirkland had proven himself capable of providing as a patron, the Oneidas first approached Johnson. This choice is significant on two levels. First, it suggests that, despite being forced by Johnson to accept unfavorable terms at the Fort Stanwix Treaty (1768), the Oneidas still recognized Johnson’s place within the

⁶² William Johnson to Earl of Dunmore, March 16, 1771, *Sir William Johnson Papers*, XIII: 28-30.

⁶³ Sir William Johnson to the Earl of Dunmore, March 16, 1771, *The Sir William Johnson Papers*, VIII; John C. Guzzardo, “The Superintendent and the Ministers: The Battle for Oneida Allegiances, 1761-75,” *New York History* 57 (1976), 273.

colonial hierarchy. Second, it reveals that the Oneidas did not wish to subvert Johnson's authority while increasing their own.⁶⁴

Although the Oneidas were careful to observe the official procedures of requests, Johnson denied their petition. Instead, Johnson countered with an offer to provide the necessary funds on the condition that the Oneidas substitute Kirkland with an Anglican minister of Johnson's choosing. Unwilling to part with someone as useful as Kirkland, the Oneidas declined Johnson's offer. In many ways, the Oneida request threatened to destabilize the balance within the region. Although not an unreasonable, the request did threaten Johnson's authority, which was predicated on a centralized network of resources and services, all of which were located at or near Johnson's home at Johnstown, New York. If the Oneida petition was granted, there would be nothing to stop other tribes from doing the same, since the granting of a request for one nation would encourage similar requests from others, the Oneidas' petition had the potential to establish a dangerous precedent. Johnson's counter offer, thus, highlights his growing concern with the influence of Kirkland and the nature of Oneida motivations.⁶⁵

After some time the Oneidas approached the subject of a meetinghouse again, but this time they sent their petition through Kirkland. Seizing an opportunity to secure Oneida loyalty and goodwill (and thus prove his usefulness to them), Kirkland translated the Oneida request into English and submitted the petition to the Boston Board, which granted the request. Shortly thereafter, Johnson learned of the subversion and tried to halt the process altogether. Rather than acknowledge any mistake on his part, Johnson blamed

⁶⁴ Graymont, *The Iroquois in the American Revolution*, 44.

⁶⁵ Pilkington, ed., *The Journals of Samuel Kirkland*, 67; Guzzardo, "The Superintendent and the Ministers," 273-75; Taylor, *The Divided Ground*, 66; Graymont, *The Iroquois in the American Revolution*, 44-45; Glatthaar and Martin, *Forgotten Allies*, 71.

Kirkland and the people of Boston, whom he described as “seditious and Rebellious people.” Fearing a potential reoccurrence, Johnson assured the Oneida chiefs that, had they petitioned him through the proper channels, he would have immediately brought the appeal to the King and granted their request. In response, the warriors of Kanonwalohale agreed that “in all our affairs respecting Government shou’d be laid out before Sir William. But in church affairs, & even all that immediately respects the Kingdom & Government of Jesus Christ, we must go directly to God, by his word & ministers.” By clarifying the division between religious and civil matters, the Oneidas had effectively rendered Johnson powerless on the matter. Rather than relinquish Kirkland to gain what they desired, the Oneidas had employed an argument rooted in religious pragmatism against Sir William to have their cake and eat it too.⁶⁶

Free to supply the Oneidas with the necessary funds, the Boston Board contributed £100 towards the future construction of the church. Although not completed until 1774, the church served to swell the confederate opinion of the Oneidas, as they had intended. Kirkland reported that chiefs of the Cayuga nation visited Kanonwalohale explicitly to judge the new meetinghouse. Not to be entirely outdone, Johnson offered to contribute a steeple and bell to adorn the new meetinghouse. Opposed to all “showy” aspects of Christianity, Kirkland advised the Oneidas that the bell was a superfluous addition. The Oneidas, however, welcomed Johnson’s gift. Taking advantage of the Kirkland-Johnson rivalry, the Oneidas secured their new meetinghouse and adorned it with Johnson’s steeple and bell. Regardless of its source, the Oneidas had received a

⁶⁶ Pilkington, ed., *The Journals of Samuel Kirkland*, 67; Sir William Johnson quoted in Pilkington, ed., *The Journals of Samuel Kirkland*, 67.

structure that achieved its purpose of attracting the attention of their confederate brethren.⁶⁷

Shortly following the church's completion, Kirkland noted that the structure was a "standing testimony" to his work among the Oneidas and a "living witness of the benevolence...and good will of the people of God toward the poor savages." Kirkland's recollection of events, which highlights his role as a minister, has informed numerous accounts of eighteenth-century Oneida history. Considering Kirkland's testimonial, it is not surprising that historians have viewed the acquisition of the Kanonwalohale meetinghouse as yet another step towards the cementing of the Kirkland-Oneida relationship. While the proceedings ultimately did contribute to the intensification of their relationship, it is crucial to recognize that, rather than actively choosing to subvert Johnson in favor of Kirkland, the Oneidas attempted to gain the funds for the meetinghouse through Johnson and the "proper channels." However, Johnson's unwillingness to concede to Oneida demands and, when willing, his blatant opposition to Kirkland's continued presence, only served to further entrench many Oneidas within Kirkland's sphere of influence.⁶⁸

On July 11, 1774, Johnson summoned the representatives of the Six Nations to a congress at Johnson Hall to discuss the growing conflict in the Ohio Valley. After hours of intense debates, Johnson suffered "a fit," was carried away to his private room, and died hours later.⁶⁹ When the news of Johnson's death reached Kanonwalohale, Kirkland responded by preparing for a particularly informative sermon based on a reading from

⁶⁷ Pilkington, ed., *The Journals of Samuel Kirkland*, 95.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 95.

⁶⁹ Guy Johnson to John Penn, July 22, 1774, *The Papers of Sir William Johnson*, VIII: 1186.

Jeremiah that he presented the following Sunday. Before a crowded gathering, Kirkland gave his pointed sermon “on the solemn occasion of Sr. William’s death.” Kirkland read from Jeremiah 9:23, 24: “Thus saith the LORD, let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches.” Despite the grandeur and authority garnered during his tenure as Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Kirkland had suggested that all Johnson had won during his life was meaningless in the face of the righteousness of God. While colonists and Indians mourned the loss of Johnson, Kirkland argued that the Oneidas especially must reflect on the “emptiness of all mortal accomplishment” so perfectly embodied in the example of the late Sir William Johnson.⁷⁰

Whatever conclusions historians have drawn about the nature of the Oneidas’ relationship with Kirkland and Johnson, it is unwise to deny the Oneidas’ agency in this affair. That the Oneidas first attempted to go through Johnson’s administration to procure a meetinghouse clearly illustrates that the Oneidas recognized that traditional hierarchy of authority and had not yet begun to doubt the Superintendent’s good will toward them. Kirkland’s presence and active support was a secondary consideration in the Oneidas’ actions. However, as Johnson became increasingly opposed to Kirkland, the Oneidas progressively sought to maintain his influence. Furthermore, the Oneidas had proved themselves to be incredibly adaptable to Johnson’s unreasonable expectations. As they negotiated with Kirkland and Johnson for goods and services, they adapted religious language as a means of nullifying Johnson’s influence on the matter. Thus, the explanation of the origins of the Oneida-American alliance lies largely within internal

⁷⁰ Pilkington, ed., *The Journals of Samuel Kirkland*, 95; Taylor, *The Divided Ground*, 74.

Iroquois political and social divisions and not just the external and meddlesome habits of British and colonial authorities.

Moreover, when analyzed within the context of Iroquoian political traditions, the actions of the eighteenth-century Oneidas can be interpreted as an attempt to revitalize their nation's place within the Iroquois Confederacy. The narrative of the Iroquois League Legend, in its multiple versions, depicts the pacification and uniting of the original five nations of the Iroquois by the prophets Deganawi:dah and Hiawatha. Although the Oneidas play a supporting role in the narrative, it is an instructive one. Cultural narratives explaining the Oneidas role in the larger confederate assemblage illustrate the Oneidas' sense of pride and authority. These narratives provided the Oneidas with a collective cultural mindset that existed on a national level. When the Oneida chief, Odatshedeh placed a log across the path to detour Hiawatha and Deganawi:dah, he attempted to highlight the Oneidas' role as a pillar of the Iroquois Confederacy.⁷¹

Meaningfully, the significance of Odatshedeh's role in the founding narrative was reinforced throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Iroquoian political practice. The Iroquois gave subsequent generations of league sachems the name of the original sixteenth-century sachems; Odatshedeh being one of the principal names for the Oneidas. In fact, the title of "Odatshedeh" could also be given to outsiders who had proven themselves capable of advancing the interests of the Oneida nation. The most striking seventeenth-century example of this was the long-time Jesuit missionary to the

⁷¹ Canfield, *The Legends of the Iroquois told by "The Cornplanter;"* Fenton, *The Great Law and the Longhouse: A Political History of the Iroquois Confederacy*; J.N.B. Hewitt, "The Legend of the Founding of the Iroquois League," 133.

Oneidas, Pierre Millet. After being captured by Iroquois forces at Fort Frontenac, the Oneidas formally adopted Millet into their society. Millet had proven himself a valuable religious and civil representative. Consequently, the Oneidas gave him the title Odatshedeh and accepted him into as “one of the Mainstays of the Nation.” Fully aware of the historical significance of the act, the Oneidas imparted the title to Millet not only as recognition of Millet’s service to them but also, like Odatshedeh, to cultivate their relationship with those partners who would enhance the Oneida nation.⁷²

Essentially, Oneida actions from 1768 to 1774 were an attempt to lay a metaphorical log across the path as their ancestors had done at the founding of the Iroquois Confederacy. Unlike the Mohawks, the Oneidas lacked a lucrative imperial connection. Although hampered by illegal land claims, the Mohawks had risen yet again to a prominent place in the confederacy. As a result of the economic infrastructure established in Mohawk territory by Sir William Johnson, nearly all trade and travel to the other Iroquoian nations flowed through that nation. By securing a blacksmith and town meetinghouse, the Oneidas believed that the traffic which flowed through the Mohawks towns would be diverted through Kanonwalohale. An increasing number of Oneidas were simultaneously emulating the actions of their ancestor Odatshedeh and attempting to shed the cultural baggage of the seventeenth century. Like Millet, Kirkland provided a means for the Oneidas to draw attention to themselves. Within the immediate context of the 1770s, the Oneidas’ request for services and funding for a meetinghouse have drawn interest with regards to the escalation of the Johnson-Kirkland rivalry. However, these manifestations of Oneida agency and determination represent an effort to overcome

⁷² Thwaites, *Jesuit Relations*, LXIV, 101; Richter, *Ordeal of the Longhouse*, 176.

centuries of subjection to inferior political and social consideration from their brethren. As dissension within the confederacy split the Oneidas from the interests of some of their confederate brethren, the connections which had been strengthened during this period of Oneida revitalization laid the groundwork for what would become the Oneida-American alliance.

IV. ASHES ACROSS THE FIRE: BREAKING NEUTRALITY, IROQUOIS DISUNITY, AND THE DISSOLUTION OF THE IROQUOIS CONFEDERACY

The American Revolution began in earnest in April of 1775 with the battles of Lexington and Concord. Ordered by the military commander of British forces in America, General Thomas Gage, to secure colonial supplies at Concord, Massachusetts, roughly 700 British troops engaged 77 militiamen at nearby Lexington. Although severely outnumbered, the colonial militia repelled the British forces, only losing 18 men in the process. The British troops suffered a second defeat at Concord, and were driven back to Boston amidst incessant attacks from Patriot militia. Following the formal onset of the American Revolution, both British and American officials prepared for inevitable conflict on the Atlantic, in the American and Canadian colonies and along the western frontier. Considering the frequency of Indian auxiliaries in previous European conflicts, both British and American officials placed the involvement (or noninvolvement) of the Iroquois as a key concern.⁷³

News of Lexington and Concord quickly spread to the Haudenosaunee. Sir William Johnson's nephew and successor as Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Guy Johnson acted as the most influential British official in the Mohawk Valley. He wasted no time explaining the hostilities to the Iroquois in a pro-British light: "This dispute was solely occasioned by some people who notwithstanding a law of the King and his wise Men, would not let some Tea land, but destroyed it, on which he was angry, and sent

⁷³ Mary Babson Fuhrer, "The Revolutionary Worlds of Lexington and Concord Compared," *The New England Quarterly* 85, no. 1 (March 2012), 78-118; Glatthaar and Martin, *Forgotten Allies*, 86; Andrew Jackson O'Shaughnessy, *The Men Who Lost America: British Leadership, the American Revolution, and the Fate of the Empire* (Yale University Press, 2014), 22.

some troops with the General, whom you have long known, to see the Laws executed and bring the people to their senses... [and] shew them their great mistake.” Johnson recognized the need to explain the conflict in terms favorable for the British. As a result, little of the ideological motivations of the Americans reached Iroquoian ears. Johnson wholeheartedly believed that the rebels would put up little resistance and expected the conflict “would soon be over.”⁷⁴ Johnson and the British government understood that should the Iroquois join the British it would require the rebels to fight on an additional front. As a result, British officials targeted this goal and utilized Johnson’s rhetoric throughout the Mohawk Valley.

Whereas the British advertised the benefits of an alliance with the king, the Americans petitioned the Iroquois to remain neutral during the war. The Continental Congress, however, was unable to match British funds allotted to Indian alliances. As the American Indian commissioners noted, “The enemy have a very capital advantage over us in their intercourse with the Indians as they have it in their power to afford them such ample supplies, and those in their interest are continually drawing comparisons.” Consequently, the Continental Congress was barely able to afford the costs of hosting meetings with the Iroquois. The delegates of the Continental Congress, however, were able to supply the Iroquois with gunpowder and clothing. Considering their financial limitations, the Continental Congress chose to petition a course of neutrality from their native neighbors.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Proceedings to GJ with the Six Nations, January 20-28, 1775, *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York*, 8:538-39.

⁷⁵ Graymont, *The Iroquois in the American Revolution*, 87.

Although the benefits of a British alliance were attractive, the Iroquois chose to remain neutral. They preferred to allow the British and Americans to settle the dispute on their own. In fact, even before the conflict between Britain and her American colonies turned violent, the Iroquois preferred to remain neutral, noting that “it was contrary to their custom to interfere between parents and children.”⁷⁶ Neutrality in external affairs was indeed a common Iroquoian policy. As early as the Grand Settlement of 1701, which promoted a policy of unified neutrality, the Iroquois had preferred nonalignment to ensure their autonomy. As Caitlin Fitz has noted, this kind of neutrality “was not a passive neutrality, but an aggressive one in which anglophile, Francophile, and neutralist factions balanced each other.”⁷⁷ This factional balance allowed for a greater number of diplomatic options. By allowing for degrees of factionalism the Iroquois promoted pro-British, pro-French, and neutralist parties that balanced their interests with those of their European counterparts.⁷⁸

Representatives from the Oneida nation offered the first declaration of neutrality on behalf of the Confederacy in June 1775. Gathered at the town of Kanonwalohale, the Oneidas prepared a statement by the “Chiefs, headmen, Councilers, warriors, & youngmen of the Onoida [sic] nation.” Addressing both British and colonial officials, the Oneidas declared that “we are together for Peace and will Exert our utmost Endeavours to keep our Brethren the Six Nations and others further back from disturbing you... We

⁷⁶ Proceedings of Guy Johnson and the Six Nations, December 1-8, 1774, *DRCHSNY*, 8:515-25.

⁷⁷ Caitlin A. Fitz, “‘Suspected on Both Sides’: Little Abraham, Iroquois Neutrality, and the American Revolution,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 28, no. 3 (Fall, 2008), 301; Brandao and Starna, “The Treaties of 1701: A Triumph of Iroquois Diplomacy,” 209-10.

⁷⁸ Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 49, 143-45.

cannot intermeddle in this dispute between two brothers.”⁷⁹ Several months later, the Mohawks offered up a similar pledge of neutrality, declaring that the war was “a family affair.” Despite Guy Johnson’s best attempts to petition aid from his native neighbors, the Mohawks consistently refused his requests. “We told him we should take no part in the quarrel,” the Mohawk chiefs noted. Furthermore, they also requested that both sides cease any attempts to petition for aid, “Whoever applies first, we shall think in the wrong.”⁸⁰

Despite these frequent announcements of neutrality, British officials continued to pressure the Haudenosaunee to abandon neutrality. These overtures for war proved difficult to ignore for many Iroquois warriors. However, for the better part of the first year of the war, Iroquois sachems and matrons were able to check the ambitions of the warriors.

Historians have often attributed the Oneida-American alliance to the influence of the Presbyterian minister to the Oneidas, Samuel Kirkland. Kirkland’s diminished role, especially among the Oneidas, during the Revolutionary period suggests that other factors were at work. A variety of circumstances led to internal divisions within the Confederacy from 1775 to 1777. These factors caused the Oneida nation to forsake their brethren and ally themselves with the Americans. First, Iroquois neutrality collapsed as influential British and American figures vied for support. This left the Oneidas as outsiders within the confederate hierarchy. Primarily British officials preyed on the fears of the Iroquois and meddled in confederate politics, intensifying the preexisting attachments of Iroquoian

⁷⁹ Statement of Jacob Reed, June 1775, Kirkland Papers; William Sunoghsis et al. to the Four New England Provinces, June 19, 1775, AA, 4 ser., 2:1116.

⁸⁰ Speech of Commissioners and Speech of Abraham, Proceedings of the Commissioners of the Twelve Colonies with the Six Nations, August 15 – September 2, 1775, *DRCHSNY*, 8:616-21.

factions. Second, ideological differences among the Haudenosaunee triggered hostile relations between the Oneidas and their brethren. These two factors combined to create a hostile environment for the Oneidas within the Iroquois Confederacy. No longer able to trust their brethren, the Oneidas sought an alliance with the American colonists in an attempt to ensure their nation's continued prosperity.

The historiography of the Oneida-American alliance has focused extensively on the activity of Samuel Kirkland. Despite claims to the contrary, not all of the Oneidas welcomed Kirkland's influence. Although he maintained a following among the residents of Kanonwalohale, the Oneida chief Kanaghwaes, a resident of Old Oneida, brought forth a complaint against Kirkland to Guy Johnson. According to Kanaghwaes, Kirkland "refused to Baptise some of our people, who were not agreeable to him." More damning to Kirkland's cause, Kanaghwaes claimed that the minister tended to "public affairs more than Religion, for he is always collecting news and telling strange matters of the white people, whilst he endeavors to represent us as a people of no consequence to them."⁸¹ This claim refers to Kirkland's frequent translation of the proceedings of the Continental Congress to the Oneidas. However, Kanaghwaes's claim implied that Kirkland had acted of his own accord. In reality, the Oneidas desired to hear of the Continental Congress' meetings and Kirkland willingly obliged their request. Guy Johnson recognized that barring Kirkland from Oneida territory at this volatile juncture would damage the British cause. As a result, he allowed Kirkland to remain for the time being. However, Johnson made it known to all gathered at Johnstown that should he discover proof that these

⁸¹ Proceedings of Guy Johnson with the Six Nations, January 20-28, 1775, *DRCHSNY*, 8:535-36; Graymont, *The Iroquois in the American Revolution*, 65-69.

claims were true “he would cut off Mr. Kirkland’s head as soon as he would a snakes [sic].”⁸²

Kirkland’s Oneidas supporters, however, denied the claims. Many of the residents of Kanonwalohale requested that Johnson stop his frequent attempts to remove Kirkland. “We consider it as no other option that saying no to God,” the Oneida chiefs noted. “We therefore beg you will desist from any farther attempts to drive him off.”⁸³ Kirkland avoided the matter for the time being by reiterating that he had not meddled in state affairs. Instead, Kirkland blamed Joseph Brant for instigating trouble. Kanaghwaes later admitted that the charges had been fabricated by Brant because “that would be agreeable to Colonel Johnson.”⁸⁴ Following the eruption of outright war at Lexington and Concord in 1775, Johnson and British officials altered their approach to Kirkland. On the advice of General Thomas Gage, Johnson banned Kirkland and all dissenting missionaries from the Mohawk Valley. By doing so, Johnson hoped to limit the pro-Patriot propaganda of the current conflict. Johnson’s decision to remove Kirkland, however, robbed the Oneidas of their patron. Ultimately Johnson’s decision proved unsuccessful. Kirkland’s removal alienated many of the Oneidas from British rule.⁸⁵

However, Kirkland’s influence among the Oneidas does not explain the course of events that led to the Oneida-American alliance. The multitude of British authorities who, like Kirkland, meddled in state affairs, affected the dissolution of Iroquois neutrality in favor of a pro-British stance. Three figures in particular influenced the course of Iroquois

⁸² Kirkland’s commentary on Guy Johnson’s letter of February 14, 1775 quoted in Graymont, *The Iroquois in the American Revolution*, 70.

⁸³ Kanonwalohale Chiefs to Guy Johnson, February, 1775, quoted in Glatthaar and Martin, *Forgotten Allies: The Oneida Indians and the American Revolution*, 84.

⁸⁴ Samuel Kirkland to Guy Johnson, February 21, 1775, Pilkington, ed., *The Journals of Samuel Kirkland*, 106-10.

⁸⁵ Glatthaar and Martin, *Forgotten Allies*, 87.

neutrality: Sir William Johnson's successor and nephew, Guy Johnson (1740-1788), William Johnson's son and heir, Sir John Johnson (1741-1830), and William Johnson's former deputy, John Butler (1728-1796).

The Johnson family had for some time enjoyed a lucrative connection to the Mohawks at the two major Mohawk villages of Canajoharie and Tiononderoge. Following Sir William Johnson's death in 1774, Guy Johnson continued to cultivate the Johnson family's relationship with the Mohawks. Naturally, he conveyed a similarly slanted view of events to the Haudenosaunee from the British perspective. It had been Johnson in 1775 who had assured the Iroquois that the war was a result of a small contingent of rebellious colonists and would "soon be over."⁸⁶

Following the battles at Lexington and Concord, Johnson began to rally military support for the British. Aided by the Mohawk chief, Joseph Brant, Johnson brought together nearly 1,700 Indians to a council at Montreal in late July 1775. The gathering was composed largely of a blend of Iroquoian and Canadian tribes. Among the Iroquois representatives, the Mohawks, Cayugas, and Senecas comprised the majority. Johnson distributed presents and "delivered each Nation a War Belt to be held ready for service."⁸⁷ Small contingents of eager warriors, acting without the sanction of their elders, accepted Johnson's war belt. Of those who accepted Johnson's War Belt, the Mohawks played the most immediate and active role in openly fighting alongside British troops in Canada.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Proceedings of Guy Johnson with the Six Nations, January 20-28, 1775, *DRCHSNY*, 8:538-36.

⁸⁷ Proceedings of Guy Johnson with the Six Nations quoted in Glatthaar and Martin, *Forgotten Allies*, 91.

⁸⁸ Although some of the Mohawks accepted the War Belt and fought alongside the British, they were severely reprimanded by the gathered nations of the Iroquois at a Grand Council meeting during the autumn of 1775; Glatthaar and Martin, *Forgotten Allies*, 97-98.

Johnson's call to arms pressured the growing rift between the nations of the Iroquois and, on a more local level, the divisions between warriors and civil chiefs, as the acceptance of the war belt by some of the Mohawks demonstrates. Always eager to gain prestige and plunder, Mohawk warriors jumped at the opportunity to wage war on the American colonists. During the autumn of 1775, the Grand Council of the Iroquois delivered a public reprimand to those Mohawks who had accepted the belt and agreed to deliver the belt to Patriot officials at Albany.⁸⁹

Johnson's tenure as Superintendent of Indian Affairs, however, paled in comparison to the accomplishments of his predecessor, Sir William Johnson. Guy Johnson spent less than a year at the traditional seat of the Johnson family's power at Johnstown, New York before retreating from Patriot forces to Canada. However, his position in the Mohawk Valley, especially during the early years of the American Revolution, prompted open debate about the nature of Iroquois neutrality and further widened the gap between warriors and civil chiefs.

Unlike Guy Johnson, John Johnson was not restrained by British authorities on the continent. As a private citizen, Johnson maintained the support and wealth necessary to affect real change. John returned to the American colonies from a brief stay in England in the fall of 1775. As the eldest son of Sir William Johnson, John received the bulk of the benefits of the Johnson estate. Additionally, he garnered the affection of the Mohawks among whom many of his half-brothers and half-sisters resided.⁹⁰ In 1775, he assumed control of one of his late father's estates and immediately began mobilizing

⁸⁹ Glatthaar and Martin, *Forgotten Allies*, 97-98.

⁹⁰ John Johnson was the son of Sir William Johnson and Catherine Weisenberg. After Weisenberg's death, Johnson married Mary Brant. A match that garnered Johnson the esteem of the Canajoharie Mohawks and Brant's sister, Joseph Brant.

support for the British cause. His actions, however, went unnoticed by Patriot forces residing at Albany. In an effort to clarify Johnson's intentions, the Tryon County Committee of Safety, formed to regulate commerce and diplomatic relations between colonists and the indigenous populations of New York, questioned him on his allegiance. Johnson responded that he would "rather suffer his head to be cut off" than "lift his hand up against the King."⁹¹

Johnson, consequently, assumed the role of one of the main leaders of the British cause in the Mohawk Valley. Making matters worse, a series of rumors regarding Johnson's plan to levy troops sparked Patriot concerns.⁹² After learning of his suspected activities, the Continental Congress instructed General Philip Schuyler to arrest Johnson and disarm all of his followers. Schuyler anticipated resistance from the Mohawks and sent messengers outfitted with a peace belt and a message expressing his peaceful intentions. Despite his best efforts, Schuyler's activity prompted the displeasure of several Mohawk warriors. Some of these warriors viewed Schuyler's march through their territory as an affront to their nation's autonomy. Convinced that an alliance with the British offered profitable opportunities, these ambitious Mohawks used the occasion to incite debate over the trajectory of Mohawk policy.

Recognizing the need to ensure peace and restrict violence towards the Americans, the Mohawk chief, Little Abraham intervened and advised Schuyler's retreat. Regarding Johnson, Little Abraham noted that "he is born among us...and minds his own affairs, and does not intermeddle in public disputes." Little Abraham also took the opportunity to forestall any possible claims against the resident Anglican minister at

⁹¹ Tryon County Committee of Safety to New York Council, October 28, 1775, *JPC*, 2:96.

⁹² Glatthaar and Martin, *Forgotten Allies*, 101.

Tiononderoge: "...likewise our Father, the Minister [John Stuart]...He does not meddle in Civil affairs, but instructs them in the way to Heaven. He absolutely refused to attend to any political matters, and says that they do not belong to him." Little Abraham noted that the "Mohawks are frequently alarmed with Reports that their Minister is to be torn away from them."⁹³ Well-versed in playing the Europeans against one another, Little Abraham understood that the removal of Johnson and Stuart would destabilize the competitive balance between the Patriots and British.

Although Little Abraham had approached the matter diplomatically and affected a peaceful resolution, some members of the Mohawk community viewed Schuyler's intrusion as an overt act of aggression. Before the Mohawk warriors could retaliate, Little Abraham again persuaded them to restrain themselves. He assured General Schuyler that the Mohawks concerned themselves with "nothing but peace."⁹⁴ Schuyler heeded Little Abraham's advice. Johnson met briefly with Schuyler and agreed to surrender his weapons, powder, and ammunition to ensure his continued residence in the region.⁹⁵

Whereas the threat of Kirkland and the Johnsons stemmed from rumor and intrigue, John Butler, a Mohawk Valley loyalist and Sir William Johnson's former deputy, actively and publically sought to sway the Iroquois into an alliance with the British. Butler's persuaded many of the Haudenosaunee away from a policy of neutrality by pressing two key issues: (1) the lack of trade provided by the Patriots and (2) the rampant fear of settler encroachment onto Iroquoian lands. Butler also noted the shared

⁹³ Little Abraham's Speech, *DRCHSNY*, 8: 621-24.

⁹⁴ Tryon County Committee of Safety to Philip Schuyler, January 11, 1776, *Papers of the Continental Congress*, 155-56; Philip Schuyler to John Hancock, January 23, 1776, *Papers of the Continental Congress*, 414-46.

⁹⁵ Graymont, *The Iroquois in the American Revolution*, 84-85.

history between Britain and the Haudenosaunee. He asked that the Six Nations conduct themselves as they had “when Sir William Johnson was alive.”⁹⁶ Ostensibly, this request called for a unified policy of neutrality. When in reality Butler hoped that the Iroquois would unite in their commitment to the British.

Not all of the Iroquois were deceived by Butler’s attempts at manipulation. In a rather pointed denouncement of Butler, the Oneida chief White Skin attempted to persuade his brothers to shun Butler. According to White Skin, Butler’s “Heart is deceitful.” Moreover, White Skin noted that his Oneida brethren had been “imposed upon, deceived, & bewitch’d by a trifling fellow.”⁹⁷ Butler’s tactics played on native fears and yielded lucrative results. However, as White Skin’s example proves, not all of the Iroquois (and especially among the Oneidas) willingly bought Butler’s narrative.

A general lack of resources, however, hindered Butler’s plan to chip away at Iroquoian neutrality. Patriot blockades along the St. Lawrence River severely restricted the goods available to the British. However, by the summer of 1776, the British had regained control of the St. Lawrence River. Shortly thereafter, goods once again flowed to Butler and his counterparts. Armed with an abundance of trinkets and goods, Butler attended a conference among the Senecas at Irondequoit, a small village on the banks of Lake Ontario, and petitioned the Senecas to forego neutrality in favor of an alliance with the British.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ “Minutes of the Proceedings of the Commissioners for the North Department Commencing April 29, 1776,” quoted in Graymont, *The Iroquois in the American Revolution*, 90-91.

⁹⁷ Quoted in Paul Lurance Stevens, *His Majesty’s “savage” Allies: British Policy and the Northern Indians During the Revolutionary War: the Carleton Years, 1774-1778*, State University of New York at Buffalo, 1984.

⁹⁸ Glatthaar and Martin, *Forgotten Allies*, 119.

At the Irondequoit conference, Butler recalled the benefits of an alliance with the king. “The Americans could do nothing for the Indians, whereas the king could do everything. His rum was as plenty as the water in Lake Ontario...his men were as numerous as the sands on the lake shore.”⁹⁹ Butler then presented each attendee with a new suit of clothing. He presented the entire village with guns, ammunition, tomahawks, and scalping knives. He gave each chief a large sum of money.¹⁰⁰ Butler, however, did not stop there. Prior to the conference’s inception, he had acquired the ancient Covenant Belt, symbolizing the friendship and alliance between the Haudenosaunee and the British. He presented it to the Senecas to a chorus of applause. The Senecas happily received Butler’s gifts and discussed his request to take up the hatchet against the Americans. After much deliberation, the Senecas finally reneged on their pledge of neutrality and sided with Butler and the British.¹⁰¹

As the Senecas joined the British war effort, unanimous neutrality was no longer a viable option for the Iroquois. The persistence of British officials, primarily John and Guy Johnson and John Butler, resulted in an environment that proved hostile to those nations still clinging to neutrality. The Senecas and other pro-British nations now viewed their neutralist brethren as pro-Patriot sympathizers.

Although the Senecas were the first Iroquois ally to the British, the Mohawks led the charge against those nations still clinging to neutrality. Since Sir William Johnson’s arrival to the Mohawk Valley in 1753, the Mohawks had cultivated close ties to the British. These ties grew even stronger as Sir William rose to the office of Superintendent

⁹⁹ Draper Manuscript quoted in Graymont, *The Iroquois in the American Revolution*, 121.

¹⁰⁰ Graymont, *The Iroquois in the American Revolution*, 123.

¹⁰¹ Tiro, *The People of the Standing Stone*, 42-50; Graymont, *The Iroquois in the American Revolution*, 126.

of Indian Affairs and offered a lucrative series of networks that had benefited the Mohawks. It is not surprising that some of the Mohawks had pledged their support for the British during the first two years of the war. These were mostly warriors who had been held in check by staunch neutralists, such as Little Abraham, since the outset of war in 1775. However, as the Senecas renounced their neutralist stance, the Mohawks resolved to do likewise. They also chose to pressure their neighboring brethren to follow their example.

Considering the Oneidas' pro-Patriot sympathies, the Mohawks targeted the that nation. During 1775 and 1776, the Oneidas had performed duties for the Americans that caused some of their brethren to doubt their neutralist intentions. During the fall of 1775, the Oneidas discouraged their native Canadian neighbors, the Kahnawakes, from getting involved in the war; a request that Guy Johnson and some of the Mohawks had lobbied. Many Oneidas had also acted as guides, spies, and interpreters for Schuyler. Moreover, despite the minister's absence, residents of Kanonwalohale retained close ties to Samuel Kirkland.¹⁰²

During a particularly heated session of the Grand Council in late February 1776, a group of Mohawks, aided by other members of the senior moiety, plotted to assassinate Samuel Kirkland's assistant, James Dean. Although of English-descent, Dean was raised among the Haudenosaunee for nearly twenty years. Fluent in several Iroquoian languages, Dean proved to be a master at mediating differences between Indians and their colonial neighbors. Wary of Dean's involvement at the Council, the conspiring party sent a warning to Dean and the Oneidas: should he attend the meeting, they intended to

¹⁰² Glatthaar and Martin, *Forgotten Allies*, 96-97.

assassinate him. The elder leadership attempted to dissuade the conspirators but were unsuccessful. Consequently, they warned Dean of their failure and urged him not to attend. In response, many Oneidas, Kahnawakes, and Tuscaroas promised to protect Dean. In his own words, Dean noted that those nations promised to “defend me to the utmost of their power should any violence be offered to me.”¹⁰³ More importantly, however, the threat on Dean’s life reinforced the belief that the Mohawks and many members of the senior moiety no longer cared for the Oneidas’ well-being.¹⁰⁴

Mohawk antagonism increased exponentially when Joseph Brant returned to America from a trip to England in 1776. Assessing the situation, Brant believed that his brethren were besieged by the Americans. His brethren twice had their homeland beset by Schuyler’s troops and were trapped between Patriot forces at Albany and Fort Stanwix. Throughout the remainder of 1776, Brant led a campaign throughout Iroquoian territory to garner support for the British.

Accompanied by the Mohawk Valley loyalist, Captain Gilbert Tice, Brant began his campaign in November 1776. Brant and Tice first traveled to Oquaga, a village at the southern edge of Oneida territory. Composed largely of Oneidas, Tuscaroras, Mohawks, and Mohicans, Oquaga had for some time been a hot bed of Iroquoian factionalism.¹⁰⁵ Brant warned the Oquaga residents that their lands and ways of life were “in danger from the Rebels.” As a result, many of the residents of Oquaga wholeheartedly supported Brant and his mission in for the king.¹⁰⁶ As the British agent, Daniel Claus, reported two

¹⁰³ James Dean Journal, March 21-25, 1776, AA, 5:1100-1101; and James Dean to Samuel Kirkland, March 22, 1776, Kirkland Papers.

¹⁰⁴ Karim Tiro, “James Dean in Iroquoia,” *New York History* 80, No. 4 (October 1999), 391-93.

¹⁰⁵ Following the expulsion of the Mohawk from their lands after the Fort Stanwix Treaty of 1768, the Oneidas allowed a portion of the Mohawks to settle at Onoquaga. Ever since, the village had witnessed divisive conflict, most frequently rooted around doctrinal differences.

¹⁰⁶ “Anecdotes of Brant,” Claus Papers, II, 48.

years later, the residents of Oquaga were “unanimously agreed with him [Brant] in Sentiment and determined to act against the Rebels.”¹⁰⁷ After his brief stop at Oquaga, Brant proceeded to Fort Niagara. Along the way he petitioned the Delawares, an Indian nation under the Iroquois’ sphere of influence, requesting that they too forego a neutralist policy and ally themselves with the British.

Backed by Guy Johnson, Brant traveled to various Iroquoian towns conveying a similar message to the one given at Oquaga. Brant spent the majority of the winter of 1776 visiting the western nations of the Iroquois: the Senecas, Cayugas, and Onondagas. During these meetings, Brant received mostly favorable responses. Despite these receptions, most of the western nations remained firm in their support of neutrality.

Whether a matter of convenience or a slight to the Oneidas, Brant visited with the Oneidas and Tuscaroras last. Adding insult to injury, he demanded that the Oneidas meet with him at the Tuscarora village of Ganaghsaraga. The Oneidas viewed Brant’s refusal to journey to Oneida territory as an insult and refused to the Ganaghsaraga meeting. If he had anything to say to them, the Oneidas told Brant, he should come and tell them in person. For many years, the Mohawks had undermined Oneida autonomy and authority, viewing them as their subordinates. The Oneidas perceived Brant’s indifference as a byproduct of the Mohawks’ irreverence for the Oneidas. Furthermore, the Oneidas learned that Brant, at a previous meeting, had scolded the Oneidas for their relations with the Patriots. Brant claimed that the Oneidas had trampled on the Covenant Chain. Having recently returned from England, Brant spoke on behalf of King George III when he noted

¹⁰⁷ “Anecdotes of Brant,” *Claus Papers*, II, 48; As Barbara Graymont has noted, Brant’s actions, which began at Oquaga, are a classic example of a warrior chief seizing power away from the sachems and matrons, effectively overturning a unified confederate policy, in favor for one that better met the needs of the local residents at Oquaga; Graymont, *The Iroquois in the American Revolution*, 110.

that “The King was very sorry to hear that the two nations of the Confederacy had forsaken him and joined with those in rebellion and deserved to die.”¹⁰⁸

When Brant and the Oneidas finally met, the Oneidas formally declared their neutrality yet again, noting that they maintained affection for both the king and the Americans. Brant responded that the king’s troops outnumbered the Patriot forces and grew more numerous by the day. The Oneidas sharply answered that if Brant’s story was true, the king had no use for the Oneidas. Despite Brant’s best efforts, the Oneidas refused to break their pledge of neutrality.¹⁰⁹

More importantly to the Oneidas’ understanding of the current conflict and their status within the Confederacy, the Mohawks’ machinations during 1776 revealed that neutrality was no longer viable. As the strongest supporters of the British agenda, Brant and the Mohawks directed Iroquoian frustrations with the limitations of neutrality against the Oneidas. Over the last months of 1776 and throughout 1777, the other nations of the Haudenosaunee blamed the Oneidas as well.¹¹⁰

The first signs of a unified antagonism against the Oneidas occurred during the late-February 1776 meeting of the Grand Council. It was during this same session that a small band of Mohawks had plotted to assassinate James Dean. Although Dean was not harmed, the assassination plot prompted many of the Iroquois to doubt Oneida intentions. As a result, many of the attendees withheld pertinent information from Dean and the Oneida delegates. First, many of the Iroquois who resided close to John Butler and Fort

¹⁰⁸ Samuel Kirkland to Philip Schuyler, January 17, 1777, *Indian Affairs Papers: American Revolution*, 66.

¹⁰⁹ “Observations of Brant,” *Claus Papers*, II, 208-11; Samuel Kirkland to Philip Schuyler, January 17, 1777, CC, III, 65-67.

¹¹⁰ In many ways, the Oneidas’ recent altercation with Brant echoed the blocking of the path by Odatshedeh in the Iroquois League Legend.

Niagara purposefully withheld details from their previous meetings with the British. Similarly, Dean reported to his Kanonwalohale constituents that in general “the information which the people of this place received...was not to be depended on; and that the *Oneidas*, on account of their well-known attachment to the Colonists, are not present very likely to be rightly informed.”¹¹¹

Dean also reported that a certain Cayuga sachem rose before the council and formally reprimanded the Oneidas for their attachment to the Americans. In a “long and very spirited speech,” the Cayuga sachem accused the Oneidas of neglecting their duties to the council fire at Onondaga. The same Cayuga sachem also noted that arrangements had been made with the Indian tribes west of New York to stand with the Iroquois against the Americans. The Oneidas, however, had not been consulted on the matter and concluded that some of their brethren were plotting against them. In fact, the Oneidas felt so insecure with the current landscape that they created a secret agreement with the Tuscaroras, Kahnwakes, and some residents of Oquaga, forming a defensive pact against all hostile nations.¹¹²

The Oneidas yet again experienced antagonism from the Cayugas during a condolence ceremony for a fallen Oneida chief in March 1776. Once the ritual was at an end, the Cayugas voiced their displeasure with their Oneida hosts. The Cayugas took offense with the fact that the Oneidas had handed over the hatchet delivered to them by Guy Johnson to Patriot officials at Albany. As the Cayugas argued, the Oneidas should have returned the hatchet to Johnson if they truly maintained a neutralist policy. The

¹¹¹ James Dean to Philip Schuyler, March 10, 1776, AA, 5:768; Tiro, “James Dean in Iroquoia,” 42-50.

¹¹² James Dean to Philip Schuyler, March 10, 1776; Samuel Kirkland to Philip Schuyler, March 12, 1776, AA, 5:768, 1100; Glatthaar and Martin, *Forgotten Allies*, 107.

Cayugas, however, hoped to rectify this wrong by retrieving the hatchet from Albany so that they could return it to Johnson. For this task, the Cayugas requested that several Oneida warriors accompany them. The Oneidas refused and demanded that the Cayugas return home. The debate ensued for the next three days and represented one of the most heated exchanges between the Oneidas and Cayugas in their nations' histories.¹¹³

In September 1776, John Butler prepared a letter that was circulated throughout the Six Nations. The letter asked each nation to take up arms against the Americans. Some of the pro-British recipients of Butler's letter warned the Oneidas that "we shall imagine that our Road of peace is Entirely stopped...and it will oblige us to act accordingly" should the Oneidas refuse.¹¹⁴ The Oneidas received a copy of this letter in October of the same year. After delivering the letter, the messengers added a threat that "not a child's life would be...spared" if the Oneidas refused.¹¹⁵

By the time Brant and the Oneidas quarreled during the winter of 1776, the Oneidas had endured several affronts to their honor and autonomy. The Mohawks had engineered hostile interactions with the Oneidas by heading the assassination attempt on James Dean's life. Members of both elder and younger moieties recognized that the Oneidas had rejected many of the Confederacy's resolutions. Thus, the primary point of contention revolved around the fact that the Oneidas' definition of neutrality remained at odds with the consensus of the Confederacy.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ James Dean to Philip Schuyler, March 10, 1776, CC, III, 79-82; Samuel Kirkland to Philip Schuyler, March 12, 1776, CC, 97-100; Graymont, *The Iroquois in the American Revolution*, 86-87.

¹¹⁴ Speech of Karahkontes, November 18, 1776, AA, 3:755.

¹¹⁵ Speech of Ojistalale, November 18, 1776, AA, 3:755.

¹¹⁶

The final nail in the coffin came when King George III denounced the Oneidas in April 1777. In a message sent through Governor Guy Carleton, King George III warned the Oneidas of the disastrous trajectory of their current path. He had been informed “that their Nation, alone, espoused the cause of those Traitors.” Governor Carleton informed the king that the Oneidas had consistently conveyed a pro-Patriot message to their brethren. Furthermore, the king warned the Oneidas that their current habit of aiding the Americans was punishable by execution. Up until this point, King George had spared “the shedding of their blood” so that he could “restore them to a proper sense of duty and obedience.” However, should the Oneidas not end relations with the American traitors, their deaths would “bear witness to one another” since “they could not be reduced by gentler methods to a due sense of their duty.” Carleton noted that the only way for the Oneidas to avoid this fate was to cease spreading patriot correspondence and allow British and Indian forces to proceed unmolested through Oneida territory.¹¹⁷ By the summer of 1777, the Oneidas were besieged on several fronts. Within the Confederacy, the majority opposed Oneida attempts to secure a path of neutrality. The British King had denounced the Oneidas for their connection to the Patriots. Although not finalized until September of 1777, the Oneida-American alliance had been all but guaranteed following the king’s open denouncement of the Oneidas.

The Oneidas officially committed themselves to the American cause on August 6, 1777 at the Battle of Oriskany. During this battle, roughly 100 Oneidas fought alongside American General Nicholas Herkimer and a force of 700 members of the Tryon County Militia. Under the orders of British Commander, Barry St. Leger, a force of 700 British

¹¹⁷ Edward Foy to [Captain Alexander] Fraser, April 7, 1777, quoted in Glatthaar and Martin, *Forgotten Allies*, 143.

regulars and roughly 800 Iroquois warriors, primarily Mohawks, Senecas, Onondagas, and Cayugas, opposed the Patriot and Oneida forces. The encounter proved disastrous for the Oneidas' relationship with their confederate brethren. After the battle, renowned Mohawk chief, Joseph Brant retaliated against the Oneidas by burning the Oneida town of Oriske. In response, the Patriots and Oneidas plundered the principal Mohawk villages of Tiononderoge and Canajoharie. During a September 1777 meeting at Albany, the Oneidas and Tuscaroras accepted the war belt offered by the Continental Congress. The Oneidas had entered the war as American allies. According to custom, the Oneidas and Tuscaroras deposited the belt at the council fire at Onondaga in recognition of their alliance with the Americans.¹¹⁸

Since the conclusion of the Seven Years' War in 1763, many Oneidas had sought new paths to gain more lucrative avenues of prestige and economic benefits. Their attachment to Samuel Kirkland initially derived from a desire to challenge Sir William Johnson to deliver more benefits to the Oneidas. As tensions flared between the British and their American colonists, the Oneidas maintained contacts with Kirkland and his colonial connections. For the Americans, especially for the Continental Congress, the Oneidas represented the principal member of the Iroquois Confederacy through which all matters rightly flowed. The Oneidas relished this position as head of the Confederacy. Despite their reputation among the colonists many Oneidas sought a course of neutrality to preserve unity. As external forces fractured Iroquoian unity, Oneida connections to the Patriots proved to be the only legitimate option for maintaining their nation's prospects.

¹¹⁸ Taylor, *The Divided Ground*, 92.

V. CONCLUSION

The American Revolutionary War formally ended on September 3, 1783 with the signing of the Treaty of Paris. The treaty formally recognized the American colonies as independent, and the United States as a sovereign nation. The terms of the treaty were generous to the Americans. While the British maintained their territories in Canada, they lost many of their leading forts along the Great Lakes, most notably at Niagara and Oswego, which had functioned as bastions of British power in the region. While the treaty ended the war between Great Britain and the United States, it made no mention of the Iroquois' post-war fate. Many of the pro-British Iroquois believed that they had been betrayed by the king since they were now forced to deal directly with American officials. This prospect was all the more daunting given the Iroquois belief that the Americans desired their lands and their removal from New York State. Britain's Prime Minister, Lord Shelburne, disingenuously addressed these concerns noting that "the Indian nations were not abandoned to their enemies; they were remitted to the care of their neighbors" who were best qualified for "humanizing their hearts."¹¹⁹

To settle the dispute, representatives from the Haudenosaunee met with American officials at Fort Stanwix during the fall of 1784. The Americans demanded that the Iroquois yield their claims to the Ohio River territories, and release all of their prisoners of war. These terms, however, did not apply to the American allies, the Oneidas and Tuscaroras. To ensure the Oneidas would be "secured in their possession of the Lands on which they are settled," the American representatives requested detailed accounts of

¹¹⁹ Lord Shelburne, Prime Minister, quoted in Graymont, *The Iroquois in the American Revolution*, 259-62; October 15, 1783, *Journals of the Continental Congress* 25: 681-87; see also Norton, *Rebellious Younger Brother*, 112-13; Taylor, *The Divided Ground*, 111-12.

Oneida territory and hunting grounds. At the request of General Philip Schuyler and Samuel Kirkland, the Continental Congress rewarded the Oneidas for their “fidelity and encourage their Zeal and Exertions against the common enemy.” The American representatives of the Continental Congress present at the Fort Stanwix negotiations believed they fulfilled this promise by allowing the Oneidas and Tuscaroras to stay in their territories.¹²⁰

The 1784 Fort Stanwix Treaty formally resolved all hostilities between the American government and the Six Nations. Aided by the New York State Government, however, land-hungry settlers threatened the Oneidas’ continued residence in the Mohawk Valley during the post-war period. During the summer of 1785, New York’s Governor George Clinton called the Oneidas to a meeting at Fort Herkimer, near German Flatts, New York. During the proceedings, Clinton revealed his desire to make a large purchase of Oneida lands. Taking advantage of the impoverished Oneidas, Clinton offered the chiefs money and ample supplies of rum in exchange for their lands. Although the renowned Oneida chief Good Peter opposed Clinton’s request, other chiefs agreed. Through 1789, Oneida chiefs continued to sell parcels of land to New York officials and land speculators. Reflecting on the matter, Good Peter noted that “[w]e Indians are unwise and our want of wisdom is owing to our want of knowledge of the ways of white people. White people say to us – , This Measure will be for your good. And we have always been accustomed to obey this voice...and hence we have been deceived in respect to our lands.”¹²¹ Consequently, the Oneidas’ loss of hunting territory

¹²⁰ Minutes of the Treaty of Fort Stanwix Negotiations, October 20, 1784, Neville Craig, ed., *The Olden Time* (Cincinnati, Ohio, 1846-47), 2:426.

¹²¹ Account of Good Peter quoted in Glatthaar and Martin, *Forgotten Allies*, 306-307.

hindered their ability to sustain themselves. Smaller hunting territories yielded a reduced population of wild game. As a result, the Oneidas had fewer pelts to trade for colonial commodities. Therefore, land sales proved the only real means for the Oneidas to remain in their traditional homeland.¹²²

After a year-long absence from Oneida territory, the long-time minister to the Oneidas Samuel Kirkland returned to Kanonwalohale in 1785. Given the nature of the war on the frontier, Kirkland seldom had the opportunity to visit with his Oneida friends at Kanonwalohale in the previous years. Despite his absence, he managed to act as a mediator for the Oneidas during the negotiations at Fort Stanwix in 1784. When he arrived at Kanonwalohale in the summer of 1785, Kirkland lamented the dreadful state of the Oneida nation.

Many Oneidas, as Kirkland noted, had resumed the consumption of rum. Kirkland regretted this regression wholeheartedly as he had campaigned to remove alcohol from Kanonwalohale in the 1760s. As Kirkland learned, traders at Schenectady had supplied the Oneidas with frequent shipments of alcohol during the war and had continued this practice during the post-war period. Like some of their confederate brethren, many Oneidas consoled themselves with rum following the wars' end. However, the poor condition of the Kanonwalohale Oneidas surprised other Iroquois. Mohawk chief Joseph Brant commented when he passed through Kanonwalohale in 1784 that the Oneidas were “continually Drunk with Stinking Rum.”¹²³

¹²² Glatthaar and Martin, *Forgotten Allies*, 307-308.

¹²³ Pilkington, ed., *Journal of Samuel Kirkland*, 120-121; Joseph Brant quoted in Graymont, *The Iroquois in the American Revolution*, 286; Glatthaar and Martin, *Forgotten Allies*, 305.

The Oneidas' problems, however, were not limited to consumption. Writing to his wife Jerusha, Kirkland commented on their awful condition. "Most of my people are degenerated as much as our paper currency depreciated in the time of war." This was partly a direct result of colonial and native violence against Oneida villages during the Revolutionary War.¹²⁴ Many Oneida settlements had been destroyed. By the time Kirkland arrived, few had returned to their previous standard. Consequently, many Oneidas resided in squalor. "They are in plain English," Kirkland wrote ruefully, "filthy, dirty, Nasty creatures a few families excepted."¹²⁵

The Oneidas believed wholeheartedly that the alliance with the Americans would offer opportunities for their nation's improvement. Despite this belief, the Oneidas soon realized the reality of the situation. For the delegates of the Continental Congress, the Fort Stanwix Treaty resolved matters between the Americans and the Six Nations. Thus, the American government turned to balancing the federal budget and mediating issues between the federal and state governments. As a result, the Iroquois were frequently left to negotiate with New York State officials, whose constituents had, for some time, viewed the region as an ideal location for prospective Euro-American settlement. As a result of federal indifference and the aggressive expansion of New York settlers, the Oneidas experienced poverty, an increase in drunkenness, and land loss in the same manner as the pro-British Iroquois. The alliance with the Americans had merely delayed

¹²⁴ In large part led by the Mohawk chief, Joseph Brant, the Oneida settlements of Oriska and Kanonwalohale were targeted by Mohawk attacks throughout the war. Major General, John Sullivan led one of the more destructive campaigns across Iroquois territory during 1779. Numerous Haudenosaunee villages were razed, crops destroyed, and more Iroquois displaced to Canadian settlements.

¹²⁵ Pilkington, ed., *Journal of Samuel Kirkland*, 130; Samuel Kirkland to Jerusha Kirkland, September 10, 1785, Kirkland Papers.

these conditions. Given the aspirations of the Oneidas and the realities of the post-war period, it is prudent to ask why the Oneidas chose to make this decision.

Throughout the Confederacy's existence, factionalism had played an integral role in Iroquois politics, shaping the nature of intra- and inter-tribal relationships. After the Grand Settlement of 1701, which formalized a unified policy of neutrality, factionalism secured Iroquois sovereignty by playing European powers against one another. Under this arrangement, pro-British and pro-French factions obtained preferable treatment and economic compensation. In the long run, however, Iroquoian factionalism negatively affected the viability of the Confederacy, severely hindering attempts at unity.

Following the conclusion of the Seven Years' War in 1763, Oneida attempts to improve their standing within the Confederacy reignited inter-tribal factionalism. The Oneidas watched the Mohawks reap economic benefits from their relationship with Superintendent of Indian Affairs Sir William Johnson. The constant Mohawks' reminder of their dominance within the Confederacy also prompted jealousy among the Oneidas. From 1763 to 1774, the Oneidas sought their own economic gain through the Presbyterian minister Samuel Kirkland. Historians have often cited Kirkland as the catalyst for the Oneida-American alliance. Despite David Levinson's claims to the contrary, Kirkland played a significant role in shaping the Oneidas' understanding of the colonists' conflict with Great Britain. More specifically, Kirkland paved the way for communication between Oneida leaders and the American government.¹²⁶

Traditional explanations of Kirkland's role, however, ignore Oneida agency. Following the conclusion of the Seven Years' War, the Oneida Nation was in shambles.

¹²⁶ Levinson, "An Explanation for the Oneida-Colonist Alliance in the American Revolution;" Graymont, *The Iroquois in the American Revolution*, 1974.

Prone to drunkenness and suffering from a terrible state of poverty, many members of the Oneidas embraced Kirkland as a means of improving their livelihoods. The Kanonwalohale-based Oneidas built a new meetinghouse and hired a local blacksmith in 1775 thanks to Kirkland's colonial connections. The Oneidas' new meetinghouse and loyal patron bolstered the status of the Oneida nation.¹²⁷ The Oneidas, however, did not view this relationship as a commitment to Kirkland and the Americans. They gladly welcomed aid from Sir William Johnson on the rare occasion he chose to help them. The Oneidas garnered thus the attention they desired from their confederate brethren. Members of the Mohawk, Onondaga, and Cayuga nations commented on the Oneidas' new meetinghouse and the miraculous transformation of that nation.¹²⁸

The American Revolutionary War intensified divisions among the Six Nations., The Oneidas were unwilling to forego their position as the principal Iroquoian ally of the American colonies for the sake of confederate unity. As a result the Oneidas clung to a policy of neutrality during the first two years of the war. However, as the British convinced the Senecas and Mohawks to forego neutrality in favor of an alliance with the Crown, the Oneidas remained wedged between two potential courses of action: (1) to forego their connections with the Americans or (2) to ally themselves with the British and maintain confederate unity. The latter option, however, was not viable. From 1775 to 1777 the Oneidas hindered, albeit indirectly, the pro-British war effort. As a result, they garnered the ire of many Mohawks, Onondagas, and Senecas, as well as high-ranking British officials, and even King George III himself.

¹²⁷ The meetinghouse functioned similarly to Odatshedeh's log across the path, which blocked the prophet Deganawi:dah from bypassing the Oneida nation during the sixteenth century.

¹²⁸ Pilkington, ed., *Journals of Samuel Kirkland*, 120-121.

Ultimately, the Oneida-American alliance was a direct result of the Oneidas attempts to obtain material wealth, gain political power, and muster prestige within the Confederacy from 1763 to 1777. During their ephemeral “Renaissance” the Oneidas attempted to redevelop their local villages, embrace western practices, rid themselves of liquor, and garner conspicuous wealth. They utilized Samuel Kirkland to achieve this latter goal. The acquisition of the Kanonwalohale meetinghouse served as a physical manifestation of the Oneidas’ enhanced self-esteem. As war between Great Britain and her American colonies began, the Oneidas desperately clung to a policy of neutrality. They did so primarily because they recognized that an alliance with Britain would deny them all the economic benefits they obtained from the Americans. The only policy that allowed for the maintenance of their status as leaders of the Confederacy in the long term revolved around an American victory, which compelled them eventually to side with the Patriots.

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