

How England won North America: William Johnson and the Importance of Indian
Allies in the French and Indian War

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The eighteenth-century was marred by a number of significant military confrontations between the great European powers of the day. Competing interests were the primary motivator behind the nearly constant fighting that lasted throughout the century. The great powers of Europe battled bitterly for dominance and the fighting spread to their domains across the globe. The Seven Years War (1756-1763) was one of these conflicts. Taking place on four continents and involving a struggle for dominance between the world's greatest powers, England and France, the Seven Years War was a global conflict that resulted in a drastic shift in the balance of power in Europe and North America.

The principle combatants were Great Britain, and Prussia fighting France, Spain, Russia, and Sweden for dominance and assertion of power in both Europe and North America. In the American colonies, where England and France were the belligerents, the conflict took on a different character than it did in Europe. In North America, the fighting was between smaller forces than in Europe and in a wholly unfamiliar terrain, foreign to the heads of state in Europe. Familiarity with the wilderness of North America became important to success, and put the Indian in a central role in determining the course of the war. Alliances with Indian Nations were crucial to military success in North America during the French and Indian War and the securing of them was the deciding factor that ultimately determined the victor of the conflict. Upon the conclusion of the war Britain acquired virtually all of France's holdings in North America and asserted itself as the dominant power on the continent. The Seven Years War, or French and Indian War as it is known in America, was thus a pivotal turning point in the history of North America whose

consequences would include the War of American Independence and the introduction of a new nation onto the world stage.

The War of American Independence often overshadows the French and Indian War in world history, and for good reason. The war for independence was a defining moment in world history for a multitude of reasons, but the truth is that American history would have been on an entirely different course had the French and Indian War ended differently. American independence from England had its origins many years before fighting broke out at Lexington and Concord among colonial militia and English redcoats in 1775.¹ The consequences of the French and Indian War were crucial in bringing about the War of American Independence. The result of the French and Indian War created the necessary circumstances for the movement for independence from England in the colonies. This occurred for a number of reasons.

England's victory in the French and Indian War resulted in nearly complete English dominance of North America. France had put more effort into the European theatre of the war and it had disastrous results. France lost almost all of its holdings in North America, even signing over the Louisiana territory to Spain.² England was now in control of North America and its colonies and Parliament began to exercise its sovereign power over its subjects to a heightened degree. England accrued a considerable cost from the French and Indian War and began to tax its colonial

¹ Fred Anderson, *Crucible of War: the Seven Years' War and the Fate of Empire in British North America, 1754-1766* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000), xxi.

² Frank W. Brecher, *Losing a Continent: France's North American Policy, 1753-1763* (Westport Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1998), 181.

citizens in an attempt to deal with its war debts.³ This taxation without representation became one of the primary motivators for the secession of the colonies from the control of the English crown. Had the French and Indian War turned out differently, England may not have held the authority and control needed to impose such strict rule on the North American colonies and the story of American independence may have turned out entirely differently, or even could have never happened at all.

The French and Indian War was therefore a significant turning point in the history of North America for a number of reasons. It drastically changed the political landscape and put into motion the end of England's control of North America, a position England was only able to hold for a decade and a half. The importance of the French and Indian War will be best understood given the appropriate context and so it will be necessary to first go over the circumstances out of which two of the world's greatest powers, Britain and France, came to war over control of North America.

Conflicts between the great powers of Europe were very frequent during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. These conflicts were motivated by competition, as European powers vied for power and influence in both Europe and North America. The first three of these conflicts – King William's, Queen Anne's, and King George's War – were typical of European conflicts in the eighteenth century, ending indecisively but at great cost to the European belligerents, in both money

³ Anderson, *Crucible of War*, 743.

and human life.⁴ Following the third of these conflicts, the War of the Austrian Succession (1740-1748), known in the colonies as King George's War, there was a re-shifting of alliances in Europe. The Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle (1748), which ended the war, had created a delicate balance of power in Europe.⁵ This balance would soon be undone by the outbreak of the fourth and most important of these conflicts, the Seven Years War (French and Indian War).

England had endured a considerable cost from the War of the Austrian Succession and was left with a weakened alliance with Austria, who had been an essential ally in counteracting French power in Europe.⁶ Having to concede Silesia to Prussia as part of the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle had left Austria disgruntled, having entered the war in 1744 for the sole reason of returning Silesia to Austrian control.⁷ Weakened by the fighting in Europe, feeling the weight of a large debt incurred from the war, and disconcerted by the disillusioned Austrians and subsequent growth in French power in Europe; England became even more intent on securing its foothold in North America.

The wealth that could be gained from the colonies held the potential to restore England from its war debts. The English became intent on securing their hold of North America's abundance for this purpose. King George's War (War of the Austrian Succession) had led to an increased tension between England and France as each challenged the other for control of frontier territory in North America. In particular, the Ohio Country, which spanned from the Great Lakes in the North to

⁴ Anderson, *Crucible of War*, 11.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 35.

⁷ Ibid.

the Ohio River in the South and from the Allegheny Mountains in the East to the Mississippi River in the West,⁸ became a highly sought after region due to its important location for trade and the extensive amount land that could be sold to those looking to settle on new lands on the frontier. It was there, in the backwoods of the Ohio Country, where the next great conflict between England and France began. It was not, however, a war fought solely between the two European powers. A crucial consideration to make is the role that Indians played in the conflict, because who they sided with and when would ultimately decide who won the war.

The name 'French and Indian War' reflects a view of the conflict as England fighting the French and their Indian allies for control of North America, when in reality the conflict was far more dynamic. The Indian role in the French and Indian War can be characterized more appropriately by positioning them as being in-between the French and English, opposing and allying with whomever they viewed as expressing their interests and goals the best at the time. The Indian Nations were well aware that they were caught in the midst of a struggle between two greater powers and so they often resorted to a policy of neutrality.⁹ By remaining neutral they could bargain for their own interests with the Europeans and remain autonomous from the control of either the English or the French. However, as the war progressed the French and English became increasingly desperate for Indian support and neutrality became difficult to maintain for Indian Nations.

⁸ Donald Barr Chidsey, *The French and Indian War* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1969), 21.

⁹ Anderson, *Crucible of War*, 16.

Indian allies were essential in the French and Indian War and the varying success that Europeans achieved in securing them, throughout the conflict, ultimately changed the course of the war. The success of European relations with Indians varied considerably between the English and French. Each had their own ideas about the Indians and the role they would have in their plans for North America. All the while the Indians vied for their own interests, trying desperately to find a favorable balance between the two powerful European states.

The relationship between Native Americans and newcomers to their land, like the British and French, varied considerably. Largely, this was due to the difference in attitude amongst Europeans toward the 'savages'. The French, motivated primarily by prospects of trade, were concerned mainly with the wealth to be made from trading with the Indians. They actively sought to establish trade connections, sending expeditions into the interior in search of trading opportunities.¹⁰ The French were chiefly concerned with the wealth to be made from trading furs with the Indians, and so they spent considerable effort on explorations into the frontier in the hope of finding new trading partners among the Indians of the American interior.¹¹

These trips of exploration put the French into contact with Native Americans of a wholly different sort than those the British were accustomed to encountering in the colonies along the coast. The Indians that inhabited the coast were brutal, sickly, bickered among each other constantly, and were even fond of torture.¹² These were

¹⁰ Chidsey, *The French and Indian War*, 17.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., 15.

the Indians that many English settlers came into contact with and it is no wonder that they initially had such a negative view of them.¹³ Of greater importance was that these explorations put the French into contact with Indians first, and the French wasted no time setting up trade agreements and a network of forts along the frontier.¹⁴ These early relations with the Indians put the French in an advantageous situation to create favorable terms with the Indian Nations. It was on these early relations that the French would foolishly put their confidence when it later came to war with the English in the French and Indian War.

French confidence in their relationship with the Indian Nations was warranted, though foolish, for a number of reasons. The English, with their quickly expanding colonies, posed the clearest threat of encroaching on Indian lands.¹⁵ The French were in North America primarily for trade. Their territories were sparsely populated and didn't pose the kind of threat that the expanding English did.¹⁶ The French, through dealings in the fur trade, had also maintained more intimate relations with the Indians compared to the English who predominantly kept their distance and concentrated more on the prosperity of their colonies.¹⁷ The English with their larger numbers on the continent, concentrated more on agriculture and, having created a relatively strong footing in North America, were less dependent on the Indian's goodwill than the French needed to be.¹⁸ However, as population in the English colonies grew and encroached further into Indian lands in the eighteenth

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Brecher, *Losing a Continent*, 22.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., 23.

¹⁸ Ibid.

century it became increasingly evident to the English that good relationships would need to be struck with the natives if their settlements were to grow unchallenged.

Trade with Indians was commonplace in the colonies, especially along the frontier. Frontier settlers needed security against Indian attacks and trade provided an opportunity to establish good relations with the natives. Trading with the Indians was not just an economic transaction, however, it also consisted of a political dimension.¹⁹ Indians would not trade without first conducting, at the very least, a minimum amount of diplomacy often taking the form of a non-aggression pact. As the relationship continued and trading increased, the non-aggression pact was likely to turn into a full alliance.²⁰ Thus, trade formed the basis of European relations with Indian Nations and the means by which alliances were secured. French excursions into the frontier had garnered a number of such situations with Indians, making the French confident that the Indians would take their side if need be against the English.

The French, however, failed to take into account a number of important considerations that would prove vital when war broke out and each of the powers scrambled to secure Indian alliances that would be essential to their war effort. Where the French failed was in maintaining these Indian alliances and in understanding the ultimate goals of the Native Americans. The Indians wanted guarantees not just gifts. They wanted assurances that their lands were safe from

¹⁹ Francis Jennings, *Empire of Fortune: Crowns, Colonies, and Tribes in the Seven Years War in America* (New York: Norton, 1988), 27.

²⁰ Ibid.

encroaching European settlers.²¹ It was this difference that the English understood and exploited to secure the Indian backing that would win them the French and Indian War.

There are a number of reasons why Indian alliances were essential to victory in the French and Indian War. The wilderness of North America was largely unmapped and Europeans were unfamiliar with the terrain. Successful navigation of it was practically impossible without the aid of an Indian guide.²² The Indian's ability to travel easily through the wilderness made them great scouts and on a number of occasions throughout the war they would provide crucial military information that directed the outcome of engagements between the English and French.²³

The rough terrain of the frontier, where the French and Indian War was to be fought, was very unfavorable for the European military tactics of the day. European armies, with all their formality and regimentation, simply could not be as effective in the dense forests of the Ohio Country as a smaller, quicker force could be.²⁴ Indian war parties could strike fast and disappear quickly into the dense forest, without the loss of many men. Such attacks were also highly effective in instilling fear into Europeans, who were not accustomed to the guerrilla-like tactics of the Indians.²⁵ Small raiding parties of Indian warriors were thus essential to the war effort and the

²¹ Jennings, *Empire of Fortune*, 23.

²² Wilbur R. Jacobs, *Wilderness Politics and Indian Gifts: The Northern Colonial Frontier, 1748-1763* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), 44-45.

²³ *Ibid.*, 144.

²⁴ Fintan O'Toole, *White Savage: William Johnson and the Invention of America* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005), 73.

²⁵ Anderson, *Crucible of War*, 102.

British concentrated specifically on securing the most powerful of the Indians, the Six Nations of the Iroquois, for the crown's cause. The driving force behind this push for Iroquois allegiance was William Johnson, whose close ties with the Mohawk of the Iroquois confederacy would prove invaluable for the British and ultimately win them the war.

The Six Nations of the Iroquois were the dominant Indian Nation east of the Mississippi in the eighteenth century, and therefore became a highly sought after ally for the European powers.²⁶ The Iroquois could provide larger contingents of more experienced soldiers than any other Indian tribe.²⁷ The Iroquois also commanded a strong influence over the other Indian Nations in the Ohio region, making them an important asset in the highly contested territory. The Iroquois League had been an economic and political ally to the English since signing a treaty known as the Covenant Chain during the late seventeenth century.²⁸ The treaty came as a result of the influx of English colonists in New York, who had now become the Iroquois's most powerful trading partner in the region.²⁹ The treaty did not, however, guarantee Iroquois warriors would fight for the English, only that they would be economic and political allies.

The Covenant Chain agreement did however put the English in favor with the Iroquois early on and would later prove useful for British liaison to the Iroquois, William Johnson, in negotiating a military alliance against the French. The treaty

²⁶ Augustus C. Buell, *Sir William Johnson* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1903), 83.

²⁷ O'Toole, *White Savage*, 114.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 65.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 63.

provided a foundation on which Johnson could remind the Indians of their mutually beneficial partnership with the English and the importance of preserving that relationship. The Iroquois, however, were distinctly mindful of their standing and importance as a military ally to the Europeans and were subsequently wary of hastily choosing a side to fight for when the outcome of the war was still uncertain.

The various Indian tribes allied within the Iroquois League often disagreed over policy toward the Europeans, but in general they tried to remain militarily neutral between the two powers.³⁰ This policy was adopted in order to retain some bargaining power between the French and English and to profit from the numerous gifts each offered for their allegiance. Along with trade, gifts were essential to Indian diplomacy and a means by which good standing with Indians, and subsequent alliances, were achieved.³¹ William Johnson, British agent to the Indians of the Northern colonies, understood this perfectly and it was his dealings with the Six Nations of the Iroquois, in particular the powerful Mohawk Nation, that changed the course of the war and ultimately brought about the defeat of the French in North America. In order to understand Johnson's pivotal role, it will first be important to examine the situation in which Johnson found himself; in the midst of a bitter contest for the Ohio Country between the French, English, and Iroquois. It would be this dispute that led the French, English and Iroquois to war.

The French began to expand into the Ohio Country early on in the eighteenth century, specifically commissioning expeditions to the Forks where the Allegheny

³⁰ Jennings, *Empire of Fortune*, 22-23.

³¹ Jacobs, *Wilderness Politics and Indian Gifts*, 11.

and Monongahela rivers join to become the Ohio.³² In 1749, the French sent an expedition led by Celeron de Blainville that placed plates throughout the Ohio Country that stated France's claim to the territory.³³ Control of the junction of these rivers meant control of the Ohio Valley all the way to the Mississippi.³⁴ Therefore, securing the Forks became of the utmost priority for France. The French were especially intent on securing the Ohio country because it would provide a connection between their territorial domains in the north, French Canada, and in the south, French Louisiana.³⁵ English control of the Ohio Country would thus have threatened to cut New France in half and weaken French presence in North America.

Also claiming ownership of the Ohio Country was the Six Nations of the Iroquois. They had frequently raided into the region in years past and subsequently saw the land as falling under their domain as a right of conquest, even though they had never permanently occupied the region.³⁶ The Ohio Country had been a long-standing Iroquois hunting preserve, which in the eyes of the Iroquois gave them further reason to claim the land as theirs, but in the early eighteenth century Indian immigrants began to flock to the region in large numbers.³⁷ Indians came from the East, pushed off their lands by expanding European settlements, and from the west, seeking to be closer to centers of trade.³⁸ Encroachment into the territory by both Europeans and Indian immigrants posed a double threat to Iroquois control of the

³² Brecher, *Losing a Continent*, 11.

³³ James Thomas Flexner, *Lord of the Mohawks: a biography of Sir William Johnson* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1979), 106.

³⁴ Jennings, *Empire of Fortune*, 23.

³⁵ Chidsey, *The French and Indian War*, 21.

³⁶ Buell, *Sir William Johnson*, 83.

³⁷ Flexner, *Lord of the Mohawks*, 102.

³⁸ Jennings, *Empire of Fortune*, 24.

region and influence over its subordinate tribes. The Iroquois were therefore determined to secure their claim to the Ohio Country. To the competing English, it was a matter of weighing income from trade with the Indians with the profits to be made from selling the land to European immigrants.³⁹ The wealth to be made from selling such a large and fertile territory was undoubtedly enticing to the English. It would take the urging of England's most successful Indian agent, William Johnson, to alert them to the seriousness with which the Iroquois made their claim.

In addition to the French and the Iroquois, there was another group competing for control of the Ohio Country. Also intent on laying claim to the Forks was the Ohio Company of Virginia. With a grant from the English crown for five hundred thousand acres, they intended to settle the area and establish settlements and a fur trade with the Native Americans of the region, thereby expanding English trading networks along the Ohio River.⁴⁰ Among the members of the company was a young George Washington, who had inherited stake in the company following the deaths of his father and brother.⁴¹ In response to French intrusion in the Ohio Country, the Ohio Company sent young Washington to ascertain French interests in the region and establish their claim to the territory.⁴²

Following Washington's unsuccessful negotiations with the French, the Ohio Company retaliated by sending a small number to construct a fort at the Forks only to be driven off by a larger force of French soldiers. Seeing this as a clear provocation, the Ohio Company sent Washington back with a force of militia to

³⁹ Jennings, *Empire of Fortune*, 24.

⁴⁰ Chidsey, *The French and Indian War*, 21-22.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁴² Anderson, *Crucible of War*, 45.

secure the Ohio Country.⁴³ Washington attacked the French force, secured victory, and then set about building a small fort in anticipation of retaliation. They were soon attacked at “Fort Necessity”, as Washington called it, and incurred heavy losses before Washington was forced to surrender.⁴⁴

The French quickly destroyed Fort Necessity and any other vestiges of the English in the Ohio Country and then proudly proclaimed the territory for France.⁴⁵ News of Washington’s defeat spread quickly and England soon began plans for expeditions against the French forts in the Ohio Country. The French, understanding the aggressive character of England’s plans, responded by sending troops to Canada and increasing their defenses on the continent.⁴⁶ As the escalation mounted and skirmishes along the frontier occurred more frequently, it became clear that war between England and France was inevitable.

Though an official declaration of war between England and France did not occur until May 1756, fighting in North America had already been going on for a few years.⁴⁷ Throughout the early years of the war the English suffered a number of crushing military defeats, often against much smaller French forces. At the Battle of Monongahela in 1755, the English under General Braddock were routed easily by the French and their Indian allies; losing nearly two-thirds of their force as compared to the French who only lost about twenty men.⁴⁸ Then in August 1756,

⁴³ Chidsey, *The French and Indian War*, 22.

⁴⁴ R. Scott Stephenson, *Clash of Empires: The British, French & Indian War, 1754-1763* (Pittsburgh: Senator John Heinz Pittsburgh Regional History Center, 2006), 20.

⁴⁵ Anderson, *Crucible of War*, 65.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁴⁷ O’Toole, *White Savage*, 157.

⁴⁸ Anderson, *Crucible of War*, 105.

the French easily took the English Fort Oswego and a year later, after a lengthy siege, the English gave up Fort William Henry as well.⁴⁹ These defeats not only demoralized the English; they were seen as signs of weakness to their Indian allies. What Indian allies the English did have began to slip from their control as defeat followed after defeat against the French. The only faithful friend to the Brits was the Mohawk Nation, who refused to abandon their longtime friend, William Johnson. The English, aware that they were at risk of losing an important ally against the French and fearful of the consequences of a weakened position in the Ohio Country, began in earnest to secure an Iroquois military alliance early in the eighteenth century.⁵⁰ Enter William Johnson, the fair-minded Irishman with a distinct savvy when it came to dealing with the Indians of the Northern colonies, particularly the Mohawk, chief tribe of the Iroquois confederacy.

William Johnson held many positions and titles throughout his life. Johnson came from humble beginnings and by the conclusion of his life he had amassed a considerable wealth, particularly in land holdings in the Ohio Valley. As the Northern Superintendent to Indian Affairs, Johnson experienced a unique success that set him apart from other British liaisons to Native Americans, even earning himself a baronetcy.⁵¹ Johnson's ability to deal fairly with the Mohawk, and the Iroquois as a whole, garnered him high esteem among both the Indians and his British superiors. His unique standing among the Indians is reflected by his appointment as the sole intermediary to the powerful Six Nations of the Iroquois

⁴⁹ Ibid., 194.

⁵⁰ Jacobs, *Wilderness Politics and Indian Gifts*, 28.

⁵¹ Milton W. Hamilton, *Sir William Johnson, Colonial American, 1715-1763* (New York: Kennikat Press, 1976), 195.

and all other Indian Nations in the Northern Colonies in 1756.⁵² By 1756, the English were desperate to obtain the Iroquois as an ally and they saw that Johnson, with his unique position among them, was the right man for the job.

William Johnson was born near Warrenstown in Ireland, growing up about twenty miles from Dublin.⁵³ There is no definitive record of his birth, but the best approximation is that he was born in 1715. As a young boy, William became well acquainted with the injustice of being an Irishman, constantly at the mercy of the English Crown. There were few opportunities to be had in Ireland. Landlords cared little for their Irish tenants and were far more concerned with spending their time and money appealing to King George II at his court in London.⁵⁴ When these absentee landlords needed more funds, which they would use to garner influence and favor with the King, they evicted farmers and replaced them with livestock.⁵⁵ This resulted in unfavorable conditions for a bright and ambitious young man, like William Johnson. His future seemed bleak if he were to remain in Ireland, and so it is no surprise that he jumped on the opportunity to join his uncle Peter Warren in America.

Peter Warren was a Captain in the navy before establishing himself with the local merchants of New York by selling captured Spanish and French prizes.⁵⁶ Warren married into a prominent family and bought a three hundred acre farm, where he built "Greenwich House", which was later to become Greenwich Village of

⁵² Hamilton, *Colonial American*, 197.

⁵³ Flexner, *Lord of the Mohawks*, 7.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Hamilton, *Colonial American*, 6.

Manhattan.⁵⁷ Thus established in his new home, Warren set out to make his fortune. Proposals for sale of Mohawk lands to the west were asking for advertisements to be sent all over, including Ireland. Warren jumped on this opportunity and bought land in the Mohawk valley and then asked for his nephew William's help in selling it.⁵⁸

Young ambitious William immediately set out for New York in 1737 and upon reaching his Uncle's land proceeded to work tirelessly to improve Warren's estate and his own settlement on his uncle's land, named Warrensburg.⁵⁹ Among Warren's intentions for young William was that he also do some trading with the local Mohawk Indians because their goodwill would be essential to the estate's success.⁶⁰ This was the beginning of Johnson's relationship with Native Americans, a relationship that would later prove vital to the English war effort.

The Mohawk Valley, where Johnson would make his career and fortune, became a lucrative and strategic area for trade as settlements began to grow in the region. The valley was also an important military consideration because of its proximity to the highly contested Ohio Country.⁶¹ Johnson bought himself some land on the north side of the Mohawk River, where he was to build his estate Mount Johnson. There, Johnson began to establish relations with the local Mohawk and his

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ William Elliot Griffis, *Sir William Johnson and the Six Nations* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1891), 12.

⁵⁹ Buell, *Sir William Johnson*, 9-10.

⁶⁰ O'Toole, *White Savage*, 41.

⁶¹ Flora Warren Seymour, *Lords of the Valley: Sir William Johnson and his Mohawk Brothers* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1930), 10.

honesty and fair dealing soon made him well liked among them.⁶² Initially, Johnson was motivated primarily by the wealth to be made from trade with the Indians, but when tensions in the Ohio Country reached a boiling point Johnson's vested economic interests became threatened by the encroaching French and their Indian allies. Thus motivated, Johnson began to take on a central role in British relations with Indian Nations through his close ties to the Mohawk of the Iroquois confederacy.

Quickly Johnson became a trusted intermediary between the Indians and the English, even earning himself the Indian name "Warraghiyagey" among the Mohawk, which meant "doer of great things".⁶³ The Mohawk were the most powerful nation within the Iroquois confederacy and therefore held the most sway in the league as "the chief tribe of the Iroquois".⁶⁴ Johnson's unique relationship with the Mohawk was due to a number of factors. Unlike many Europeans of the day, Johnson did not share the common perception of the Indians as brutal, unfeeling savages. Johnson saw them for what they were: a proud people with a rich heritage, who were afraid of being driven from the lands their people had hunted on for thousands of years.

Johnson recognized that the Iroquois had claim to the land England and France were fighting over in the Ohio Country and he saw the need for the English to acknowledge this if they wanted the Indians to fight for them. Johnson made himself familiar with Iroquois interests, particularly among the Mohawk, in the Ohio

⁶² O'Toole, *White Savage*, 41-44.

⁶³ Hamilton, *Colonial American*, 45.

⁶⁴ Griffis, *Sir William Johnson and the Six Nations*, 17.

Country and tried to negotiate favorable terms for them when he could.⁶⁵ Johnson showed respect to the Indians and in turn, they accepted him into their tribe and family. What made Johnson a great emissary to the Indians was “his ability to feel simultaneous loyalty to both Indian and white institutions.”⁶⁶ Johnson may have been predisposed to show such empathy because of his upbringing in Ireland, but regardless of how he came to be this way, Johnson was what the Indians needed. He was “a champion adept in threading the political mazes of the English world” and it wasn’t long before his career as Indian liaison took off for this exact reason.⁶⁷

As a trader in the Mohawk Valley, Johnson gained respect through his fair dealing, which earned him the friendship of King Hendrick of the Mohawk.⁶⁸ Hendrick saw that Johnson was a man he could trust with the interests of his Nation. The strong friendship between Johnson and Hendrick would last their lives. Johnson would call on Hendrick and his Mohawk warriors throughout the French and Indian War to fight for the English. The Mohawk provided a strong Indian ally during the war and an important in with the Six Nations of the Iroquois, of which the Mohawk were the most powerful. They came to see him as man they could trust, unlike most Europeans, who were likely to try and trick the Indians.⁶⁹ Johnson gained an elevated status among the Indians by acknowledging their interests, adopting Indian dress and customs, learning their language, and paying very careful attention to

⁶⁵ Hamilton, *Colonial American*, 45.

⁶⁶ Flexner, *Lord of the Mohawk*, 38.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 38-39.

⁶⁹ Buell, *Sir William Johnson*, 14.

Indian protocol during negotiations.⁷⁰ Johnson's good relations with the Mohawk provided not only warriors to fight for the English cause, but also opportunity. By befriending the Mohawk, Johnson put himself in a crucial position to mediate between the Iroquois and his English superiors when it came to forming a military alliance against the French.

Johnson was keenly aware of the importance of the Iroquois as a military ally in the French and Indian War. This is clearly reflected in his personal papers, in which he continually maintained that Iroquois "assistance must be of great advantage on this Service".⁷¹ On numerous occasions Johnson implored his superiors to give him the necessary funds to secure the Iroquois, who Johnson contended were "a useful body of men, so absolutely necessary, as the only Barrier, against so bad a neighbor [as] the French".⁷² Johnson would warn of the consequences "If the French should by their valuable Presents &c overset our [English] Interest with said Indians".⁷³ Johnson understood that the Indians needed to be enticed more to fight for the English than the French. They would only fight when they knew they would be adequately compensated and so providing the appropriate encouragement became tantamount to his position as England's Indian liaison.

⁷⁰ O'Toole, *White Savage*, 57.

⁷¹ William Johnson to William Shirley, Edward Braddock and Sir William Pepperrell, New York, 17 March 1755, in *The Papers of Sir William Johnson, vol.1*, ed. James Sullivan (Albany: The University of the State of New York, 1921), 457.

⁷² Colonel Johnson to Governor Clinton, New York, 22 November 1749, in *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York, vol.6*, ed. E. B. O'Callaghan (Albany: Weed, Parsons and Company, 1855), 540.

⁷³ Johnson to Clinton, *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York*, 589.

Johnson pursued a vigorous gift giving policy throughout his career as mediator between the Iroquois and the English. His personal papers are riddled with detailed descriptions of the various gifts for, and trading with, the Indians. These gifts and trade goods ranged from weapons and tobacco to clothing and trinkets, and always in large quantities.⁷⁴ Johnson was clearly mindful of the importance of trade to Indian relations, writing that, "Trade is undoubtedly the strongest cement to bind the Indians to our Alliance".⁷⁵ Trading and gifts created the necessary goodwill with the Indians that Johnson would need in order to convince them to fight the French.

Johnson also paid careful heed of the ritual dimension of trade with the Indians, giving it as much attention as he did to acquiring profit.⁷⁶ Not only did Johnson don Indian clothing and learn their language, he also made use of their customs to engender favor among them towards the English. For instance, Johnson would use the ceremonial belt or string of wampum on numerous occasions in his dealings with Indians.⁷⁷ The belts, which held sentimental and symbolic value among the Indians, could serve as war belts, peace belts, condolence belts, and even credentials for diplomatic relations.⁷⁸ Johnson would make use of the wampum throughout his career as Indian intermediary, often receiving and sending wampum belts as invitations to meetings between the Indian tribes and the English.⁷⁹ Such customs needed to be observed in order for good relations with the Indians to occur

⁷⁴ A List of Indian Goods, *The Papers of Sir William Johnson*, vol.3, 334.

⁷⁵ Johnson to William Denny, *The Papers of Sir William Johnson*, vol.2, 879.

⁷⁶ O'Toole, *White Savage*, 57.

⁷⁷ Pound, *Johnson of the Mohawks*, 510.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Johnson to James Abercromby, 830-831.

and Johnson paid careful attention to that fact, making use of wampum belts and other Indian customs throughout his time as liaison to the Indians of the Northern colonies.

William Johnson's savvy in Indian affairs was unsurpassed by any other man in the colonies in the eighteenth century. Owing, perhaps, to his Irish background, Johnson was particularly sensitive to Indian culture and customs. As a young Irishman, Johnson became personally familiar with the looming authority of England. Perhaps, Johnson saw a similar situation in English attempts to control the Iroquois in North America and sympathized with the Indian's predicament. Whatever the motivation, Johnson became a unique success as an Indian agent, but his understanding of his Indian brothers did not end there.

Johnson was also acutely perceptive of the Iroquois's concern for the safety of their lands. Johnson warned his superiors of the consequences of European intrusion into them, stating that it "will give them great umbrage and alarm all the Nations, and probably produce consequences wch. may be verry prejudicial to his Majestys Interest, and stop the settling of the Country".⁸⁰ Johnson was referring to the contested Ohio Country where the Iroquois laid claim, as did the French and the Ohio Company of Virginia, and to the west, further into the interior of the continent. What Johnson understood was that it would be much easier to deal fairly with the Indians than risk upsetting them and pushing them toward the French. Johnson saw that only by giving the Iroquois assurances for their land could the English hope for a military alliance against the French.

⁸⁰ Johnson to Cadwallader Colden, *The Papers of Sir William Johnson*, vol. 3, 410.

France pursued a similar Indian policy of using gifts and trade to garner favor with the Indians. The French had held strong alliances with an assortment of Indian tribes throughout the war, especially among the Delawares and Mingo tribes of the Ohio Country.⁸¹ These alliances gave the French superior numbers in Indian allies, as compared to the English, who relied mostly on Johnson's ability to recruit Mohawk warriors from the Iroquois. This was due largely to the constant neutrality of the Iroquois who held the power to shift the balance of the war significantly depending on which side they chose. The English, specifically through the industry of William Johnson, spent considerable effort attempting to achieve the Iroquois as an ally.

The French were at a bit of a disadvantage when it came to swaying the Six Nations of the Iroquois. There was still some lingering resentment by the time of the French and Indian War between the Iroquois and the French over a previous conflict earlier in the century in which the French had backed the Iroquois's Indian enemy, the Algonquians, against them.⁸² The Iroquois lost quite badly and were forced to concede to France's terms in 1701. The Iroquois gave up hunting grounds west of Detroit and promised to stay neutral in any future conflict between England and France.⁸³ France's policy toward the Iroquois was therefore conducted largely in order to maintain this neutrality, and gifts became the principle instrument for achieving that.⁸⁴ The French were largely successful in keeping the Iroquois neutral, owing in part to their military successes early on in the conflict, until the English

⁸¹ Anderson, *Crucible of War*, 31.

⁸² Jacobs, *Wilderness Politics and Indian Gifts*, 27.

⁸³ O'Toole, *White Savage*, 64.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

finally secured the Iroquois as an ally following negotiations over the boundaries of the expanding colonies.

As the British suffered a number of defeats in the early years of the war, Indian assistance became increasingly important. To secure such assistance Johnson resorted to an aggressive policy of giving gifts to the Indians. The giving of gifts was an important precursor to diplomatic relations with the Indians, and Johnson was particularly attentive to that fact.⁸⁵ Throughout his personal papers, Johnson kept extensive accounts of Indian expenses. On numerous occasions Johnson petitioned the crown for more money and trading goods for Indians so as to ensure goodwill among them towards the English and secure Indian warriors for the war at a time when they were greatly needed. British officials would see Johnson's gift giving as extravagant and "charitable to the point of being foolhardy" on a number of occasions, but Johnson's policy of constantly maintaining relationships with the Indians through gifts and trade helped keep the Iroquois neutral at a time when joining the French seemed like the best course of action available to them.⁸⁶

There were a number of reasons why the Iroquois gave fighting for the French serious consideration. French victories early on in the conflict, at Monongahela, Oswego and Fort William Henry, had led the Iroquois to the point of shunning the English and taking up sides with the French.⁸⁷ The Iroquois were also fearful of rumors, cleverly spread by French spies, of an English plan to destroy

⁸⁵ Jacobs, *Wilderness Politics and Indian Gifts*, 11.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁸⁷ Anderson, *Crucible of War*, 105.

them and take their lands.⁸⁸ Intent on coming out of the conflict on the side of the victor and worried the English might be planning to wipe them out, the Iroquois began to see the French more warmly. There were a number of reasons, however, why the Iroquois didn't take France's side, but in fact, dropped their long-standing neutrality and took up the hatchet against them.

British war strategy had taken on a new attitude after William Pitt became Prime Minister in 1756.⁸⁹ Pitt increased the emphasis on securing victory in North America and began to exploit the advantage in manpower that was available in the colonies by using colonial soldiers to a greater degree.⁹⁰ The use of colonial armies would put the English at a clear advantage over the smaller armies of the French, who were in desperate need of reinforcements. In late 1757, a successful blockade by the British Navy was in place that was making it difficult for the French to get supplies and troops to Canada.⁹¹ Without the necessary supplies, the French were unable to provide their Indian allies with gifts to the degree that the English were providing. Johnson's Indian policy was beginning to pay off. The French began to lose control of their Indian allies as conflict and resentment grew between them. Soon their Indian allies had become disillusioned with the French, but they were still far from taking up the hatchet against them. The turning point in Indian relations, and in the French and Indian War as a whole, would come when the Iroquois gave up their long-standing neutrality and decided to take up the hatchet and avenge Iroquois and English blood spilled by the French. This did not occur

⁸⁸ Johnson to Denny, 879.

⁸⁹ Jennings, *Empire of Fortune*, 354.

⁹⁰ O'Toole, *White Savage*, 193.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 195.

until England officially guaranteed the safety of Iroquois lands from the expanding colonies at the Treaty of Easton in 1758.⁹²

At Easton in 1758, the Iroquois confederacy, along with a number of tributary tribes, met with English officials and France's most important Indian ally, the Delawares, to negotiate an alliance and the preservation of Iroquois land interests and hegemony over the subordinate Indian tribes of their domain.⁹³ Through Johnson's urging, a large and powerful Iroquois delegation attended the conference. Even the smaller nations under Iroquois protection, like the Nanticokes, Tuteloes, Chugnuts, Minisinks, Mahicans and Wappingers sent observers.⁹⁴ Such a strong show of force on the part of the Iroquois represented not only the seriousness with which they took the conference, but also the influence that Johnson held with them. Johnson was able to rally the Six Nations to attend the conference under the presumption that Iroquois land complaints would be resolved, while at the same time, he urged the Pennsylvania governor to give the Iroquois "satisfaction with regard to their Land Complaints, and by a solemn public Treaty to agree upon clear and fixed Boundaries between our Settlements & their Hunting Grounds".⁹⁵ Johnson knew that the Iroquois would only fight for the English with the assurance of their freedom from European encroachment, so he sent his most trusted agent to represent himself and Iroquois interests at the conference at Easton, while he maneuvered amongst his superiors to secure their backing for a treaty that safeguarded Iroquois lands.

⁹² Anderson, *Crucible of War*, 275.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ O'Toole, *White Savage*, 200.

⁹⁵ Johnson to Denny, 879.

Johnson's maneuvering paid off. Pennsylvania agreed to cede all claimed lands west of the Allegheny Mountains back to the Iroquois and promised to prevent future settlements in Iroquois territory.⁹⁶ The Six Nations were also able to bring France's longtime Indian ally, the Delawares, back into the fold of the confederacy.⁹⁷ Now back under Iroquois authority, the Delawares could no longer fight for the French. If they chose to raid with the French they risked upsetting their Iroquois masters who still held some resentment towards the Delawares for their long-standing alliance with the French.

Without Delawares support, the French could no longer hold Fort Duquesne, an important military installation at the intersection of the Allegheny and Monogahela Rivers in the Ohio Country, and were forced to abandon and destroy it in late 1758.⁹⁸ Without a significant French threat to the Iroquois in the Ohio region and with assurance of the safety of their lands from encroaching European settlements, largely due to Johnson's efforts, the Six Nations were finally in a favorable position for the English to try and strike an alliance with them as a whole, rather than with just a single nation like the Mohawk. The English were now taking the upper hand in the war and the Iroquois could see that. The Iroquois had always been apprehensive about choosing sides, afraid of choosing wrongly, but now they could take up the hatchet as a confederacy against the French without having to fear a significant French reaction. Now they had their English brothers to protect them.

⁹⁶ O'Toole, *White Savage*, 200.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

A full alliance of the Iroquois Confederacy with the English would follow soon after the Treaty at Easton in 1758. At the forefront of the push for this alliance was William Johnson. Johnson, as the obvious choice, was the perfect man for the job. Johnson was ordered to secure Indian warriors for an upcoming expedition against the French fort at Niagara.⁹⁹ The success of the expedition would be more assured with Indian warriors backing the English and Johnson knew he had to deliver. Johnson knew the Iroquois could be enticed to fight the French, especially after receiving the concessions at Easton in 1758, but it would also be important to muster other Indian allies, and if at all possible, turn some of France's Indians too.

With Iroquois land claims placated and the Delawares back under the authority of the Six Nations, Johnson turned to the task of bringing the rest of France's Indian allies over to side with the English. A conference was called, and in April 1759 the Six Nations met with William Johnson at Canajoharie. The conference would have been held at Johnson's home had there not been smallpox at Fort Johnson at the time.¹⁰⁰ Johnson sent belts of invitation to all the Indian tribes of the region, even those who had long been allies to the French. As if all at once, France's Indian allies began to abandon them. Johnson received news that the "Tionontatis, the Miamis, the Shawnees, the Amikwas, the Chippewas, and the Missiaugas, all western tribes long in alliance with the French" were on their way to Canajoharie to strike an alliance with the English.¹⁰¹ France was now without any significant Indian

⁹⁹ Flexner, *Lord of the Mohawk*, 201.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 198.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 199.

ally and the Iroquois quickly decided to officially abandon neutrality and ally themselves with the winning side, the English.

Without any significant Indian allies and with the English closing in on their remaining holdings in North America by sea, the French soon came to realize they could no longer hold in North America. The French surrendered after successful British campaigns against Quebec and the fall of the crucial Fort Niagara.¹⁰² The surrender of the French in North America, in 1760, came only a year after the conference at Canajoharie. With the Indians on their side the English took North America and proudly proclaimed the French and Indian War over, though the fighting in Europe, the Seven Years War, continued for a couple more years.¹⁰³

The Seven Years War was a global conflict that resulted in an entirely new country being introduced onto the world stage. The results of the war laid the groundwork for the coming American Revolution. Had the French secured victory in North America we could be signing the national anthem in French, but the French didn't. They lost the war and all their major holdings in North America. French resentment over the end result of the conflict put them in a favorable position to be called on later during the Revolution to aid in the fight against the English. The American theatre of the Seven Years War, the French and Indian War, was therefore an important conflict for the future of the American continent. The backwoods fighting in the Ohio Country ultimately determined who would control North America.

¹⁰² Ibid., 221.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 247.

Essential to the course of the French and Indian War was Indian alliances. The Six Nations of the Iroquois, who were the most formidable Indian power in the Northern colonies, predominantly tried to follow a policy of neutrality towards their European neighbors. Intent on remaining autonomous and free of the control of the Europeans, they delayed choosing sides in the French and Indian War until the odds were in England's favor, and only after considerable effort on the part of England's agent to the Indians, William Johnson. The Indians were concerned mainly with the security of their lands in the midst of an expanding European presence and Johnson's understanding of that concern provided the means to secure the powerful Iroquois for the English. With the Iroquois, and their subordinate Indian tribes under Iroquois authority, behind them the English were able to overcome French forces in North America and secure the continent for the English crown.

Indian allies were essential to the course of the French and Indian War and European Indian agents were in a critical role as the means of achieving them. The Indians were an important military asset owing to their knowledge of the North American wilderness, their subsequent use as spies and guides, and their style of warfare that was largely unfamiliar to the Europeans who were used to fighting in formations and straight lines. Indians were also able to raid along the frontier, striking fear into the hearts of colonial settlers, and disappearing back into the forest without the loss of many men. Indian allies became an essential factor in achieving victory in the wilderness of the North American frontier.

French excursions into the interior in search of trading opportunities put the French into a favorable position to make Indian allies before the English, who

focused on their colonies more than trade with Indians. However, the French failed to take into account the Indian's importance of maintaining relationships with Indians through trade, a consideration that was not lost on William Johnson, chief English intermediary to the Indians of the Northern colonies. Johnson enjoyed unique success negotiating with the Indians, in particular with the most powerful nation of the area, the Six Nations of the Iroquois. Johnson's success was due in large part to the way Johnson treated America's natives. Johnson observed Indian customs with the utmost concern and used that knowledge to engender a strong trust between him and the Indians he was dealing with. This trust provided the basis for bringing the Indians to negotiations over trade, but more importantly, it provided the necessary goodwill to negotiate for a military alliance against the French.

The French enjoyed considerable success early on in the war, aided significantly by their Indian allies, defeating English forces of a larger number on a number of occasions. These defeats inspired doubt among the Iroquois and there was a precarious period when the Six Nations could have conceivably joined the French had it not been for an English blockade and the gift giving policy of William Johnson. Johnson kept up this policy at a time when the French could not, and the implications are obvious when one considers that soon after France lost all of its Indian allies, it lost the war. France lost its Indian allies because it couldn't provide what the English could and because the English, under the guidance of Johnson, came to understand what the Indians cared about more than gifts or trade in English goods. They wanted a guarantee of the safety of their lands from the growing

colonial settlements and Johnson gave them just that. With these assurances in hand, the Iroquois could fight without fear. Soon after the Iroquois joined the English, the French were forced to abandon their holdings in North America. With the French out of the picture, the English could concentrate on their colonies. In an attempt to counteract a considerable cost incurred from the Seven Years War, the English began to tax their colonies in North America. The American colonies resisted increased English control and the stage was thus set for the next great conflict in North America, the War for American Independence.

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