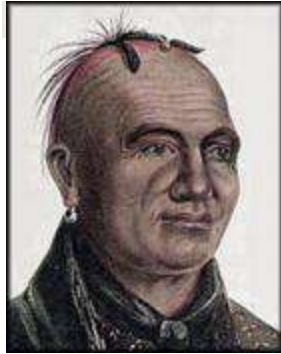


Introduction



Joseph Brant or Thayendanegea, Mohawk chief, led four of the "Six Nations" against the American rebels. Detail of lithograph by Thomas McKenney (produced between 1836-1844).

Credit: Image courtesy of [American Memory](#) at the Library of Congress.

We desire you will hear and receive what we have now told you, and that you will open a good ear and listen to what we are now going to say. This is a family quarrel between us and Old England. You Indians are not concerned in it. We don't wish you to take up the hatchet against the king's troops. We desire you to remain at home, and not join on either side, but keep the hatchet buried deep." —The Second Continental Congress, [Speech to the Six Nations, July 13, 1775](#)

At the outbreak of the Revolutionary crisis in the 1760s, Native Americans faced a familiar task of navigating among competing European imperial powers on the continent of North America. At the close of the era in the 1780s, Native Americans faced a "New World" with the creation of the new United States of America. During the years of conflict, Native American groups, like many others residents of North America, had to choose the loyalist or patriot cause—or somehow maintain a neutral stance. But the Native Americans had distinctive issues all their own in trying to hold on to their homelands as well as maintain access to trade and supplies as war engulfed their lands too. Some allied with the British, while others fought alongside the American colonists.

In this lesson, students will analyze maps, treaties, congressional records, first-hand accounts, and correspondence to determine the different roles assumed by Native Americans in the American Revolution and understand why the various groups formed the alliances they did.

We are Told that the Americans have 13 Councils Compos'd of Chiefs and Warriors: The Chickasaws Send a Message of Conciliation to Congress, 1783

The Chickasaw Indians occupied a key region of northern Mississippi. They held in check the French and Choctaws with their allies and trading partners the British. The American Revolution ended that balance of power. The Chickasaws sought neutrality but also felt allegiance to the British due to their long-held ties. In 1779, the Virginians sent threatening messages warning them of dire consequences if they did not make peace. The Chickasaw chiefs replied in a bold manner. The Mississippi River valley changed significantly when the Spanish replaced the British in West Florida. The Chickasaws found themselves without allies and caught in a competitive crossfire between Spain, the new United States government, and the various new states. The once defiant Chickasaw leaders sought to inaugurate a new relationship with the new United States by sending this message to Congress in the spring of 1783. They desired a halt to encroachments on their land and regular access to supplies in order to appease their belligerent young warriors.

July 28, 1783

TO HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT OF THE HONORABLE CONGRESS OF TEJ UNITED AMERICAN STATES

Native Americans

Friend & Brother,

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

Brother,

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

Brother,

Notwithstanding the Satisfaction all these things give us we are yet in confusion & uncertainty. The Spaniards are sending talks amongst us, and inviting our young Men to trade with them. We also receive talks from the Governor of Georgia to the same effect-We have had Speeches from the Illinois inviting us to a Trade and Intercourse with them-Our Brothers, the Virginians Call upon us to a Treaty, and want part of our land, and we expect our Neighbors who live on Cumberland River, will in a Little time Demand, if not forcibly take part of it from us, also as we are informed they have been marking Lines through our hunting grounds: we are daily receiving Talks from one Place or other, and from People we Know nothing about. We Know not who to mind or who to neglect. We are told that the Americans have 13 Councils Compos'd of Chiefs and Warriors. We Know not which of them we are to Listen to, or if we are to hear some, and Reject others, we are at a loss to Distinguish those we are to hear. We are told that you are the head Chief of the Grand Council, which is above these 13 Councils: if so why have we not had Talks from you,-We are head men and Chiefs and Warriors also: and have always been accustomed to speak with great Chiefs & warriors-We are Likewise told that you and the Great men of your Council are Very Wise-we are glad to hear it, being assured that you will not do us any Wrong, and therefore we wish to Speak with you and your Council, or if you Do not approve of our so Doing, as you are wise, you will tell us who shall speak with us, in behalf of all our Brothers the Americans, and from where and whome we are to be supplied with necessaries in the manner our great father supplied us-we hope you will also put a stop to any encroachments on our lands, without our consent, and silence all those People who sends us Such Talks as inflame & exasperate our Young Men, as it is our earnest desire to remain in peace and friendship with our Br: the Americans for ever.

Brother,

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

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

We have desired our Br. Mr. Donne, who brought talks from General Clark, and has been some time among us, to deliver this talk to you, and speak it in our behalf to your Grand Council, that you may know our want, and as you are wise, that you may direct us what to do for the best. He has Promised, at our desire to take it to your great council fire & to bring as your answer, that you may be no more in the dark-beleive what he tells you from us; we have told him all that is in our hearts.

Native Americans

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

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

MINGHOMA, PYAMATHAHAW, KUSHTHAPUSHASA, PYAMINGOE of Christautra, PYAMINGO of Chuckaferah.

Source: William P. Palmer, ed., *Calendar of Virginia State Papers and other Manuscripts from January 1, 1752 to December 31, 1784 Preserved in the Capitol at Richmond* (Richmond, VA., 1883), 3:515–17.

13f. Revolutionary Limits: Native Americans



Mohawk Indian Thayendanege, also known as Joseph Brant, served in the British army as an interpreter of native languages during the Revolutionary War.

While the previous explorations of African American and white female experience suggest both the gains and limitations produced in the Revolutionary Era, from the perspective of almost all **NATIVE AMERICANS** the American Revolution was an unmitigated disaster. At the start of the war Patriots worked hard to try and ensure Indian neutrality, for Indians could provide strategic military assistance that might decide the struggle. Gradually, however, it became clear to most native groups, that an independent America posed a far greater threat to their interests and way of life than a continued British presence that restrained American westward expansion.

Native Americans

CHEROKEES and **CREEKS** (among others **TRIBES**) in the southern interior and most Iroquois nations in the northern interior provided crucial support to the British war effort. With remarkably few exceptions, Native American support for the British was close to universal.



This drawing shows an Iroquois warrior dressed for battle.

The experience of the **IROQUOIS CONFEDERACY** in current-day northern New York provides a clear example of the consequences of the Revolution for American Indians. The Iroquois represented an alliance of six different native groups who had responded to the dramatic changes of the colonial era more successfully than most other Indians in the eastern third of North America. Their political alliance, which had begun to take shape in the 15th- century, even before the arrival of European colonists, was the most durable factor in their persistence in spite of the disastrous changes brought on by European contact. During the American Revolution, the Confederacy fell apart for the first time since its creation as different Iroquois groups fought against one another.

The **MOHAWK** chief **THAYENDANEGEA** (known to Anglo-Americans as **JOSEPH BRANT**) was the most important Iroquois leader in the Revolutionary Era. He convinced four of the six Iroquois nations to join him in an alliance with the British and was instrumental in leading combined Indian, British, and Loyalist forces on punishing raids in western New York and Pennsylvania in 1778 and 1779. These were countered by a devastating Patriot campaign into Iroquois country that was explicitly directed by General Washington to both engage warriors in battle and to destroy all Indian towns and crops so as to limit the military threat posed by the Indian-British alliance.

In spite of significant Native American aid to the British, the European treaty negotiations that concluded the war in 1783 had no native representatives. Although Ohio and Iroquois Indians had not surrendered nor suffered a final military defeat, the United States claimed that its victory over the British meant a victory over Indians as well. Not surprisingly, due to their lack of representation during treaty negotiations, Native Americans received very poor treatment in the diplomatic arrangements. The British retained their North American holdings north and west of the Great Lakes,

Native Americans

but granted the new American republic all land between the Appalachian Mountains and the Mississippi River. In fact, this region was largely unsettled by whites and mostly inhabited by Native Americans. As a Wea Indian complained about the failed military alliance with the British, "In endeavoring to assist you it seems we have wrought our own ruin." Even groups like the **ONEIDA**, one of the Iroquois nations that allied with the Americans, were forced to give up **TRADITIONAL LANDS** with other native groups.



When British General John Burgoyne marched from Canada to Albany, some of the Native American warriors he enlisted began killing settlers. When the news of Jane McCrea's murder reached major cities, many young Americans enlisted to fight.

Despite the sweeping setback to Native Americans represented by the American Revolution, native groups in the trans-Appalachian west would remain a vital force and a significant military threat to the new United States. Relying on support from **SPANISH COLONISTS** in New Orleans as well as assistance from the British at **FORT DETROIT**, varied native groups continued to resist Anglo-American incursions late into the 19th century.

This ongoing resistance resulted in treaties with the United States that would much later be the basis for redressing some illegal losses of **INDIAN LANDS**. Although the meaning of the Revolution for most Native American groups was disastrous, their continued struggle for autonomy, independence, and full legal treatment resulted in partial victories at a much later date. In some ways, this native struggle showed a more thorough commitment to certain revolutionary principles than that demonstrated by the Patriots themselves.