

Neutrality Negotiations in Acadia and Iroquoia

by

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INTRODUCTION

“Neutrals should sit still,” or so advocated the Dutch jurist Hugo Grotius, who lay the foundations for international law in the early 1600s.¹ Several months after the American War for Independence commenced at Lexington and Concord, Little Abraham, a Mohawk chief, declared the very same, that is, that his people wished “to sit still” in the conflict between American rebels and the British crown and “see you fight it out.”² Oneida chiefs had recently come to a similar conclusion, declaring earlier in 1775 that they wished to be “nutrail in these critical times, these times of great confusion”³ In spite of these declarations, the Mohawk and Oneida nations, both members of the Iroquois Confederacy, would eventually become partisans on opposite sides of the Revolution. Sitting still had not kept them neutral. Indeed, the Revolution shattered the ancient confederacy, which had until then successfully maintained cohesion and autonomy by advocating political neutrality in the face of European colonization. The Acadians, who espoused neutrality and secured autonomy in the British colony of Nova Scotia between 1713 and 1755, had long adopted a pacifistic neutrality that more closely aligned with Grotius’ maxim. But pacifism and passivism were very different stances, and the Acadians were not passive. Instead, they, like the Iroquois, actively negotiated for their own autonomous agenda by refusing to submit to the British crown. In historical reality, neither group could maintain their autonomous position by sitting still. It is to the activities of neutrality that this thesis attends.

¹ In Koen Stapelbroek, “The Rights of Neutral Trade and Its Forgotten History.” *Trade and War: The Neutrality of Commerce in the Inter-State System*, 2011.

² “Reply of the Indians, delivered by Abraham, a Mohawk Sachem, Speech by the Onondaga Sachem” Aug. 31, 1775, American Archives, ed. Peter Force (9 vols., Washington, DC, 1837-1853), ser. 4, 3: 485-487.

³ “Oneida Declaration of Neutrality, 1775” Kirkland Papers (KP).

This thesis will argue that the neutrality of the Acadian people and the Iroquois Confederacy was a diplomatic expression that both groups creatively performed and negotiated in order to preserve autonomy from the imperial powers who sought dominion over them. Often, tensions arose between the neutrality that the Acadians and Iroquois declared, and the imperial reception of that neutrality: affirmative declarations usually reflected complex agendas, while imperial rejections tended to denude all nuance. In negotiations with the British Empire, both the Acadians and the Iroquois pursued autonomy by claiming to be neutral entities, a political stance that British officials tolerated when times were good, and criminalized when times were bad. In advocating for neutrality, these two groups claimed independence from the French and British empires. The history here told reanimates a wider spectrum of political life in eighteenth-century North America by focusing on the experiences of two groups who tread ground between imperial rivals.⁴

Acadian and Iroquoian neutrality was active, performative, and temporal. In performing neutrality between empires, these groups employed it as a strategy of resistance. Crucially, neutrality was a posture in imperial politics, rather than a characteristic inherent to the identity of either group. Indeed, the Acadians and the Iroquois tried to secure neutral status from imperial powers so as to maintain their own autonomy and advance their own agendas; they adopted it to remain beyond the dominion of competitive imperial powers. For a time, both groups carved political space for themselves by performing neutrality. Within the space that such a posture

⁴ Recent studies have shed light on the fact that ideology and allegiance in the eighteenth century North America was far more of a sliding scale than is traditionally imagined. For example, Alan Taylor, *American Revolutions: A Continental History* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2016); and Maya Jasanoff, *Liberty's Exiles: American Loyalists in the Revolutionary World*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011

secured, they maintained control over their lives and lands in the face of European colonization and intercolonial war.

In conjunction with its performativity, Acadian and Iroquoian neutrality was temporal. These groups espoused neutrality when they needed to, but it was not a perpetual state of their being. The expressions of neutrality that this thesis analyzes are precisely those moments when circumstances in imperial politics necessitated that these groups negotiate their neutrality in order to secure their autonomous agendas. This thesis examines Acadian oaths and Iroquoian Covenant Chain renewals to find evidence of complex expressions of neutrality. In Acadia, neutrality negotiations occurred when British government officials made rounds to the scattered Acadian settlements in the region to administer oaths of allegiance to the British crown. In Iroquoia, neutrality negotiations occurred before and after periods of war in negotiations with the French and British. Though the Acadians did swear oaths and the Iroquois did maintain the Covenant Chain alliance, they both pursued neutrality in these supposed rituals of fealty to the British, and carved out political and geographic space for themselves as a result. In making such a claim, this thesis refines some scholarship that describes Iroquois neutrality as ending once the group become more dependent on the Euroamerican world.⁵ Moreover, this thesis uses the concept of neutrality to fill gaps in three separate but related historical fields: Acadian history, Iroquois-British relations, and neutrality studies.

Francophone, Catholic settlers of modern day Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, the Acadians created a small but prosperous community along the tidal flats of the inner Bay of Fundy. Of French ancestry, the Acadians crafted a self-sustaining way of life centered on farming

⁵ Daniel K. Richter, *The Ordeal of the Longhouse* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1992)

reclaimed tidal marshland. “Acadia or Nova Scotia,” as the region they populated was known, was intermittently oriented toward France and Britain throughout the seventeenth century. In 1713, the Acadians became, at least in theory, Francophone and Catholic subjects of the British Empire. With cultural and historical ties to France, but allegiance due to Britain, the Acadians’ identity was especially fraught because, even after 1713, Acadia was disputed between Britain and France and largely controlled by the Mi’kmaq. The Acadians feared the consequences of the British subjecthood repeatedly asked of them after 1713 for its potential to curtail their right to freely practice Catholicism, but also because they feared upsetting the balance they maintained with the French-allied Mi’kmaq.⁶ In this context, they pursued neutrality in order to maintain the conditions that allowed their idiosyncratic identity to thrive.

Once described as “the Romans of the Western World,” the Iroquois Confederacy was a powerful Indigenous political grouping that controlled Iroquoia, a geographic region concentrated in what is now upstate New York, and that also included settlements in southern Ontario and along the colonial frontiers of Pennsylvania and Ohio.⁷ Though scholarly debate remains over the extent of the Iroquois “empire,” one Iroquois spokesman in 1987 sufficed to say that in colonial America the Iroquois “were a power to be reckoned with and they changed the course of the history in North America.”⁸ Militarily powerful and politically complex, the Iroquois Confederacy spoke in imperial politics with one symbolic voice. The political expression that comprised the Iroquois Confederacy predated contact with Europeans.⁹ Consensus among fifty tribal chiefs from across

⁶ Naomi Griffiths, *From Migrant to Acadian* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2004).

⁷ Richter and Merrell, *Beyond the Covenant Chain* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1987), 5.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁹ It is essential to understand that “Iroquois,” is a term of uncertain origin derived from an Algonquian language, and most regularly used by the French. Another common name for the

the confederation —both militaristic “warriors” and cerebral “sachems”—emerged from “council fire” meetings, which were historically held at Onondaga, in central Iroquoia. Ceremonial fires also burned at imperial centers around Iroquoia (particularly Albany and Niagara), where the Iroquois conducted their diplomacy with colonial governments. Political consensus hashed out at these council fires made its way back to the geographically disparate villages throughout Iroquoia, though there was never any way to ensure that each village strictly adhered to league-wide edicts.¹⁰

Imperial peacetime and imperial wartime strained the autonomy of the Acadians and the Iroquois in different ways. During imperial peacetime—generally, between 1700 and 1744—these groups pursued neutrality in diplomatic negotiations with the British and the French. The sources on which this thesis draws largely animate neutrality negotiations between these two neutral groups and the British. Specifically, the Acadians cultivated the unusual status of neutral French inhabitants of the British colony of Nova Scotia by refusing to swear unconditional oaths of allegiance and fighting for their own agenda in a long series of oath negotiations. Meanwhile, the Iroquois used the ancient Covenant Chain with the British—a living agreement that linked the two entities—to advocate for their own autonomous interests and maintain political and geographical space between themselves and British North America.

Iroquois Confederacy is the Haudenosaunee, deriving from the Seneca language and translating roughly to “The People of the Longhouse.” However, “the Iroquois,” or “the Iroquois Confederacy” are the most succinct terms to describe the confederacy as it expressed itself to imperial powers, and so this thesis refers to the Haudenosaunee in those terms. The documents that constitute the foundation of this thesis, negotiations between the British and the Iroquois, do not ever describe the Iroquois as the Haudenosaunee or the People of the Longhouse. Instead, the Confederacy is referenced as the Iroquois, the Five Nations or the Six Nations, or, more pejoratively as “the Indians” or “the Savages.” In some cases, these documents mention only one specific nation, e.g. “the Mohawk” or “the Oneida.” For more on naming, see Daniel K. Richter, *The Ordeal of the Longhouse* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1992), 1.

¹⁰ Barbara Graymont, *The Iroquois in the American Revolution* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1972), 16.

Imperial wartime brought considerably more attention to Acadia and Iroquoia, as both groups occupied borderlands between the French and British empires, who now faced off against one another. In times of war, the neutrality espoused by these groups threatened the British, who made more concerted efforts to assure their allegiances. The tenets of neutrality that the Iroquois established proved far more durable than those negotiated for by the Acadians. Beginning in 1744 with the outbreak of King George's War, the Acadians' refusal to swear oaths strained their ability to successfully negotiate with the British governors of the colony, as their long record of refusing complete allegiance in order to retain their self-declared autonomy—which was always disputed by the British—came to be seen as unbearably insolent. On the other hand, the Iroquois managed to transition the tenets of diplomatic neutrality that they had established in peacetime to the period of intercolonial warfare that began in 1744. Though warfare would put new strains on the Iroquois, they utilized the Covenant Chain agreement and the mutual respect it promised in order to maintain political space for themselves beyond the increasingly polarized and militarized belligerents who fought for control of the region.

Although both Acadian and Iroquois neutralities eventually faltered under the pressures of imperial war (the Acadians at the outset of the Seven Years' War and the Iroquois in the midst of the American Revolution), their successful maintenance of neutrality throughout long stretches of the eighteenth century displays a record of resistance to the onslaught of European colonialism. In their ability to carve out political and geographic space for themselves by negotiating doctrines of neutrality, these groups exhibited political skill and agency that tells a story of defiance to and freedom from the powers that organized North America. This thesis tells a new story about the Forty Years War—the perpetual period of intercolonial conflict in North America—in which the

central actors are neither belligerents or victims, but rather participants with their own goals and agendas that aligned with neither imperial power.

Some scattered work has been done on neutrals in eighteenth-century North America. The richest body of such scholarship centers on Nova Scotia and Quebec during the American Revolution, and the diplomatic policy adopted by the United States in the 1790s.¹¹ Iroquois neutrality is well-studied in the early years of the eighteenth century, but little-considered after 1750.¹² Two useful theories of neutrality deriving from this scholarship serve as touchstones for this study's understanding of neutrality.

In Jon Parmenter and Mark Robison's article on Acadian and Iroquois neutrality during the intercolonial wars, they proffer the following definition:

Neutrality situates a people or state outside alliances or other commitments that align it with any given group in a competitive environment. Idiosyncratic circumstances such as geographic isolation or the need of adversaries to communicate through the good offices of a neutral party sometimes help maintain the neutrality of a group in the midst of belligerent rivals. Neutrality in wartime has generally carried with it these implications of aloofness, and thus it has been viewed historically almost exclusively as a reactive policy,

¹¹ John B. Brebner, *The Neutral Yankees of Nova Scotia: A Marginal Colony during the Revolutionary Years* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1937), 291–353; Donald Desserud, "Nova Scotia and the American Revolution: A Study of Neutrality and Moderation in the Eighteenth Century," in *Making Adjustments: Change and Continuity in Planter Nova Scotia, 1759–1800*, ed. Margaret Conrad (Fredericton, NB: Acadiensis Press, 1990), 89–112; Gustave Lanctot, *Canada and the American Revolution, 1774–1783*, trans. Margaret M. Cameron (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 92–148; for United States diplomatic neutrality see, for example, Richard Owens, *The Neutrality Imperative* (New York: University Press of America, 2009).

¹² Richter, *Ordeal of the Longhouse*; Richard Haan, "The Problem of Iroquois Neutrality: Suggestions for Revision," *Ethnohistory*, Vol 27 No. 4, 321. For studies that extend the lifespan of neutrality into the latter half of the eighteenth century, see Jon Parmenter, "After the Mourning Wars: The Iroquois as Allies in Colonial North American Campaigns, 1676-1760." *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, 64, no. 1 (2007): 39-76.

rooted in isolationism or weakness, and lacking in imagination or initiative.¹³

Extending Parmenter and Robison's challenge to the notion that neutrality implies aloofness and a lack of imagination or initiative, this thesis shows that the Acadians and Iroquois endeavored to pursue their specific agendas at every neutrality negotiation. Moreover, this thesis challenges the idea that neutrality puts people outside "alliances or other commitments" by demonstrating that, in fact, alliances and commitments often enabled neutrality.

Meanwhile in a treatment of Nova Scotia during the American Revolution, political scientist Donald Desserud proffers the following definition of political neutrality, which emphasizes, as this thesis will, the political skill and understanding that such a position required:

Political neutrality refers to that neutrality when the neutral party can and must maintain communications with both sides, and must behave in such a manner as to avoid helping one side at the expense of the other, or helps and hinders each in an equitable fashion, but cannot avoid being actively involved in the dispute. Political neutrality, further, would seem to require considerable political skill to be successful, a skill which would require a sound understanding of the issues at hand, and the character of the combatants.¹⁴

Crucially, the expressions of neutrality examined in this thesis were not improvised or spontaneous. The Acadians and the Iroquois demonstrated "considerable political skill" in their negotiations of neutrality.

This thesis will unfold over five substantive chapters. Chapter One problematizes the tendency to consider neutrality as a measure of simplicity rather than of complexity, drawing on Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's *Evangeline* and other romanticized accounts of Acadia, which aided and abetted a historical tendency to paint Acadians as simple neutrals, rather than complex

¹³ Parmenter, "Perils and Possibilities," 167.

¹⁴ Desserud, "Nova Scotia in the American Revolution," 97.

agents in the Atlantic World. The argument in this chapter, that neutrality records complexity and agency, rather than simplicity and apathy, holds true for both the Acadians and the Iroquois, and grounds the historical analysis that guides the remaining four chapters.

Chapter Two narrates the history of Acadian neutrality in loyalty oath negotiations with the British. It examines three extended moments: first, oath negotiations in the aftermath of the treaty of Utrecht (1713 to 1730); second, negotiations leading up to and during King George's War (1740 to 1746); and third, negotiations on the eve of the Acadian expulsion (1750 to 1755). It explains how Acadian neutrality emerged, persisted, and, eventually, precipitated the violent expulsion of the Acadians.

Together, these chapters historicize Acadian neutrality negotiations to show that Acadian expressions of neutrality created significant political space within which they pursued an autonomous agenda and manufactured critical distance between themselves and the British, something which also characterizes the parallel history of Iroquois neutrality in the eighteenth century, which the final three chapters relate. As these chapters show, the Covenant Chain relationship with the British, which would seem to be an indicator of Iroquois alliance, actually ensured Iroquois neutrality

After a brief transition that explains the Covenant Chain, Chapter Three outlines the development of Iroquois neutrality in peacetime, arguing that it emerged in diplomatic negotiations in 1701 out of a necessity to enter into treaty relationships with increasingly powerful—and adversarial—European powers. The successful negotiation of neutrality 1701 allowed for the Iroquois to maintain autonomy over their lives and land without making war.

Chapter Four discusses the altered contours of Iroquois neutrality during the intercolonial wars in the mid-eighteenth century, arguing that the Iroquois managed to remain neutral during

both King George's War and the Seven Years' War. This chapter discusses how the Iroquois adapted the tenets of neutrality that they had established in peacetime in order to secure continued control over their homelands and maintain relative peace in their communities.

Chapter Five discusses Iroquois neutrality during the American Revolution, underlining that the Americans created a new opportunity for the Iroquois to retain autonomy through neutrality, before essentially ending the possibility of Iroquois neutrality altogether. All of these chapters focus on the Covenant Chain as a central diplomatic avenue through which the Iroquois successfully advocated for their neutrality, and show that the Iroquois were able to utilize neutrality in order to secure geographic autonomy and diversify their political and economic options.

SECTION ONE: ACADIA

CHAPTER ONE

Simple or Neutral?

Evangeline's Acadia and History's Acadia

Over the past 150 years, it has been difficult to understand Acadian history apart from the melodramatic, pastoral imagining of Acadian life and the Acadian expulsion put forth by the American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow in the epic poem *Evangeline, A Tale of Acadie*. Published in 1847, the work unfolded the story of its eponymous heroine's lifelong search through America for her betrothed, Gabriel Lajeunesse, after they were separated in *le grand dérangement*—the violent expulsion of approximately fifteen thousand Acadians—francophone settlers of modern day Nova Scotia and New Brunswick—by the colony's British governors. Numbering between fifteen and twenty thousand in 1755 and populating the British colony of “Acadia or Nova Scotia,” the Acadians' steadfast refusal to swear unconditional oaths to the British, and their suspected allegiance to the French—despite a long-established stance of political neutrality—led the British governor of the province to summarily order the expulsion the entire population from the land they had fashioned livelihood and community upon for generations.¹⁵

The stories of *le grand dérangement* (often referred to simply as the embarkation, expulsion, or deportation) and of pre-deportation Acadia were severely understudied before *Evangeline*. The Acadians, mostly illiterate descendants of the French peasantry, recorded little of the texture of their own lives and history in writing.¹⁶ As such, much of Acadian history was written from European, and later American and Canadian, perspectives. As A. J. B. Johnson puts it, “The general absence of Acadian-authored texts leaves the door wide open to commentators who feel inclined to project qualities on the people of the period.”¹⁷ To this day, it is Longfellow's poem that most influentially renders the spirit of a lost people. However, in romanticizing Acadia

¹⁵ Christopher Hodson, *The Acadian Diaspora* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

¹⁶ For a comparative analysis of Acadians and the French peasantry, see Kennedy, *Something of a Peasant Paradise* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2014).

¹⁷ Johnston, A. J. B. “The Call of the Archetype and the Challenge of Acadian History.” *French Colonial History* 5 (2004): 67.

and the Acadians, Longfellow paints them as simple, an archetype that abstracts from their complex political relationship with empire, most noticeable in their neutrality negotiations with the British government.

This chapter juxtaposes literary Acadia with historical Acadia. In many ways, *Evangeline* created an origin myth for a dispersed and battered people; decidedly, though, the Acadia that *Evangeline* depicted abstracted from historical reality.¹⁸ In short, the origin story that has come to govern Acadian memory mistakes the actively negotiated neutrality of the Acadians for inherent simplicity. Most centrally, this chapter will argue that the narrative abstraction of the bucolic, simple Acadian—a long held stereotype that Longfellow channeled—illuminates a central misunderstanding about neutrals in the Atlantic World: namely, they are written off as simple. Acadian history, as opposed to the literary memory of Acadia, reveals the agency of an idiosyncratic identity group in increasingly polarizing imperial circumstances. As we will see, the tendency to write off neutral groups as unimportant, especially in histories of conflict and empire, limits historical understanding of these agentive, political third parties. By interrogating the assumptions and realities of neutrality first through a deconstruction of literary Acadia, it will become clear that understanding oft-neutral groups as “simple,” or ahistorical, denies them the political agency required to navigate the maelstrom of imperial politics.

“Forest Primeval” or Imperial Fault Line?

¹⁸ Expelled from their homelands, the Acadians were dispersed throughout the British empire. Eventually, a significant portion of the diaspora made community in Louisiana, where “Acadians” became “Cajuns.” For a treatment of the Acadian Diaspora, see Hodson, *The Acadian Diaspora*. For a treatment of the creation of Cajun identity and its Acadian antecedents, see the work of Carl Brasseaux, especially *From Acadian to Cajun* (Mississippi: University of Mississippi Press, 1992).

Europeans tended to romanticize Acadia as a biblical land of plenty, an image propagated by Longfellow, which belied the important political geography of the region, and the fraught identity of its people. Indeed, Acadia's political geography formed a central feature of the Acadian claim to neutrality; and indeed, the developing identity of the growing population of denizen Acadians reflected the group's position on what Elizabeth Mancke would later aptly describe as an "imperial fault line."¹⁹ In the first fifty years of settlement, thanks to competing French and British claims, a handful of Scottish and English migrants found themselves struggling for survival in routinely harsh northern conditions alongside a larger population of settlers from, chiefly, the Poitou and Loire regions of France. In addition to the imperial interests in Acadia, the Mi'kmaq retained sufficient control over the interior of peninsular Acadia. As was customary in early contact zones, the Mi'kmaq lent local expertise to their intrusive new neighbors that in many ways sustained the colonial project on the peninsula.²⁰

The history of this remote corner of North America garnered general cultural currency with the publication of *Evangeline*. Indeed, ever since 1847, audiences for whom the word "Acadian" meant nothing might nod knowingly or begin a recitation upon hearing the name *Evangeline*; indeed, the text is perhaps one of the most ubiquitously read and taught works of North American literature, and its first lines amongst the most iconic in American poetics:

This is the forest primeval. The murmuring pines and the
hemlocks,
Bearded with moss, and in garments green, indistinct in the
twilight
Stand like Druids of eld, with voices sad and prophetic,
Stand like harpers hoar, with beards that rest on their bosom,
Loud from its rocky caverns, the deep-voiced neighboring ocean
Speaks, and in accents disconsolate answers the wail of the forest.

¹⁹ Elizabeth Mancke, *Fault Lines of Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

²⁰ Bill Wicken, *Encounters with Tall Sails and Tall Tales*, (Montreal: McGill University, 1994) 227-241.

This is the forest primeval; but where are the hearts that beneath
it
Leaped like the roe, when he hears in the woodland the voice of
the huntsman?
Where is the thatch-roofed village, the home of Acadian
farmers, —
Men whose lives glided on like rivers that water the woodlands,
Darkened by the shadows of earth, but reflecting an image of
heaven?
Where are those pleasant farms, and the farmers forever departed!
Scattered like dust and leaves, when the mighty blasts of October
Seize them, and whirl them aloft, and sprinkle them far o'er the
ocean
Naught but tradition remains of the beautiful village of
Grand-Pré...²¹

The universal appeal of a romantic wilderness removes this “forest primeval”—Acadia—from any historical temporality. Longfellow mythicized *Evangeline* so as to make the protagonist’s story—and therefore that of the Acadians—relatable to a general Victorian readership. Indeed, the poem’s popularity gave testament to the universality of the story it told, which emanated from a dinner conversation with fellow poet Nathaniel Hawthorne, who related the tale of lovers separated in the embarkation, who searched for each other for the rest of their lives only to be reunited in their dying moments. Eight years after its publication, *Evangeline* had been translated into German, Polish, French, Danish, Swedish, Dutch, and Italian. One hundred years later, it had been published in approximately 270 different editions and translated an estimated 130 times, a testament to its universal appeal.²²

The lineage of a romanticized Acadia, dating back to the early sixteenth century, when the region got its name, centered on two mythical abstractions—the primitive beauty of the land and

²¹ Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, “Evangeline, A Tale of Acadie” (1847).

²² A. J. B. Johnston, “The Call of the Archetype and the Challenge of Acadian History.” *French Colonial History* 5, no. 1 (2004), 77.

the simplicity of its people (the Acadians, not the indigenous Mi'kmaq, who were left out of Longfellow's rendering). Indeed, despite its ubiquity in literary circles—both upon publication and through the centuries—*Evangeline* in 1847 was only the newest iteration in a long tradition of mythical or embellished writing and thought about Acadia. This tradition served to create a usable past for the authors' purposes, be they colonial (like Giovanni da Verrazzano and Dièreville), anticolonial (like Abbé Raynal), or patriotic and popular (like Longfellow). Thus, despite diverse agendas, all of these writers of *Acadie* shared a conception of Acadia as a land removed from history. They either prefigured or imposed a conception of a plighted people with little understanding of the forces that governed their lives. Stripped of agency, the “simple” Acadians were painted as helpless victims torn from the North America they claimed as home.

Since Europeans first laid eyes on the Northern Atlantic coast—let alone the Bay of Fundy—they began narrating Acadia from a European perspective that knew little of the region as it actually was. In 1524, the explorer Giovanni da Verrazzano christened the North Atlantic region “*Arcadie*,” a name that harkened back to the Classical era, connoting, in poetic fantasy, a “pastoral paradise.”²³ Most scholarship suggests that *Arcadie* distilled to *Acadie* in part thanks to Verrazzano's appellation and in part thanks to the fact that “akati” was a popular Mi'kmaw suffix meaning “place of.”²⁴ Regardless of the true origin of the name, Acadia was initially thought of as

²³ Oxford English Dictionary. Accessed Mon Feb 20, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/arcadia>.

²⁴ For one treatment of the origins of “Acadia,” see John Mack Faragher, *A Great and Noble Scheme: The Tragic Story of the Expulsion of the French Acadians from Their American Homeland*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 2005), 6.

a “*paradis terrestre*”—heaven on earth.²⁵ Moreover, the linguistic proximity of “Acadia” to “Arcadia” connotes a paradisiacal land, even to this day.

Ever since Europeans first reached *Acadie*, it was a contested land. European settlement of “Acadia or Nova Scotia” occurred in fits and starts. Clashing French and English charters—in 1604 and 1621, respectively—preceded Euroamerican community by several generations. In 1689, a full eight decades after the establishment of the French settlement of Port Royal (1605), approximately only one thousand Europeans permanently inhabited the wooded peninsula. These inhabitants established themselves in the meadows along the shores of the Bay of Fundy, whose prodigious tides washed up on mainland Canada to the west and the jutting peninsula of modern day Nova Scotia to the east.²⁶ Though still well outnumbered by the Mi’kmaq on the peninsula, that the Indigenous peoples called Mi’kma’ki, a community of French-speaking settlers was entrenched in the disputed colony of “Acadia or Nova Scotia,” what they would call *Acadie*, by the turn of the eighteenth century. Economically stable and reproductively self-generating by the 1680s, this group of settlers gradually cultivated an idiosyncratic identity that could not be reduced to their European origins. The Acadian people, as they became known, were Catholic and French speaking, but they were not, strictly, Frenchmen. In a fluid, frantic, yet remote settlement context on the beckoning shores of North America, the Acadians established an unusual degree of self-sufficiency.

Longfellow’s Sources and the Myth of Romantic Acadia

²⁵ Marc Lescarbot, a lawyer and poet from Paris, was the first to compare the region with a “Paradis Terrestre,” in his account of his expedition to New France in 1606, Lescarbot, Marc. *Histoire de la Nouvelle-France*. (Paris: Edwin Tross 1866.)

²⁶ For census information and population estimates, see Naomi Griffiths, *The Contexts of Acadian History, 1686-1784*. (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992).

In penning *Evangeline*, Longfellow drew on source material that was diverse in certain ways yet uniform in others. Despite the fact that by 1847 a small cadre of American historians had begun telling the history of the Acadian expulsion—it molded easily into the American ideological project, with freedom-loving farmers pitted against villainous British tyrants—Longfellow eschewed what then sufficed as historical scholarship for romanticized, literary, and mostly French accounts of pre-deportation *Acadie* in his research.²⁷

One of his sources, Sieur de Dièreville, a French surgeon and botanist, romanticized a plentiful and bucolic Acadia, and simple, idling Acadians following a year's tour in 1699-1700:

Yet ever is the habitant content
With his abode; he only for
His living works, and no one speaks
To him of Taxes or of Tithes...
Each one in peace beneath a rustic roof,

And in the winter, keeps himself quite warm
Without a farthing spent on Wood; where else
Could such Advantages be found?
A Land of *Cocagne* this might be.
But if a Hillside of Champagne were there,
Better than any other it would be...

Leisure delights them, and they love their ease;
This Country from a thousand vexing cares
Has set them free; no Taxes burden them,
And so they only work that they may live.
They take things as they come.
When times are good, then they rejoice,
They suffer when times are hard,
Each keeps himself as best he can,
And without envy or Ambition, waits
Until his modest fortune bears its fruit;
Blind Fortune, when she equalized,
Exempted them from jealousy.
Men cause themselves no great fatigue
By labor in this Land; and as they have
No other intrigues, they beget

²⁷ Hodson, *The Acadian Diaspora*, 8.

Abundant offspring by their wives.
Of virtue, which in these our times
Is rare, this is the real abode...²⁸

Such reverence to the virtuous simplicity of the Acadian existence, with its notable lack of mercantilism, political expression, or connection to empire led A. B. Johnston to argue that Dièreville was making distance between the imperial regime of which he was a part—with its bustle of colonialist practices—and the idyllic North American community which lived in a “Land of Cocagne”—a word which translates to “a land or place abounding in good things.”²⁹

In reality, despite the isolation of the region, the land that the Acadians farmed lay on an increasingly important borderland between the snowballing North American claims of England and France. Encroaching upon the homelands of the Mi’kmaq, the Acadians found themselves at the nexus of several military and political interests in an evolving and often volatile contact zone. Indeed, it would always be Acadia’s geography—rather than its natural resources—that made it an important Atlantic World locale. But an important locale it always was. French and English desires for a lucrative extract colony or a vibrant imperial settler colony on the Acadian peninsula subsided once the soil was found to be low yielding, the winters harsh, and the Mi’kmaq resilient and powerful.³⁰ However, the region straddled New England to the south and Canada to the west, meaning that in spite of its lack of inherent value (in contrast, for example, to Saint Domingue or Massachusetts Bay), the peninsula retained strategic political and military significance to North American imperial powers.

For much of the eighteenth century, it was international custom to refer to Acadia as “Acadia or Nova Scotia.” Though long-winded, this designation was not redundant. In fact, it

²⁸ Drièreville, *Voyage to Port Royal*, 91-2.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 91.

³⁰ Wicken, *Encounters*, 209-263.

perhaps was insufficient. The land to which it referred, which Longfellow and his French lineage called *Acadie*, was home to several indigenous groups (the Mi'kmaq were most powerful), variously claimed and administered by two European empires (the British and the French), and intermittently occupied by transatlantic travelers of all sorts. The region was coveted by Europeans for its proximity to Europe, its plentiful cod fisheries, and the promise that it would serve as a valuable access point into the mainland interior of “the New World.”³¹ Thus, the literary Acadian’s distance from the contingencies of the imperial Atlantic World abstracts significantly from the reality of the Acadian experience.

Acadian Identity and Acadian Subjecthood

Evangeline is widely credited as initiating both academic and cultural understanding of Acadian history. A flurry of historical scholarship emerged in the decades after it was published, and the story has been constantly commodified for economic purposes since 1847.³² As Carl Brasseaux pointed out in an academic debunking of the *Evangeline* myth, “legends are often confused with historical fact by the general public,” and business incentives can lead interested parties to “further embellish and exploit legends for their own profit, thereby transforming folklore into ‘fakelore.’”³³ Indeed, the simple Acadians of *Evangeline* hold cultural and economic currency well into the twenty-first century, yet they remain a mythical abstraction of the historically-

³¹ For physical descriptions of the region, see Andrew Hill Clark, *Acadia* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1968).

³² See Brasseaux, *In Search of Evangeline* (Kingston, ON: Blue Heron Press, 1988); and Naomi Griffiths, "Longfellow's "Evangeline": The Birth and Acceptance of a Legend." *Acadiensis* 11, no. 2 (1982): 28-41; Hodson, *The Acadian Diaspora*.

³³ Brasseaux, *In Search of Evangeline*, 8.

contingent Acadians whose relationship to empire was, by the 1700s, an important aspect of their identity.

Culturally, the scattered settlements in Acadia were decidedly French. Preceding the English by several decades, the French settlers of Acadia established the French language and Catholic faith as normative to the region. In addition to mostly French, Catholic settlers who immigrated to Acadia, the Jesuit missions to Mi'kmaw communities were quite successful.³⁴ Still, as was the case in many early French settlements, a fair amount of cultural tolerance (for European customs and Indigenous practices) characterized the first century of colonization, not least because harsh winters and low numbers necessitated cross-cultural camaraderie.³⁵ By the 1700s, though, the Acadians by and large were Catholic and Francophone.

Acadians defined themselves between the two dominant imperial rivals of Northeast North America. Importantly, inexact imperial claims and counterclaims on the land that the Acadians inhabited slackened these culturally French settlers' sense of allegiance to one European power or the other. As a result, a sense of Acadian identity developed that took no single empire as a defining point of reference. Rather, they thought of themselves as autonomous. Imperial territory disputes on "Acadia or Nova Scotia" were not systematically addressed for the first 100 years of settlement, making it easier for the Acadians to claim political space between empires; the colony existed on the periphery of each empire, and, without prodigious economic prospects or truly favorable settling conditions, was of fairly minor importance to either.³⁶

³⁴ Griffiths, *Migrant to Acadian*, 309-375.

³⁵ Griffiths, *The Contexts and Contours of Acadian History* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1992), 8-10.

³⁶ Griffiths, *Migrant to Acadian*, 133-167.

Indeed, throughout the seventeenth century, “Acadia or Nova Scotia” was varyingly governed by London and Boston or Paris and Quebec. Following 100 years of disputes between the English and the French over who had the more legitimate claim to the region of the colony, it gained international status as a French colonial holding in the 1698 Treaty of Ryswick, which ended King William’s War (in the same treaty, France acquired what would soon be known as Saint Domingue).³⁷ The extent of “Acadia or Nova Scotia” was frequently debated alongside the question of its imperial orientation; as Naomi Griffiths explains, “disputes between these European powers were not only about where the limits of the Acadian territory should be drawn but also, frequently enough, *about whose colony it was that the Acadians inhabited.*”³⁸ Though the Treaty of Ryswick meant that the eighteenth-century dawned on the Acadians with a reference point to the French Empire—one that aligned with their cultural customs—seemingly perpetual warring between the French and British empires meant that there was little to suggest that the terms at Ryswick would last.

Events in between 1710 and 1713 oriented Acadia, at least tentatively, back toward Britain, which heavily politicize the culturally French identity of the Acadians who occupied the region. Historians often point to the British siege of the French settlement of Port Royal in 1710 as the British “conquest” of Acadia as not actually doing much to change the relationship the region had to empire.³⁹ Though Acadia’s imperial orientation and the allegiance of the Acadian settlers of the colony were internationally established as British, both would be heavily contested for the next five decades, creating space within which the Acadians could secure neutrality. The Treaty of

³⁷ Ibid, 166-167.

³⁸ Griffiths, *Contexts*, 6.

³⁹ Plank, *An Unsettled Conquest*; Reid et al, *The “Conquest” of Acadia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004).

Utrecht (1713) saw France cede mainland Acadia to the British, although it maintained control of Île Royale (Cape Breton Island) and fishing rights on Newfoundland.⁴⁰ However, the weight of scholarship concludes that the British siege of the French town of Port Royal and the terms at Utrecht hardly settled the question of Acadia's imperial orientation.⁴¹ As John Reid describes, the 1710 "conquest" of Acadia, created a new theoretical "framework" for the region, with the British taking nominal control, but did not constitute a conquest in any other sense of the word.⁴² Nonetheless, a collection of inky signatures in the Dutch city of Utrecht sent a message across the Atlantic to this tiny network of agrarian hamlets: a flourishing population of Francophone, Catholic farmers were now in duty bound to the Anglophone, Protestant British Empire.⁴³

That thirty years later, in 1744, this new crown colony was still known internationally as "Acadia or Nova Scotia" gives testament to the ambiguous relationship between Acadians and imperial politics even, or especially, following the 1713 treaty of Utrecht. As opposed to "Acadie ou Nouvelle Écosse," the English appellation reflected British control of the colony; but the continued usage of a twofold title suggests that uncertainty and tension over imperial claims on the land, and the imperial allegiances of its people, persisted past 1713.⁴⁴ As Naomi Griffiths has pointed out, from a European perspective, Utrecht meant little more than a "change [in Acadia's] status from a not overly inhabited territory recognized as French, with disputed boundaries, into a similarly underpopulated territory, recognized as English, with disputed boundaries."⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Griffiths, *Migrant to Acadian*, 252-281.

⁴¹ Plank, *Unsettled Conquest*; Reid, "Conquest".

⁴² Reid, "Conquest," 3-25.

⁴³ See David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

⁴⁴ Plank, *Unsettled Conquest*, 68-106.

⁴⁵ Griffiths, *Migrant to Acadian*, 254.

On one level, then, the official designation of imperial control over Acadia at Utrecht from intermittently, and tangentially, French to nominally (though still tangentially) British did constitute a turning point in Acadian history, given the uncertainty that constant claim and counterclaim on the region had engendered for the first 100 years of settlement. However, recent historical debate about the 1710 conquest and the 1713 treaty has made indisputable the truth of that this moment marked continuity as much as change, in comparison to the claims of earlier Anglophone historians.⁴⁶ Some of this debate has shed light on the ways in which the fallout of the “conquest” contributed to the development of the Acadians’ policy of political neutrality. Whatever the case, Acadia was a contested land, and the Acadians were a contested people.

Abbé Raynal and The Apolitical Acadian

The violent expulsion of the Acadians from 1755-1763 provided a perfect rising action (or coda, depending on one’s perspective) for the story of the simple Acadians, for Longfellow and the earlier narrators of Acadia he drew upon. For example, the polemical eighteenth century historian *Abbé* Guillaume-Thomas-François Raynal’s entry on the Acadians in his systemic critique of European colonialism, *Histoire philosophique et politique des établissemens et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes* (1770), projected his political agenda onto the Acadians. In this text, Raynal appropriated the narrative tropes of Acadia as established in earlier European imaginings (chiefly *Sieur de Dièreville’s* travel writing) so as to critique the evils of colonialism. In so doing, Raynal foregrounded Acadians’ simplicity to further his anticolonial and anticlerical agenda, ignoring their fraught political identity.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Reid, “*Conquest*”.

⁴⁷ Johnston, “The Call of the Archetype,” 72.

Notably, Raynal describes the primordial and isolated perfection of pre-deportation Acadia so as to highlight the inhumanity of the British Empire, on whose orders these farmers were dispassionately scattered to the wind. In spinning this narrative, Raynal grossly overstated the isolation and nonpartisanship of the Acadians:

Their manners were of course extremely simple. There never was a cause, either civil or criminal, of importance enough before the court of judicature established at Annapolis. Whatever little differences arose from time to time among them, were amicably adjusted to their elders

-- -- --

Real misery was entirely unknown, and benevolence prevented the demands of poverty. Every misfortune was relieved, as it were, before it could be felt

-- -- --

These people were, in a word, a society of brethren, every individual of which was equally ready to give and to receive what he thought the common right of mankind

-- -- --

Who will not then be affected with the innocent manners, and the tranquility of this fortunate colony? Who will not wish for the duration of its happiness?⁴⁸

Like Dièreville, Raynal exaggerated the simplicity of Acadian life, and painted an Acadia that existed in isolation. This idealized portrait of a pastoral people living peacefully in a heaven on earth did not align with the complex political reality of Acadia as outline in the previous section. In Raynal’s Acadia, “manners” were “extremely simple” and Acadian courts in the town of Annapolis Royal never saw a single case. Rather, whatever “little differences arose from time to time” were settled by some unspecified group of “elders.” The primitivization of Acadian social life worked, as the reference to Arcadia did, to remove the Acadians from the reality that they were French settlers. As will be seen in Chapter Two, the Acadians hardly avoided political or judicial expression; negotiations with the British government were central to securing their autonomy and the political agenda of their group.

⁴⁸ Quoted in *ibid*, 73.

Continuing on, Raynal suggests that for the Acadians, “real misery was entirely unknown, and benevolence prevented the demands of poverty.” This statement again universalizes the Acadian experience and removes it from the materials of life in historical Acadia which, as has been well established here—and as follows logically about any society anywhere on the earth—was not utopic. The implication here was likely not that the Acadians were socialistic, but rather that they were unable to feel “real misery” or “the demands of poverty,” because, in Raynal’s imagination, although the Acadians were of French origin, they were “simple” and “innocent”—and not imperial Frenchmen. Idealized and removed from an early Atlantic World that was in actuality governed by imperial desires and imaginations, the Acadians Raynal depicts are a sheltered “society of brethren.” In fact, the Acadians were and had always acted in what Raynal, an enlightenment critic of colonialism, would have been fairly typical of early European settlers. They were, after all, French and catholic subjects who existed *and* acted in a European imperial context, and who must be understood as themselves involved in a settler colonial project.

Indeed, Raynal’s Acadians perpetuated notions of Acadian simplicity, innocence, and weakness, all of which obscure the possibility that they had any agency—or any culpability—in their historical existence. On this note, As Geoffrey Plank has noted, “when the British referred to the ‘inhabitants’ of Nova Scotia, they often implicitly left the Mi’kmaq out of the category.”⁴⁹ Meant to critique the evils of colonialism, Raynal’s encyclopedia forgets that the Acadians were descendants of Frenchmen and settlers on lands they assumed as theirs. Viewed in this light, Raynal’s rhetorical questions take on a different valence: “Who will not then be affected with the innocent manners, and the tranquility of this fortunate colony? Who will not wish for the duration of its happiness?” Rather entirely, Raynal’s imagined Acadia erases the Mi’kmaw. Indeed,

⁴⁹ Plank, *Unsettled Conquest*, 71.

Acadian (and French and British imperial) life reflected the influence of their powerful Indigenous neighbors, but Raynal did not imagine the Mi'kmaw's place. It has been argued that understanding the Acadians as simple, tranquil, and thriving confers upon them a “noble savageness,” which further removes them from the colonial space-time that they unquestionably occupied.⁵⁰

Acadian Simplicity in *Evangeline*

From this French narrative lineage that emphasized an idyllic, pastoral, and peaceful Acadian life, Longfellow animated the *Acadie* of *Evangeline*. He continued Raynal's and Dièreville's archetypal and romanticized depiction of the region and its people, while to a significant degree removing them from the colonial context in which they existed:

Thus dwelt together in love these simple Acadian farmers,--
Dwelt in the love of God and of man. Alike were they free from
Fear, that reigns with the tyrant, and envy, the vice of republics.
Neither locks had they to their doors, nor bars to their windows;
But their dwellings were open as day and the hearts of their owners;
There the richest was poor, and the poorest in abundance.⁵¹

Echoing Raynal, Longfellow's Acadians were, most importantly, “simple.” The archetype of the humble farmer resonated with one vision of America espoused by founders such as Thomas Jefferson—who, alongside his many political followers and descendants, foresaw a republic of yeoman farmers. Indeed, Longfellow also reprised Dièreville's reading of the Acadians in the final lines of the passage, suggesting that the Acadians were non-mercantile, living out spiritual, simple lives in communal, agrarian bliss. Though they were agrarian settlers who espoused neutrality, these factors were not measures of their simplicity. Longfellow's Acadians, “free from fear...and envy,” away from “tyrant” and “republic,” found autonomy on their hamlets in their muted,

⁵⁰ Johnston, 70.

⁵¹ Longfellow, “*Evangeline*.”

quotidian existence. Indeed, this embellishment encourages academic discussions of the “Acadian neutrals” to understand Acadian neutrality as a measure of simplicity, rather than as a measure of complexity. Although the independence of Longfellow’s Acadians aligns with the desire for autonomy that actually did mark their successful political life in the first half of the eighteenth century, his commitment to describing the group’s biblical simplicity and ignorant happiness embellishes their existence problematically.

Moreover, *Evangeline* was never meant to hold such power in shaping historical conceptions of the region—Longfellow was moved by other forces. It has been well established that the Acadia of *Evangeline* and its Acadian heroine elevated the gendered ideals of Victorian womanhood and marital relations, even as the poem constructed a tour of the America’s westward expansion—underneath the conceit of *Evangeline*’s search for Gabriel—all of which were meant to increase the poem’s popularity. The story’s religious overtones (look no further than the names of the separated lovers) proffered a vision of America that furthered Jeffersonian ideals. As Christopher Hodson summarizes, “*Evangeline*’s pursuit of her Gabriel took readers on a tour of an American empire in the making.”⁵² Thus, the Acadian story served an allegorical, ideological American purpose that did not prioritize the facts of Acadian life. Undoubtedly, then, the Acadia that Longfellow created—the Acadia that would lead to the birth of both academic Acadian history and public Acadian memory—was constructed for an American audience, one that elevated dominant cultural tropes of mid-nineteenth century North America.⁵³

Moreover, building on the French lineage upon which Longfellow so heavily drew, *Evangeline* proffered an Acadia that existed, at best, on the most distant periphery of colonial

⁵² Hodson, *The Acadian Diaspora*, 10.

⁵³ Brasseaux, *In Search of Evangeline*, 8.

North America, or, perhaps, in a “forest primeval” that was entirely apart from the disputed colony of “Acadia or Nova Scotia.” In this paradise, a political ideology would have been unnecessary. However, the unique political development of the Acadians, a fact of their existence almost entirely eschewed in literary depictions of the region, contradicts the historical reality of Acadia. By examining how the political neutrality of the Acadians emerged, expressed itself, was received, and ended, it becomes clear that the Acadians were not simple or passive. Rather, they were agentive political actors. Neutrality negotiations with the British empire, as the following chapter will illustrate, demonstrate that the Acadians were politically active and astute as they created political space for themselves in between European empires.

CHAPTER TWO

Loyalty Oaths as Neutrality Negotiations

This chapter will interrogate the political development of the Acadians following the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713. It will examine the political relationship between the Acadians and the British governors of the colony by analyzing three crucial moments in Acadian political life, all centering on British demands for an Acadian oath of allegiance: first, the fifteen years immediately following Utrecht, under Governors Doucette and Philipps; second, at the beginning of King George's War in the early 1740s, under Governor Paul Mascarene; and third, on the eve of the Seven Years' War and the Acadian expulsion in the early 1750s, under the reign of Charles Lawrence. Negotiating for the right to remain neutral and peaceful in an increasingly fraught imperial environment, the Acadians crafted political space for themselves that was distinct from British or French subjecthood. Rather than simple or apolitical, the Acadians were communicative and complex, as they pursued a neutral diplomacy that would help them maintain distance from either empire. Through these neutrality negotiations, the Acadians advocated for their own interests.

Initial Oath Refusals, 1713-1720

Following Utrecht, as a *de jure* British colony, "Acadia or Nova Scotia" appears to history to have obtained a new degree of certainty over its collective sense of self, given that it would never again be French. Acadia was, after 1713, a British province, the newest outpost of an expanding North American presence that included New England, New York, the Chesapeake colonies, the Carolinas, and Georgia. The inhabitants of "Acadia or Nova Scotia" could thus expect the protection of the British crown in exchange for loyalty and servitude to it, but the process of becoming British subjects was a murky one. The British presence on Acadia was miniscule, and

would remain that way until the establishment of Halifax in 1749 and the subsequent influx of protestant, British settlers.⁵⁴ Until then, the Acadians and the Mi'kmaq were the primary, though relatively innumerable, populations in an isolated, harsh, Northern region that the British hoped to regulate. Another major issue following Utrecht was the question of incorporating illiterate, Roman Catholic Francophones into the British imperial system. Though the assimilation of other identity groups into the British empire was not without precedent, the Treaty of Utrecht meant that the British gained dominion over a people who looked, prayed, and spoke like their main imperial rival, which had yet to vacate the region.⁵⁵ Though the envelopment of New France into British North America following the Seven Years' War and the 1763 Treaty of Paris receives far more historical attention in this regard, it was the British annexation of Acadia in 1713 that shed initial light on the fraught Atlantic World dynamic of culturally French (Catholic and Francophone) settlers becoming subjects of the Anglophone and Protestant British Empire in North America.⁵⁶

In short, the position in which the Acadians found themselves following Utrecht was not easily navigable, especially given that the nominal clarification of the colony's imperial status in 1713 did not settle imperial land disputes—let alone allegiance disputes—permanently. French control of adjacent Île Royale and of fisheries on Newfoundland—not to mention the already extensive and ever-proliferating network of fur traders in mainland French Canada—sowed doubt in the minds of Acadians, British officers, and the Mi'kmaq alike over British sovereignty in the region. The French did not disappear at the end of the War of the Spanish Succession, and remained omnipresent in and around the region until the 1760s. Such confusion enhanced the chances that

⁵⁴ Jeffers Lennox, "An Empire on Paper: The Founding of Halifax and Conceptions of Imperial Space, 1744-1755." *Canadian Historical Review* 2007 V8, I3.

⁵⁵ There were Catholic Britons in Maryland and Virginia.

⁵⁶ Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837*.

the Acadians would be able to avoid true allegiance to the British. French designs on “Acadia or Nova Scotia” after 1713 were embodied in Louisbourg, a fortified French military town on Ile Royale (today’s Cape Breton Island), which remained under French control until a successful siege by the British in 1758 (although Louisbourg was seized briefly by the British in 1745). Even after Utrecht, Anglo-French skirmishes on Acadian shores were commonplace, as they had been throughout the seventeenth century.⁵⁷ These skirmishes would intermittently pepper Acadian existence, even in periods of relative stability—namely between 1720 and 1744. They symbolized the ever-tense Anglo-French struggle for North America that both produced the conditions in which the Acadian neutrality policy would emerge *and* those that would justify the Acadian expulsion. Indeed, while the Treaty of Utrecht began the Anglicization of “Acadia or Nova Scotia,” it did not precipitate any true Anglicization of the Acadians. Though this moment of imperial shift seemed on paper to offer only two true collective futures to the Acadians—submit to English dictates and remain or uproot and migrate to Ile Royale—a third possibility arose, which allowed the Acadians to remain practically unincorporated so as to be uninterrupted in their local pursuits and retain control of their farmlands. By negotiating with British officials, the Acadians fought for this third future, which satisfied their own interests of remaining on their homelands and maintaining their idiosyncratic cultural life.

Facing the prospect of inheriting a burgeoning Acadian population who lived along the Bay of Fundy, the British sought to establish some degree of imperial presence in mainland Acadia so as to regulate their new subjects. Some British officials considered removing the Acadians and repopulating the crown colony with good, protestant British blood, but ultimately the decision was made to treat the Acadians as property-owning British subjects. A 1713 letter from Queen Anne

⁵⁷ Griffiths, *From Migrant to Acadian*, 195-252.

suggested that Acadian inhabitants would “continue [as] our subjects,” and could “retain and enjoy their said lands and tenements without any let or Molestation as fully and Freely as our other subjects do.”⁵⁸ Codifying that subjecthood was a fairly simple process—all it took was a short oath of allegiance.

For their part, the Acadians were not unaware of the strange circumstances in which they found themselves following the Treaty of Utrecht, though, as discussed above, the strengthening French presence on Ile Royale and continued disputing over the bounds of Acadia ensured that continuity as much as change marked their experience of this period. The Acadians’ immediate instinct was to negotiate a political position that would serve their central interest of remaining on their homelands, which they called “*les prés d’Acadie*,” from which they crafted a sustainable agrarian existence.⁵⁹ In 1713, the Acadian inhabitants of Beaubassin—a major Acadian settlement on the isthmus of Chignecto—stated this position, which would be negotiated and renegotiated until the Acadian expulsion in 1755:

We do not know in what manner the English will use us. If they burden us in respect of our religion, or cut up our settlements to divide the land with people of their nation, we will abandon them absolutely. . . . We will never take the oath of fidelity to the Queen of Great Britain, to the prejudice of what we owe to our king, to our country, and to our religion.⁶⁰

Routine procedure for British subjects, an oath of allegiance was the currency with which the Acadians were to retain the property claims upon their meadows, which held the key to their relatively stable livelihood on the peninsula.⁶¹ Indeed, the Beaubassin Acadians did not reject the

⁵⁸ “From Queen Anne to Francis Nicholson, 23 June 1713,” quoted in Faragher, 137.

⁵⁹ For a thorough treatment of communal Acadian farming practices and identity formation, see J. Sherman Bleakney, *Sod, Soil, and Spades* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2004).

⁶⁰ Faragher, *A Great and Noble Scheme*, 139.

⁶¹ See Griffiths, *Migrant to Acadian*, 267-269; A. J. B. Johnston, “Borderland Worries: Loyalty Oaths in Acadie/Nova Scotia, 1654-1755.” *French Colonial History* 4 (2003): 31-48.

principle of swearing an oath to the crown, so long as it did not put them in a position “to the prejudice of” their cultural (mainly religious and customary) allegiance to France. By this refusal, the Acadians signaled that they considered themselves and their settlements apart from the British Empire; with sovereignty claims being made upon them from two directions, the Acadians threatened to leave if the British presence came to be a “burden.”

As John Mack Faragher summarizes, “the use of subtlety with imperial officials was a highly developed Acadian art. They were protecting their own interests, playing both ends against the middle.”⁶² The oath called for following the Utrecht treaty was neither the first nor the last asked of the Acadians; but since the question of Acadia’s colonial status was now internationally recognized (at least on paper), the British felt empowered to ask the Acadians to swear an *unconditional* oath to a protestant, Anglophone Empire. This was a level to which proud Acadian farmers were not prepared to stoop. On the other hand, Great Britain’s own expectation that nominal rule of mainland Acadia constituted sufficient grounds for grinding Acadian farmers under its imperial thumb was, ironically enough, substantively inflated. The counterpoint of Île Royale promised a suitable alternative only a short journey away from the British mainland colony, and Acadian migration to the island would have swung the balance of power in the Maritimes back toward the French.⁶³

By 1714, it became clear that the Acadians would not be immediately made to swear an unconditional oath. In fact, some senior British officials, including the lieutenant governor of the colony, Thomas Caulfield, were instructed “to use . . . endeavours to persuade the French inhabitants to remain.”⁶⁴ The tides had turned on the British, for they feared the consequences of losing the

⁶² Faragher, 140.

⁶³ See Plank, *Unsettled Conquest*.

⁶⁴ Faragher, *A Great and Noble Scheme*, 140.

only European settlers of their new colony. Perceiving their value to the British Empire, the Acadian inhabitants of various localities, including Annapolis Royal, Minas, and Beaubassin, actively negotiated for their autonomy under these circumstances. Inhabitants of Minas and Beaubassin, for example, collaborated to deliver a defiant message to their new King that reflected the neutral course they intended to stay between empires:

We could not be any more grateful than we are for the kindness shown us by King George, whom we recognize to be the legitimate sovereign of Great Britain, and under whose domination it would give us great pleasure to remain, for he is such a good Prince, had we not taken since last summer, before knowing of his ascent to the throne, the resolution to return under the domination of our Prince, the King of France.⁶⁵

In what may be understood as an ironic threat, these inhabitants leveraged their cultural French identity to suggest they would certainly have offered themselves up to “domination” by the King of England, had they not the option of “domination” by “our Prince, the King of France.” Such defiance from any subject, let alone from the descendants of papist francophone peasants, must have incensed the British. But the imperative of an at least minimally populated “Acadia or Nova Scotia” brought the empire to the negotiating table. Fearing potentially existential consequences of a mass Acadian exodus to Île Royale, Governor Caulfield was made to reconsider the necessity of mandating an immediate unconditional oath to the Acadians.

In spite of the potential it had for creating space for the Acadian identity under British rule, this strange position that the inhabitants of Beaubassin and Minas described was decidedly not a position of strength. The strategy of playing one “domination” against another characterizes one plight of the Atlantic World neutral, which the Iroquois would also employ. Despite the sparseness of the settlements, the relative unimportance of Acadia to the imperial power struggle after Utrecht,

⁶⁵ Quoted in *ibid*, 144.

and the (largely) unobtrusive nature of Acadian life, there was no room for the Acadians to exist outside of empire, no matter how much Longfellow and his ancestors would suggest in their renderings of Acadian life. On the contrary, the political skill of the Acadians, which ran counter to their supposed simplicity, emerged essentially in response to the changing imperial world in which they operated.

Leveraging their ties to France, the Acadians advocated for a significant addendum to the unconditional oath of allegiance that Governor Caulfield proposed. The acceptance of this addition by the British reflected both the value they placed on Acadian settlers and the influence of Acadian self-representation (and politicking) on their collective future. After the traditional “I sincerely promise and swear, that I will be faithful and maintain a true allegiance to His Majesty, King George,” the Acadians added a major caveat: “as long as I shall remain in l’Acadie or Nova Scotia. And that I shall be permitted to withdraw wheresoever I shall think fit, with all my movable goods and effects, without any one being able to hinder me.”⁶⁶ Effectively, the Acadians had secured the freedom to pack up and leave if British rule turned out not to suit them. As Arthur Quinn has editorialized, “this was not an oath of allegiance. This was a deal.”⁶⁷ Such dealing, as opposed to swearing fealty, proves that the Acadians actively negotiated for their autonomy even as a claim was made upon their sovereignty.

In 1717, another attempt was made to encourage the Acadians to acknowledge British sovereignty in the region and swear fealty. As it did not align with Acadian interests, they once again successfully rejected. That year, Lieutenant Governor John Doucette sent out a new declaration for the Acadians to swear unconditional loyalty to the crown. In the eyes of the British,

⁶⁶ Ibid, 144.

⁶⁷ Arthur Quinn, *A New World* (Boston: Faber & Faber, 1994), 395.

this oath was to be unconditionally accepted, yet the Acadians opened negotiations.⁶⁸ They responded to the call for unconditional allegiance asking the British for time to deliberate, which, as it was granted, suggests that the British once again decided to enter into negotiations with the Acadians. By carving out a seat at the imperial negotiating table, the Acadians were not acting like the imperial subjects they had supposedly become in 1713. Though the Acadian response to Doucette's 1717 oath began with niceties, it ultimately "requested" that time be allowed to "assemble the deputies of the other colonies of Minas, Beaubassin and Cobequid, with ourselves, in order that we may answer the demands that have been made on us, as we are instructed that they are now made for the last time."⁶⁹ Hardly subservient or apolitical, the Acadians asked to be allowed to deliberate before acceding to an oath that would affect their collective future. Their response also pointed out "that unless we are protected from these savages, we cannot take the oath demanded of us without exposing ourselves to have our throats cut in our houses at any time, which they have already threatened to do."⁷⁰ It ended with a proposal that would initiate debate over the next four decades about the "neutral" status of the Acadians. They offered to take an oath, so long as it included a clause ensuring that they would never have to "take up arms neither against his Britannic Majesty, nor against France, nor against any of their subjects or allies."⁷¹ Rather than capitulate to terms dictated to them by their new monarch, the Acadians tried to secure a pacifist position of autonomy between empires.

⁶⁸ "Copy of the answer to the above Declaration, sent to the Secretary of State," 1717. *Selections from the Public Documents of the Archives of Nova Scotia*, ed Thomas Akins, (Halifax: Charles D'Annand, 1869) 16. (Hereafter cited as NSD).

⁶⁹ Ibid, 16.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 16.

⁷¹ Ibid, 16.

Unsurprisingly, simply by asking to remain neutral in imperial conflicts, the Acadians drew the ire of the British government. In 1720, for example, Governor Philipps wrote to the Board of Trade that the Acadians “are growne so insolente, as to say they will neither sweare allegiance, nor leave the Country.”⁷² How had the Acadians negotiated this “insolent” position, wherein they were neutral inhabitants of a foreign colony? Crucially, they had actively pursued it in negotiations with the British Empire—passive and apolitical behavior (of the type that might be expected from “simple” Acadian farmers) would not have produced such an outcome. Although it was ultimately the British who sanctioned the Acadians’ requests, it is impossible to deny that this group exerted significant influence over its collective future following the transfer of power in the region from France to Britain in 1713.

Each time an attempt was made to secure an oath of allegiance from the Acadians, they returned it with an expression of neutrality in order to maintain their own political space. In this way, the neutrality espoused by the Acadians was temporal, emanating from their need to respond to empire, rather than their pursuit of a concerted neutrality policy. In April of 1720, the inhabitants of the Minas Basin were again implored to accept an oath of allegiance, with Governor Philipps “inviting” them to “[answer] his Majesty's just demands in taking your Oaths of Allegiance and fidelity to his sacred Person, under whose Government you live...since he has so graciously condescended to let you enjoy what you seem to think most precious, your Religion, and upon your so doing I do further assure you of my protection and friendship.” In the same month, he signed a letter to the Chignecto Acadians, “I am your Friend, ready to serve you.”⁷³ Cognizant of the necessity of bringing the Acadians into the British imperial fold so as to avoid migration to Île

⁷² “Governor Philipps to Board of Trade, 3 January, 1719.” NSD, 17.

⁷³ “At a Council held at the Honble. Lieut. Governor's House in His Majesty's Garrison of Annapolis Royal upon Friday the 29th April 1720,” NSD, 20.

Royale, Philipps began showing them deference—the Acadians’ neutrality policy was advancing their own, autonomous agenda, and confirming that they were a unique political entity. Indeed, Philipps promised the French priest Justinien Durand, who aided Philipps with translations to the Francophone inhabitants, that “neither I nor those under my command will use no kind of violence, unless the Inhabitants do so by their indiscretion or disobedience.”⁷⁴ In essence, he acknowledged Acadian wishes—and therefore Acadian autonomy.

With the prospect of moving to Île Royale still very much on the minds of the Acadians, they opened communications with both the British and the French, hoping to play one power off against the other and secure their interest, which lay in the middle. Namely, they desired to remain in their settlements but not swear fealty to the British. At a council in May of 1720 at his Annapolis Royal home, the British lieutenant governor welcomed his officers and “six French [Acadian] representatives...of the inhabitants of this river.”⁷⁵ Simultaneously, Annapolis Royal Acadians made overtures to Île Royale, “requesting...advice and assistance in the matter of the summons from the English general requiring them to take the oath of allegiance to the king of England.” In this letter, the Acadians’ own appraisal of their position and actions was that “in this very pressing conjuncture, we have preserved our fidelity to our king”—the King of France—“in declaring anew that we will persist in being faithful to our prince and to our religion.”⁷⁶ Indeed, the Acadians were walking a tightrope. They claimed continued loyalty to France but wished to remain on British lands, even as they entered into negotiations with the British to make a conditional oath of

⁷⁴ “Governor Phillipps to Father Justinien Durand,” NSD, 23.

⁷⁵ “At a Council held at the Honble. Lieut. Governor's house in His Majesty's garrison of Annapolis Royal upon Wednesday the 11th May 1720,” NSD, 25.

⁷⁶ “Letter of the inhabitants of Acadie to Mr. St. Ovide* requesting his advice and assistance in the matter of the summons from the English general requiring them to take the oath of allegiance to the king of England,” NSD, 25-26.

allegiance. Subsequently, a letter from Philipps to Île Royale made it clear that he considered the Acadians rightfully wards of Great Britain, and understood (or knew for a fact) that the Acadians were looking toward the colonial French government for advice.⁷⁷

By the end of May, however, both Minas and Annapolis Acadians expressed refusals of the oath of allegiance that doubled as positions of neutrality to Governor Philipps and the British. As Griffiths writes, “whatever advice [Île Royale] provided, it did not change Acadian policy.”⁷⁸ For their part, the Minas Acadians remained steadfast in their refusal of Philipps’ unconditional oath, and referenced their sworn allegiance to the French Empire and the threat of “savages” as justification for this continued evasion of British demands. “Nevertheless,” they promised, “we shall be equally as faithful as we have hitherto been and that we shall not commit any act of hostility against any right of his Britannic Majesty, so long as we shall continue to remain within the limits of his dominion.”⁷⁹ Mirroring this response, Acadians from the Annapolis region responded to Philipps with a commitment to “oblige themselves to be good subjects in every respect excepting that of taking up arms against the King of France.”⁸⁰ Chagrined, Philipps worked to craft a response to Acadian oath refusal, which would come in full in the fall of 1720.

Acadian Refusal, British Adjustment

With each refusal, the British government further incriminated the Acadians, whose desire for neutrality to conflict between the British and French increasingly became a symbol of their insolence. With the region still disputed, the British had been desperate to keep the Acadians on

⁷⁷ Griffiths, *From Migrant to Acadian*, 279.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 279

⁷⁹ “Letter from the inhabitants of Mines to Mr. Philipps Governor of Acadie,” May 1720, NSD, 28-29.

⁸⁰ “Governor Philipps to Secretary Craggs, 26 May, 1720” NSD, 35.

their settlements, as their migration to Île Royale would have tipped the scales toward the French, which had tempered their requests for unconditional oaths. The specter of Louisbourg loomed large in the eyes of the British governors of Nova Scotia, even after Philipps' efforts throughout the spring and summer to secure some measure of Acadian loyalty—or at least commitment to remain in Acadia. By the fall, he wished to take more definitive action to settle the Acadian question.

In September of 1720, Philipps and his officers wrote a letter to London proposing a change in policy toward the Acadians. The letter implored the crown to authorize either sending more troops to the colony to force the Acadians to swear oaths, or “oblig[ing]” the Acadians “to depart, and leave this Country on the terms prescribed to them, and at the same time to protect those of his Majesty’s subjects who will come to settle in their stead.” Rationalizing that “these Inhabitants and the Indians, are entirely influenced and guided by the Government of Cape Breton, and the Missionary Priests residing among them,” the council succinctly made the case for either martial law over the Acadians or their outright expulsion.⁸¹ Evidently, Philipps' patience for Acadian oath dodging had worn down. Adding to the insolence that marked Acadian refusal to swear yet another unconditional oath was Philipps' assumption that the Acadians and the Mi'kmaq plotted against his government.⁸² Indeed, Paul Mascarene—a French Huguenot in service of the British, who would later become governor of the colony—convinced Philipps of this.⁸³

Philipps' letter to the Board of Trade in London reflected Mascarene's assessment of the Acadian situation in the fall of 1720. The letter suggested that both the nature of Acadian farming

⁸¹ “Governor Philipps to the Secretary of State,” NSD, 55.

⁸² Griffiths, *From Migrant to Acadian*, 280-281.

⁸³ “Description of Nova Scotia,” NSD, 39-49

life *and* their close relations with the Mi'kmaq—hence the conflative epithet “these Inhabitants and the Indians”—constituted actions subversive to the British crown:

That by continuing to plow and till their lands...they seem to have no thoughts of quitting this country, which we have reason to believe proceeds from a contempt of this garrison and a dependence on their own numbers, with a reliance on the assistance of the Indians, who are their firm allies and dependents, by the ties of long acquaintance, consanguinity and religion.⁸⁴

The governors here criminalized two of the main traditions that constituted Acadian identity—farming and intermingling with the Mi'kmaq—by suggesting that they “proceed” from an inherent “contempt” of their new King. Even as the Acadians attempted to create their own political space where none seemed to exist, the British criminalized their identity. Conferring upon the Acadians a kind of pseudo-savagery, Philipps tried to their neutrality seem evil.

In aligning “the Inhabitants” with “the Indians,” Philipps strategically incriminated the Acadian identity in the eyes of the British. By implying an inherent criminality to the Acadian identity, rooted in a twin bias against Catholics and “savages,” the letter distills the ideological component of the British distrust of Acadian neutrality; entirely distinct from any Acadian action, this anti-Acadian argument reflected a British hatred for popery. By referencing not only this “alliance” but also what they perceived as Mi'kmaw fealty to the Acadians, Philipps suggested Acadian superiority to the indigenous group *even as* he implied a kind of Acadian savageness. One of the examples of “insolence” that the board offered cemented this point—it described “a plundering a sloop at Minas to a considerable value, belonging to another of his Majesty’s subjects... which was committed by Eleven Indians in the midst of two or three hundred French inhabitants.” Although it had been “Eleven Indians” who did the “plundering,” the Acadians, amidst whom this plundering took place, did not come to the aid of the English vessel. Here, then,

⁸⁴ “Phillips to Board of Trade, 27 September 1720,” NSD 56.

the Acadians became allies—indeed orchestrators of—Mi'kmaq acts of resistance. Simply *being* bystanders to this incident made the Acadians intolerable British subjects. Simultaneously, though, through sharing “consanguinity and religion” with the Mi'kmaq—a reference to initial French colonialism in the region—the papist, Francophone, *but non-indigenous* Acadians emerged as savage enemies.

Although it referenced another specific incident of a French inhabitant acting violently toward British officers, the letter's central claim was that the Acadians' *quotidian existence*, of which their persistent refusal to take an unconditional oath was only a symbolic reminder, merited a change in British policy. Ultimately, that is, the governors argued: “by daily experience...there is in general an entire repugnance amongst them to obey the orders which anyway tend to the good of his Majesty's service, and that they pay little regard to the King's authority beyond the reach of the guns of this fort.” In short, without an unconditional oath, the British perceived a wholesale rejection of their authority. As justification for potential expulsion—as Philipps advocated—this case was overzealous. But the call for troops reveals the depth of British paranoia about their new French subjects, thanks in part to the distance from the crown that the Acadians seemed desperate to negotiate.⁸⁵

Neutrality Coalesces

As Parmenter and Robison have noted, during the first half of the eighteenth century in Acadia, “British authority existed mostly on paper.”⁸⁶ Following Philipps' flurry of activity and anger in 1720, the urgency of Acadian oath swearing dissipated for several years, partly due to a

⁸⁵ “Governor and Members of His Majesty's Council For Nova Scotia to the Board of Trade, 27 September 1720” NSD, 55-56.

⁸⁶ Parmenter and Robison, “Perils and Possibilities,” 174.

period of conflict between the Mi'kmaq and the British at Annapolis Royal.⁸⁷ Philipps redoubled his efforts in 1726, when he told an assembly of Annapolis Royal deputies that he

hoped they had so far considered their own and children's future advantages, that they were come with a full resolution to take the Oath of fidelity like good subjects, induced with sincere honest principles of submission and loyalty to so good and gracious a King, who upon their so doing, due and faithful observation of their sacred Oaths had promised them not only the free exercise of their religion, but even the enjoyment of their Estates and the rights and other immunities of his own free born subjects of Great Britain.

To this, a group of assembled Acadians “[requested]...a French translation,” and “[desired] that a clause whereby they may not be obliged to carry arms might be inserted.”⁸⁸ Once again, the Acadians added conditions to the oaths the British asked of them: alongside attempting to secure a right to pacifism. Philipps attempted to assure the Acadians that such a clause would not be necessary under his protection, but the Acadians still refused to take the oath. It was only following this continued refusal each time the oath was asked of the Acadians that Philipps “granted the same” which he ordered to be scratched in ink “upon the margin of the French translation in order to get them over by degrees.”⁸⁹ Around the same time, a similar agreement was made when Philipps administered an oath to the Minas Acadians. In their obstinacy, the Acadians forced Philipps to capitulate to their modest demands.

Thus, in 1726, the Acadians expressed their desire for military neutrality—a position first advanced in 1717—and witnessed the British colonial authority accept it. Importantly, this sanctioned position of neutrality was *negotiated* with the British. As has been shown, the Acadians actually retained a fair amount of strength in the region at this period thanks to the specter of Île

⁸⁷ Ibid, 175.

⁸⁸ “At a Council held at the Honble. Lawrence Armstrong's house in His Majesty's Garrison of Annapolis Royal on Wednesday the 21st of September 1726.” NSD, 66-67.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 67.

Royale and the weak British militia and their crumbling fort at Annapolis Royal.⁹⁰ Still, that this synthesis reflected that Acadian intransigence could move the British needle—giving testament to Acadian agency in advocating for their own interests.

The death of George I and the accession of George II in 1727 necessitated a new oath, setting the stage for another neutrality negotiation between British officers and the Acadians, during which they believed they had solidified their autonomous agenda. That year, British ensign Robert Wroth attempted to secure the allegiance of the Acadians of Beaubassin. Amidst ringing in the new British monarchy, Wroth did get Acadian representatives to swear an oath of allegiance, but only after the inhabitants had inserted three addendums, first, an “[exemption] from taking up arms against anyone,” second, assurance they were free to leave the colony and forfeit their subjecthood, and third, freedom of “their religion, and to having Catholic, Apostolic, and Roman priests.”⁹¹ After a night of deliberation, Wroth, “not judging [the addendums] Repugnant to Treatys, Acts of Parliament and Trade...granted them as an indulgence.”⁹² He then went to the Acadian settlements at Grand Pré and Minas, where he administered similar conditional oaths, where a fourth clause securing property rights was added.⁹³ For the Acadians, negotiating for these conditions constituted diplomatic victory. The conditional oath, it seemed, reflected British recognition of Acadian autonomy and amenity to compromises that would benefit them.

When Wroth reported back to his lieutenant governor, however, it became clear that senior officials in the British government did not sanction the liberties that the Acadians had negotiated successfully with him. Ultimately, the Governor’s council pronounced the conditions “null and

⁹⁰ For more on the state of Annapolis Royal, see Griffiths, *Migrant to Acadian*, 196-197.

⁹¹ Quoted in Faragher, *A Great and Noble Scheme*, 172.

⁹² *Ibid*, 173.

⁹³ *Ibid*, 173.

void.” Yet, they retained the documentation of Acadians acknowledgement of the sovereignty of George II, a strange sleight of hand that gave testament to the importance of these oaths of allegiance as symbols of submission more so than as regulators of behavior. In spite of the nullity, they were kept as records of Acadian fealty, and the Governor’s council never alerted the Acadians to the fact that their conditions were rejected. Thus, the Acadians entered the 1730s under the impression that their military neutrality, property rights, and freedom to practice Catholicism had been officially sanctioned by Wroth and the British.

Paul Mascarene and Acadian Neutrality During King George’s War

Between the years of 1720 and 1744, the Acadians enjoyed a period of growth and prosperity that some scholars have taken to calling the “golden age” of Acadian history. During this time, they abided by the terms of neutrality they had (unwittingly illegitimately) negotiated with Wroth.⁹⁴ Upon the outbreak of the War of the Austrian Succession (known as King George’s War on North American shores), the split identity of the Acadians (culturally French but occupying British-claimed territory) thrust their contested neutrality into a new imperial situation. By 1743, the Acadians’ population had ballooned to 10,000, while the British settler population, despite imperial control of the region, numbered only a few families in Annapolis Royal and Canso—a remote fishing village.⁹⁵ Paul Mascarene was by this point lieutenant governor of the colony, and he remained realistic about the uncertain loyalties of the now numerous Acadians. Due to the lack of British population, Mascarene, as previous governors, believed in the inherent value of their “subjecthood”—in whatever form it took—to continued British claims on the region. Indeed, until

⁹⁴ Griffiths, *Contexts*.

⁹⁵ Parmenter and Robison, “Perils and Possibilities,” 181.

1749, when the crown focused new attention and resources on the region with the erection of the military fort Halifax and the beginning of a process of immigration of settlers from England, the British presence in the region was negligible. As such, the Acadians enjoyed a period of salutary neglect from the British Crown while under the impression that their neutrality negotiations in the 1720s had secured an indefinite autonomous future on their farmlands.

During King George's War, Mascarene's writings indicated a profound wariness of the allegiances of the Acadians, but a steadfast conviction to allow them to continue their peaceful existence. In 1743, for example, Mascarene wrote to a French priest, that he was "well satisfied" with the Acadians' assurances for "peace and tranquility and duty towards the government as the oath they have taken obliges them to."⁹⁶ Indeed, a major tenet of Acadians' conditional oaths had been neutrality during times of imperial conflict. Mascarene even struck a tone of pride at his lenience to this idiosyncratic group of subjects, hailing compromise and mutual benefit:

What a happiness is it for these Inhabitants to have it in their power to Enjoy the Sweets of peace Whilst So many others are Afflicted with the scourge of War, and how will those answer in this world or in the World to Come who by Inciting these Inhabitants into disorder will naturally draw on them the Punishment Due to Rebellious People! My duty to his Majesty in the Post which I am in Obliges me to let his Subjects feel the Mildness of his Government whilst they Render themselves worthy of it besides my Inclinations naturally lead me to it wherefore if everyone aims at the same End We may prevent trouble from approaching Us.⁹⁷

The togetherness that Mascarene preached to the Acadians was not as apparent in a letter to the secretary of state later that year, when he wrote that the "inhabitants cannot be depended on for assistance in case of a Rupture with France. It is as much as we can expect if we can keep them from joining with the enemy."⁹⁸ Indeed, their stated commitments to neutrality did not make them

⁹⁶ "Governor Mascarene to M. Goudalie, Priest" NSD, 127.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 128.

⁹⁸ "Gov. Mascarene to Secretary of State, 1 December 1743," NSD 129.

of much use to the British in times of imperial war. Months later, Mascarene reiterated his need for an oath from the Acadians, after they had petitioned him with the message that they would “adhere to the promise that you have made to take up arms neither for nor against the King of Great Britain.”⁹⁹ While this promise had sustained the Acadians for the last twenty-odd years, with the outbreak of imperial warfare in the region, their dalliance and noncommittal was not satisfactory to Mascarene and the British power he represented.

Once the French threatened, Acadian neutrality also became threatening. Mascarene attempted to underscore this point to the Acadians in this letter, noting that the terms of allegiance that Philipps and Wroth had negotiated in the 1720s were not as the Acadians perceived them:

If in taking this oath of allegiance, the government was kind enough to say to you, that it would not compel you to take up arms, it was out of pure deference, and more than had been stipulated for you. In consequence of your oath you owe every obedience and every assistance to the King your Sovereign; and you ought to take it as a great favour that he does not compel you to take up arms.

But you owe no assistance, no obedience to any authority that does not emanate from his Britannic Majesty; and you have the strongest reason for abstaining from giving any assistance to his enemies.¹⁰⁰

Indeed, it was by the grace of the British crown that the Acadians were able to remain neutral, and it was contingent on their general commitment to refrain from acting on behalf of the French.

On the opposing side of the imperial conflict, some calls emanating from Île Royale in 1744 asked the Acadians “to acknowledge the obedience they owe to the King of France” and come to their aid.¹⁰¹ With their origins and cultural allegiance on one side of the war, and their subjecthood and the closest governing body on the other, the Acadians found themselves caught

⁹⁹ “Extract from a letter of Gov. Mascarene to the Deputies of Chignecto,” NSD, 139.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 139.

¹⁰¹ “M. Du Vivier’s order to the inhabitants of Mines, Piziquid, River Canard, and Cobequid,” NSD, 134.

in the middle of a conflict of which, as their steadfast calls for pacifism indicated, they wanted little part. Just as they had in the 1710s, the Acadians played their domination by the British to their advantage, suggesting that they would be unable to supply the French with the support they requested without “placing ourselves in great peril.” Further, the Acadians asked that the French respect their position as neutral inhabitants of British Nova Scotia, writing that “we live under a mild and tranquil government, and we have all good reason to be faithful to it. We hope therefore, that you will have the goodness not to separate us from it; and that you will grant us the favour not to plunge us into utter misery.”¹⁰² Resistant to both French and British calls for aid, the Acadians successfully negotiated their middling position throughout the King George’s War. Upon its conclusion, they remained neutral French Inhabitants of a peripheral British colony, but that status would not survive the tenure of Governor Charles Lawrence, who first arrived in Nova Scotia in 1747.

Neutrality’s End: Charles Lawrence and the Acadian Expulsion

Charles Lawrence entered his tenure at Halifax with little sympathy for the Acadians, in contrast to Mascarene, who, despite his desire to secure their allegiances, believed that they could exist as neutral subjects of the crown. Lawrence, on the other hand, came to Nova Scotia in wartime, and could not help but see the Acadians as partisan to the French, for whom he had a deep hatred. As Naomi Griffiths writes, “from the beginning, Lawrence had treated the Acadian population as a liability and something to control by fear. His policy had been one of accusation

¹⁰² “To M. De Ganne, Knight, Captain of infantry commanding the troops and the savages united, at present in the country,” NSD, 135.

and demand. He had a fundamental disbelief in the possibility of the Acadian population being of any value to Nova Scotia and thus his communications were always threatening.”¹⁰³

The episodic renewal of Acadian neutrality that marked the years between 1713 and 1727, and the relative acceptance of—or failure to address the problems with—that position between 1727 and 1748, changed as imperial rivalries heightened with the outbreak of imperial war. According to the minutes of a council meeting in July of 1755, “affairs were now at such a Crisis in America that no delay [in swearing allegiance] could be admitted” by Lawrence’s government.¹⁰⁴ The crisis period that had begun truly in 1744 and was unsuccessfully resolved at the Treaty of Aix La Chappelle (1748) showed no signs of abating in the 1750s. Indeed, the Seven Years’ War was already underway, and imperial fighting for control of Chignecto, the isthmus that separated British Nova Scotia from French Canada, had been raging for the first years of the 1750s. Pressure also emanated from the Acadian-hating Massachusetts Governor William Shirley to solve the problem of the French inhabitants that populated Acadia, as connection between Massachusetts and Nova Scotian colonial governments connection grew.¹⁰⁵ In this context a final neutrality negotiation this chapter will examine ended in the call for Acadian expulsion.

More so than Philipps, Wroth, or Mascarene, Lawrence was convinced of the disingenuousness and insubordination of the Acadians. Governor Cornwallis, for whom Lawrence initially served, had also been lenient, proposing to defer pressing Acadians “to swear allegiance till we see what can be done at Chignecto and what settlers came from England.”¹⁰⁶ Indeed, he felt

¹⁰³ Griffiths, *Migrant to Acadian*, 462.

¹⁰⁴ “To his Excellency the Honble. Charles Lawrence, Lieutenant Governor and Commander in Chief of His Britannic Majesty’s province of Nova Scotia and Colonel of one of his regiments of infantry &c,” NSD, 261.

¹⁰⁵ Griffiths, *Migrant to Acadian*, 463

¹⁰⁶ “Govr. Cornwallis to Duke of Bedford, 19 March 1750,” NSD, 184.

the Acadians were still needed to populate British Acadia. By Lawrence's estimation, however, all previous administrations had been too tolerant of the Acadians, who had never shown respect for the British crown in return. Intent on imposing his agenda and bringing Nova Scotia into the mainstream fold of British North America, Lawrence focused on the Acadian question that had lingered on the minds of colonial governments for nearly half a decade. When Governor Cornwallis removed to England in 1753, Lawrence took matters into his own hands, limiting his communication with England and growing increasingly obstinate in the face of the escalating crisis between imperial interests, symbolized by the battle for Chignecto.

Fighting on Chignecto saw some local Acadians flee to French forts, an action which, for Lawrence, proved that the Acadians could not be treated as neutrals, and were instead sympathetic to the French. He issued an edict that clarified the consequences for the supposedly neutral Acadians who took refuge from the imperial fighting in French settlements:

If any Inhabitant either old or Young should offer to go to Beausejour, or to take arms or induce others to commit any Act of Hostility upon the English, or make any Declaration in favour of the French, they will be treated as Rebels, their Estates and Families undergo immediate Military Execution, and their persons if apprehended shall suffer the utmost Rigour of the Law, and every severity that I can inflict; and on the other Hand such Inhabitants as behave like English Subjects, shall enjoy English Liberty & Protection.¹⁰⁷

The rigorous order that Lawrence intended to bring to Acadia began with draconian consequences for the Acadians if they looked to the French for shelter, although it did offer "English Liberty and Protection" if the Acadians behaved "like English subjects." Under Lawrence's governance, the negotiated position of neutral French subject was no longer legitimate.

In the decades since Robert Wroth's invalid oath with its favorable conditions was administered throughout the major centers of Acadia, Acadians had lived under the assumption

¹⁰⁷ "Charles Lawrence to Captain Murray," NSD, 242.

that they had successfully obtained special status as militarily neutral, Roman Catholic, subjects of the Crown. They summarized as much in a 1753 memorial to the French King, in which they “[implored his] majesty’s powerful protection,” having been informed by Lawrence that they were to swear “a new oath without conditions,” in place of the conditional oath that had theretofore allowed for them to maintain neutrality to imperial conflict, freedom to practice Catholicism, and autonomy on their farmlands.¹⁰⁸ Losing these rights and securities, the Acadians pleaded with the French King to intervene with the British government on their behalf (as they had in the 1720s).

By the 1750s, the neutral doctrine the Acadians espoused hinged on their not having to swear unconditional allegiance, and so they again sat down at the negotiating table with the British, hoping to once again stave off unconditional subjecthood by leveraging their position between the empires and their commitment to not bear arms. Thus, in 1755, the inhabitants of Minas, Pisquid, and Canard petitioned Charles Lawrence to “consider our past conduct,” which showed that “very far from violating the oath we have taken, we have maintained it in its entirety.”¹⁰⁹ These inhabitants did not see any reason to change their relationship with the British, arguing that they still “entertained the same pure and sincere disposition to prove under any circumstances, our unshaken fidelity to his Majesty, provided that His Majesty shall allow us the same liberty that he has granted us.”¹¹⁰ Indeed, the Acadians maintained that the more militant and dictatorial leadership of Lawrence—he had just confiscated their hunting weapons, for example—alienated the Acadians and did not ensure their loyalty. For them, Lawrence’s draconian methods were anathema to the Acadian way of life, and an excessive response to the limited liberties they requested. As the inhabitants explained: “the arms which have been taken from us are but a feeble

¹⁰⁸ “The Inhabitants of Acadia to the French King,” NSD, 234.

¹⁰⁹ “At a Council Holden at the Governor’s house on Thursday 3rd July 1755,” NSD, 247-249

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, 248.

guarantee of our fidelity. It is not the gun which an inhabitant possesses, that will induce him to revolt, nor the privation of the same gun that will make him more faithful; but his conscience alone must induce him to maintain his oath.”¹¹¹ Indeed, the Acadians had never wanted military involvement, so the confiscation of their arms, which they used for hunting and for protection, seemed a particularly arbitrary affront. As the inhabitants of Minas and Pisquid had explained, the way to Acadian fidelity was through their “conscience,” which counseled neutrality, thanks to their unique identity, and not through punitive measures. As the military presence in Acadian settlements grew in the summer of 1755, the Acadians begged that “Lawrence have the goodness to make known to us your good pleasure before confiscating our property and considering us in fault.”¹¹² For the Acadians, property confiscation was unwarranted and tyrannical, and they were skeptical as to how the modest terms they negotiated for, which had sustained them for a prosperous generation, were now incriminating them.

A final oath negotiation between Lawrence and the Acadians in the summer of 1755, with the French and Indian war underway, concluded with Lawrence gaining the justification he needed to expel the Acadians from Nova Scotia and disperse them throughout the British empire. As ever, the Acadians clung to their conviction that their status with the British empire had not changed since the 1727 oath—they were willing to “prove in every circumstance Fidelity to His Majesty in the same manner as we have done, provided that His Majesty will leave us the same Liberties” granted in 1727 and largely acceded to in the intermittent years.¹¹³

¹¹¹ Ibid, 248.

¹¹² Ibid, 249.

¹¹³ “To his Excellency Charles Lawrence, Esq., Governor of the province of Nova Scotia or Acadie” NSD, 250-255.

In council at the Governor's mansion, assembled Acadian deputies were offered "a very fair Opportunity...to manifest the reality of their Obedience to the Government by immediately taking the Oath of Allegiance in the Common Form before the Council." Unsurprisingly, the deputies asked for time to deliberate with each other and gather the sentiments of those they represented, as they had always done when faced with the prospect of swearing allegiance. Lawrence characterized this as a postponement, a typical "evasion under frivolous pretences." Indeed, stalling had always been characteristic of the Acadians' manner of negotiating with the British; In times past, the Acadians often managed to return to their ways simply by being forgotten about. Even once Lawrence charged the Acadians with this "evasion," the Acadians asked to return home to consult with their constituents and return with a reply. Lawrence desired an unconditional oath sworn, but allowed the deputies a day to deliberate. Even under dire circumstances, the Acadians managed to open negotiations.

Unfortunately, Lawrence did not intend to sway in his convictions for an unconditional oath. When the Acadian deputies returned the following day, Lawrence's journal recalls,

They declared they could not consent to Take the Oath in the Form required without consulting the Body. They were then informed that as they had now for their Own particulars, refused to Take the Oath as directed by Law, and thereby sufficiently evinced the Sincerity of their Inclination towards the Government, The Council could no longer look on them as Subjects to His Britannick Majesty, but as Subjects of the King of France, and as such they must hereafter be Treated; and they were Ordered to withdraw.¹¹⁴

The Acadians' unwillingness to swear an unconditional oath when Lawrence offered it to them incriminated them in his mind for the last time, leading him to symbolically revoke their British subjecthood and proceed in governing the colony under the assumption that the Acadians were French sympathizers. As the severity of the situation dawned on the Acadians, some deputies

¹¹⁴ "Council held at Lawrence's house, 4 July 1755," NSD 256-257.

attempted to reverse their decision and take the oath, but their initial refusal had given Lawrence the justification he needed to treat the Acadians as “popish recusants,” and begin orchestrating their expulsion.¹¹⁵ Just as oath negotiations had given birth to Acadian neutrality, so too did they seal the Acadians’ demise; Lawrence scattered his deputies throughout the settlements to ask Acadian communities to swear an unconditional oath, knowing that most communities would refuse and give him the justification he needed to treat them as enemies to the Crown.

Throughout the summer of 1755, Acadian settlements petitioned Charles Lawrence to recognize their continued obedience to the crown under the conditions established between 1713 and 1727, claims to neutrality whose legitimacy Lawrence flatly denied. As his admirals put it, “it was now the properest Time to oblige the said Inhabitants to Take the Oath of Allegiance to His Majesty, or to quit the Country.”¹¹⁶ Most Acadians stuck to the precedent set by Governor Phillips and confirmed, in their eyes, by Lieutenant Governor Wroth, “determined, one and all, rather to quit their Lands than to Take any other Oath than what they had done before,” especially since swearing fealty would have required them to raise arms against the French and impinged upon their religious freedom.¹¹⁷ Throughout the summer and across many settlements, the Acadians remained markedly steadfast in their commitment to military neutrality and land autonomy, even when faced with expulsion.

While they had largely managed to avoid the scrutiny of the British colonial government between 1713 and 1750, the Acadians could do so no longer. Escalating imperial warfare in northeast North America made Nova Scotia much more important to the British, specifically after

¹¹⁵ “Council held at Lawrence’s house, 4 July 1755,” NSD 256-257.

¹¹⁶ “At a Council Holden at the Governor’s house on Tuesday 15th July 1755,” NSD 258-259.

¹¹⁷ “To his Excellency the Honble. CHARLES LAWRENCE, Lieutenant Governor and Commander in Chief of His Britannic Majesty’s province of Nova Scotia and Colonel of one of his regiments of infantry,” NSD 262.

the establishment of Halifax in 1749. As such, the Acadians' usual expressions of neutrality, wherein they asked to be left alone, deferred the swearing of oaths and promised not to bother anyone, no longer sufficed. When Charles Lawrence focused his attention on the Acadians, his disgust with their desired neutrality combined with a fear that they may be sympathetic to the French, led him to advocate for their expulsion. As he put it, "nothing would induce them to acquiesce in any measures that were consistent with his Majesty's honor or the security of his Province."¹¹⁸ Their political neutrality was not to survive the imperial warfare that necessitated its final explicit expression. This final refusal to swear an unconditional oath led to the Acadian expulsion, which commenced in the fall of 1755, and continued for the next several years.

Conclusion

Neutrality was a crafted response to calls for unconditional allegiance to the sovereign who controlled their territory, but whose sovereignty over them the Acadians would not admit. Although the initial options accorded to the Acadians following The Treaty of Utrecht appeared to be either unconditional fealty to the British or migration from their homelands, they managed to craft a position of autonomy by espousing neutrality in imperial politics. Whenever an oath was required of them, the Acadians, rather than submitting to it, negotiated with the British in hopes of securing an independent agenda centered on freedom of religion, autonomous control over their homelands, and the right not to bear arms in imperial conflicts. The long series of negotiations between the Acadians and the British reveal the former to be anything but simple or ignorant of imperial politics, as *Evangeline* and other literary imaginings of Acadians often described. Those moments in Acadian history when Acadians negotiated with British colonial officials to secure

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neutrality reveal a diplomatic environment in which the Acadians spoke for themselves and pursued a self-serving agenda at odds with the unconditional British subjecthood that was theoretically imposed upon them after Utrecht. In one sense, the Acadian-ness of the Acadians depended upon this critical distance. When analyzed as a product of negotiation, these instances of negotiation should be seen as a record of Acadian agency and British capitulation.

Indeed, Acadian refusal to swear unconditional oaths to the British was always seen as evidence of insolence, but the Acadians managed to continue productive diplomatic relations with the British until midcentury when imperial war increased crown attention on the region, criminalizing the autonomous political space on which the Acadians claimed autonomous control of their lives and lands. The neutrality that the Acadians had crafted and negotiated since Utrecht no longer sufficed, as their French cultural identity became more obviously dangerous. Until Charles Lawrence came to the colony, though, the Acadians had successfully negotiated for their agenda to freely practice their own religion, control their homelands, and refrain from military involvement. With the French and British fighting over Acadia by the 1750s, however, the imperial binary between which the Acadians fashioned autonomy became the reality that would precipitate their expulsion. Though undoubtedly Acadian autonomy persisted in part because of the region's relative isolation, hopefully this chapter has shown that the Acadians also exhibited significant political activity and skill in navigating an imperial context that did not have much room for the desires of their hybrid identity.

SECTION TWO: IROQUOIA

From Acadia to Iroquoia

Like Acadia, Iroquoia represented an imperial fault line between British North America and New France. For the better part of the eighteenth century, the Iroquois Confederacy acted to maintain a position of peace and balance between the empires that surrounded Iroquoia, which was essential for maintaining their autonomous control in the region.¹¹⁹ Intentionally kept inscrutable to European settlement, Iroquoia was a tenuous corridor of Indigenous land between empires who struggled for North American hegemony and, often, for Iroquois sympathies.

In response to the traditional ills and pressures that colonialism wrought on Indigenous communities—to name a select few: genocide, land expropriation, and relocation to western reserves—the Iroquois employed their homelands to fashion autonomous political and geographical space for their peoples throughout the first three-quarters of the eighteenth century by playing local colonial rivals off against one another. In the main, it was a creative, iterative, and evolving commitment to diplomatic, political, and military neutrality—to remain somehow between belligerent colonial actors—that staved off European settlement and ensured some continuance of Iroquois autonomy and power in the region. In similar fashion to the Acadians, the Iroquois espoused neutrality in imperial politics in order to advance autonomous group interests that allegiance or submission to one power or another would have curtailed. Differently from the Acadians, the Iroquois were able to adapt their neutrality successfully during imperial war—a measure of their longer diplomatic history and infinitely more influential military capacity.

Chapters Three and Four will argue that the Iroquois' nominal alliance with the British Empire—embodied in the Covenant Chain—was actually the key to their neutral stance in imperial

¹¹⁹ Richard White, *The Middle Ground* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 150.

politics. Masked in peacetime as quotidian allegiance or friendship, the Covenant Chain became a major bargaining tool for the Iroquois during imperial war, which allowed them to keep critical distance between themselves and the British. Specifically, the mutuality historically established within the Covenant Chain conferred agency upon the Iroquois; they could justify rebellious behavior by claiming that the British were “breaking the chain”—not keeping their end of the bargain. Moreover, frequent, though scattered, declarations of neutrality or mentions of remaining “neuter” suggest that the Iroquois Confederacy understood the concept of neutrality as an ideology that could protect them from imperial domination. Chapter Five will describe the fall of neutrality—and of the Iroquois Confederacy—in the American Revolution. Though the Iroquois managed to maintain autonomy through neutrality after the Seven Years’ War and declared as much at the outbreak of the Revolution, simultaneous claims on the Covenant Chain by each belligerent power induced the Iroquois to split up—the Revolutionary War eventually became an Iroquois civil war.

The Covenant Chain

On the 24th of June, 1755, at Mount Johnson, New York, the newly Crown-appointed Superintendent of Indian Affairs, William Johnson, made a series of speeches to a gathering of sachems and warriors of the Iroquois Confederacy. The assembled headmen represented the six indigenous nations that comprised the confederacy (east to west: Mohawk, Oneida, Tuscarora, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca). Colonel Johnson, a middle-aged Irish immigrant to the British colony of New York, had been appointed in the spring of 1755 to improve relations between the British Empire and the Six Nations. Timing was everything. Imperial rivalry between the French and the British had hardly been settled during King George’s War (1744-1748), and though the

Seven Years' War, known in North America as the French and Indian War, would not be declared until 1756, skirmishes between the French and British were increasing on the Western frontier of British North America, and imperial war was imminent. The British desired Iroquois allegiance in future imperial war, and they tasked Johnson with obtaining it. From his vantage point in the early summer of 1755, William Johnson looked out into Iroquoia, well aware that the French had better alliances with the Indigenous peoples in the Great Lakes region to the West, including amongst the Cayuga and Seneca in Western Iroquoia.

At his home in 1755, William Johnson held up four volumes of “the many solemn Treaties and the various transactions” between the English government and the Iroquois Confederacy, and summarized nearly a century of Anglo-Iroquois relations:

These books testify that it is now almost 100 years since your Forefathers and ours became known to each other. That upon our first acquaintance we shook hands and finding we should be useful to one another, entered into a covenant of brotherly love and mutual friendship. And though we were at first only tied together by a Rope, yet lest this Rope should grow Rotten and break, we tied ourselves together by an iron Chain. Lest time and accident might rust and destroy this chain of iron, we afterwards made one of silver; the strength and brightness of which would but eject to no decay.¹²⁰

Indeed, this relationship rested on a symbolic, mutual agreement of friendship known as the Covenant Chain, of which trade relations constituted the founding link.¹²¹ The Covenant Chain metaphorically connected the fates of the Iroquois and the English, and functioned practically as a semi-official, amorphous political arrangement between the Iroquois Confederacy and the King of

¹²⁰ “The Honorable William Johnson’s speech to the Sachems and Warriors of the Confederate Nations.” Mount Johnson, 24 June 1755. *Early American Indian Documents* (hereafter EAID) V10, 92.

¹²¹ Richard Haan, “The Problem of Iroquois Neutrality: Suggestions for Revision,” *Ethnohistory*, Vol 27 No. 4, 321.

England.¹²² Alongside trade, the Covenant Chain often also addressed military, diplomatic, and legal concerns that arose between the Iroquois and the British. At semi-regular meetings between imperial and Confederacy officials, the chain could be brightened and strengthened, renewing good relations between these two powerful North American political entities. It was through mutual communication in the specific symbolic language of the Covenant Chain that the terms of the Anglo-Iroquois relationship could be renewed. The Iroquois understood the alliance as a living agreement, and thus the metaphor of the chain symbolized the need to renew understandings and mend misdeeds at regular intervals; even when dull or tarnished, the metaphor went, the silver Covenant Chain could be brightened. As such, Anglo-Iroquois relations ebbed and flowed, but the historical agreement linked their fates.

Whereas the Iroquois highlighted the Covenant Chain as a living, symbolic agreement, the British highlighted its legal and written elements. Thus, it is unsurprising that in a moment when Johnson wished to win Iroquois loyalties, he referenced the written documentation of the Covenant Chain. Indeed, the assumption of British superiority colored Johnson's language and had always existed in the Covenant Chain, underneath the symbolic respect that grounded the relationship.¹²³ Still, the chain acknowledged Iroquois agency by definition; as Francis Jennings compellingly argued, the Iroquois were, in many respects, an "ambiguous empire" with legitimate power in

¹²² Richard L. Haan, "Covenant and Consensus: Iroquois and English, 1676-1760," in Richter and Merrell, ed, *Beyond the Covenant Chain* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1987); and Francis Jennings, *The Ambiguous Iroquois Empire* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1984).

¹²³ For example, many Indian agents referred to the Iroquois as "Children" in Council Fire/Covenant Chain rhetoric, although they were often also addressed as "Brethren" or "brothers." William Johnson, other British officials, and the King of England were often referred to as "our Father."

northeastern North America alongside the French and the British—the Covenant Chain was evidence of their “ambiguous” power.¹²⁴

Although many traditional accounts of Iroquois neutrality consider this 1755 council the precise historical moment that it ceased to exist, this thesis argues that it persisted well past.¹²⁵ Imperial jousting for Iroquois loyalties had been a significant component of Anglo-French relations in northeastern North America for the first half of the eighteenth century. Throughout this period, the Iroquois managed to balance each power’s overtures for their loyalty, carving out space in between empires in which they could pursue their own agenda of peaceful imperial relations, free trade, and autonomy over their homelands. Existing geographically between New York and Canada, Iroquoia was between rival empires, both of whom generally respected the confederacy’s military capacities, which bolstered its claim on the region. Ever volatile, the conditions of Iroquois neutrality during the first half of the eighteenth century reflected the reality of growing French and British competition for North American hegemony. Chapter Three will argue that the Iroquois Confederacy’s political neutrality in the relative peacetime between 1700 and 1744 constituted a concerted, creative response to the myriad pressures of snowballing European colonialism. Chapter Four will discuss Iroquois wartime neutrality in the Anglo-French wars between 1744 and 1763. At odds with traditional accounts, which end Iroquois neutrality around 1755, though in line with more recent studies by Caitlin Fitz, Karim Tiro, and Jon Parmenter, Chapter Five will show that Iroquois neutrality survived through to the American

¹²⁴ Francis Jennings, *The Ambiguous Iroquois Empire: The Covenant Chain Confederation of Indian Tribes with English Colonies from Its Beginnings to the Lancaster Treaty of 1744* (New York: Norton, 1984).

¹²⁵ Parmenter and Robison, “Perils and Possibilities,” 187; Fenton, *The Great Law and the Longhouse* (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998) 476-478.

Revolution, where it took a new form Americans and Britons competed for control of the Covenant Chain.

CHAPTER THREE

Iroquois Neutrality in Peacetime, 1700-1744

Neutrality to imperial conflict was deeply engrained in Iroquois diplomacy by the time of the 1755 council at Fort Johnson. Its origins lay in a flurry of political activity around 1700, following a difficult period in the late 1600s that saw a significant depletion of Iroquois population and military strength.¹²⁶ By the turn of the eighteenth century, both the French and the English had established frontier presences around the ancient homelands of the Iroquois. English colonization of New York butted against the eastern door of Iroquoia, at Albany, in traditional Mohawk land. Meanwhile, French fur trading networks and Jesuit missions proliferated to the north and west, with significant imperial presence at Montreal and Detroit. A series of bloody conflicts between the Iroquois and Western indigenous groups allied with the French had decimated the Iroquois' military strength by the 1690s, and the French and English empires began vying for influence amongst the historically powerful but recently depleted confederacy. These two increasingly powerful European adversaries attempted to shape the political horizons of the Iroquois, which the latter resisted by making claims to neutrality that played the domination of one power off against the other.¹²⁷

Internal political diversity within the Iroquois Confederacy served to maximize its maneuvering room in the political maelstrom that accompanied English and French settlement around Iroquoia. During the second half of the seventeenth century, Anglophiles (English-leaning Iroquois peoples) and Francophiles (French-leaning Iroquois peoples) enjoyed periods of political

¹²⁶ Jon Parmenter, *The Edge of the Woods: Iroquoia 1534-1701* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2010); Jon Parmenter, "After the Mourning Wars: The Iroquois as Allies in Colonial North American Campaigns, 1676-1760." *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, 64, no. 1 (2007): 39-76.

¹²⁷ Gilles Havard, *Great Peace of Montreal of 1701* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2001). Parmenter, *Edge of the Woods*; Daniel K. Richter, *The Ordeal of the Longhouse* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1992).

ascendancy in league politics.¹²⁸ Though these factions chose to align with different imperial powers, they similarly concluded that it was in the best interest of the confederacy to maintain close economic and diplomatic ties with their well-armed European neighbors.¹²⁹ Alongside these two factions, a third group of “neutralist” Iroquois maintained that the right course of action for the Confederacy was to “take care of our selves,” and not become overly dependent on one European power or another.¹³⁰ Broadly, hunting (land) rights, trade relations, and security concerns grounded each of these factions’ stances toward Europeans. Each faction advocated for its position under the assumption that it was in their best interest, and thus of interest to the entire Confederacy. At different moments, and in different locales throughout Iroquoia, each was right. By allowing for a range of responses to the imperial pressures that the Iroquois faced, they were able to stave off true domination by either the French or the British. With their military might depleted (though Iroquois warriors would always remain formidable), the confederacy took this policy of factionalism into the realm of diplomacy. In this way, the Iroquois pursued a factional neutrality in relations with empire.

1701: Parallel Neutrality Negotiations and Rebuilding the Confederacy

By the turn of the eighteenth century, the Iroquois were in a moment of league-wide crisis, their numbers sinking from disease and perpetual war with French fur traders and their Indigenous allies. Indeed, in the ten years between 1689 and 1699, Iroquois warriors’ numbers had decreased by half (2550 to 1230).¹³¹ In 1694, an Onondaga chief succinctly described the dire situation facing

¹²⁸ Richter, *Ordeal*, 105-162.

¹²⁹ *Ibid*, 153.

¹³⁰ See Barr, *Unconquered: The Iroquois League at War in Colonial America*, 77-95; Richter, *Ordeal*, 153.

¹³¹ Havard, *The Great Peace of Montreal*, 62.

the Iroquois Confederacy as French and British presence strengthened around them: “The Grease is melted from our flesh and drops on our neighbours who are grown fat and live at ease while we become lean. They flourish and we decrease.”¹³² The parallel peace negotiations that the Iroquois entered seven years later were meant to address this concern. In treaties with the French at Montreal and the British at Albany in 1701, the Iroquois embraced diplomatic neutrality as their league-wide stance in imperial politics. These treaties were a singular diplomatic accomplishment, and an especially essential one in light of the confederacy’s diminished military capacity at the end of the seventeenth century. However diminished, though, the confederacy was not defeated—even in 1700, Iroquois communities maintained some autonomy between empires solely thanks to the strength of their warriors.¹³³ Vitality, though, military posturing was no longer enough to create distance between the Iroquois and the European empires.

As would be displayed in the parallel negotiations of 1701, the Iroquois intended to adapt to these new circumstances and preserve autonomy over their life and lands, rather than submit to sovereignty claims made by one empire or the other. Indeed, through diplomacy with both the French and the British, the Iroquois managed to balance imperial designs for their loyalties so as to secure political (and geographic) space for themselves. Obtaining autonomy from their weakened position required curating to both French and British interests, but, paradoxically, accommodating both powers allowed the Iroquois to secure their own autonomous agenda. As with the Acadians, who played French and British “dominations” against each other, the Iroquois oriented themselves toward dependence and deference to both empires, which produced the conditions for the neutrality they would espouse throughout the eighteenth century. Crucially, by

¹³² Quoted in *Ibid*, 62.

¹³³ Brandão, J. A., and William A. Starna. "The Treaties of 1701: A Triumph of Iroquois Diplomacy." *Ethnohistory* 43, no. 2 (1996): 215.

treating with both empires, the Iroquois diversified their channels of trade and communication, such that neither empire could fully come to dominate them or expropriate their land.

The Treaty of Ryswick elevated the importance of Iroquois diplomacy, rather than military efforts, in order to secure their wishes in a colonial context in which they were now indisputably enmeshed. Terms negotiated between the French and English at Ryswick ended the Nine Years' or King William's War (1697), a conflict between the French and the English fought over English designs for Acadia. Ushering in a tenuous imperial peace, Ryswick precluded the possibility of direct military aid to the Iroquois from the English, which had undergirded Iroquois management of French and their Indigenous allies' raids from the west (and north). Both the English and the French subsequently made claims to Iroquois sovereignty, which the Iroquois avoided by entering parallel negotiations.

In 1701, with their military might depleted and peace established between the English and the French, the Iroquois turned to simultaneous diplomacy—forged through parallel negotiations with either empire—to secure their interest in maintaining sovereignty over their homelands, which English aid and their own military strength could no longer support. These negotiations displayed the Iroquois' ability to creatively adapt to the colonial matrix that grew more and more powerful around them. Indeed, they proved that warfare was not the Iroquois' only response to settler colonialism. Especially given that both empires had designs over Iroquois homelands, the Iroquois' ability to play one power off against the other evidenced the significant political skill and agency required to shape their own future.¹³⁴

In negotiations at the English outpost of Albany with Governor John Nanfan, the Iroquois renewed the Covenant Chain, ceding lands of their subsidiary tribes along the Ohio in exchange

¹³⁴ Brandão and Starna. "The Treaties of 1701," 215.

for promises of British protection. “We do renew the Covenant Chain and make it bright and clear,” the Iroquois delegates confirmed, before requesting English protection from French encroachment on Iroquois country:¹³⁵

If the French make any attempts or come into our country to delude us, we desire you to send men of wisdom and understanding to countermine them, for they are too subtle and cunning for us and if you can convince them, that will be a means to stop our designs and so prevent their ill intentions.¹³⁶

By renewing the Covenant Chain, the Iroquois ensured peaceful relations with the British. But they had done so by ceding lands in the Ohio river valley that did not belong to them. Indeed, the Iroquois secured protection from the British through ceding land that was not theirs. Whatever the circumstances, the Iroquois managed, in 1701, to renew their peace with the English, which the land cession guaranteed.

At Montreal, a delegation of Iroquois headmen made a “Great Peace” with the French and their Indigenous allies, with whom the Iroquois had continually warred over control of the Western fur trade during the late 1600s. The French Governor threw the symbolic hatchet “where none shall find it again for it is now Peace over all the world...you shall no longer kill one another at hunting.”¹³⁷ Henceforth, the agreement confirmed, the Iroquois would be able to hunt for furs on Western lands previously contested by allied tribes of the French. In exchange, the Canadian governor secured a commitment of Iroquois neutrality in future imperial conflicts with the English:

Now children it is now peace all over the world, probably we or the English will be the cause of a war and if it so happens that there be a war you are by no means to intermeddle, let us and the English fight alone—Come freely and fetch of me as you do of your brother Corlaer Powder and Lead, and do not love the one better than the other.¹³⁸

¹³⁵ “Conference of Lieutenant Governor Nanfan with the Indians, Albany, 19 July 1701.” NYCD, V4, 901.

¹³⁶ Ibid, 905.

¹³⁷ Ibid, 918-919.

¹³⁸ Ibid, 919.

With productive terms established with either empire, the Iroquois would be able to take advantage of English and French trading centers—at Albany and Detroit, respectively. This new degree of free trade promised to economically and materially strengthen the confederacy; there were now double the sources for “Powder and Lead,” alongside other increasingly indispensable European goods.¹³⁹ Simultaneously renewing the Covenant Chain with the English and swearing neutrality to imperial conflict with the French, the Iroquois entered the eighteenth century with a refashioned political outlook that promised new economic networks, decreased the threat of invasion or imperial domination, and highlighted autonomy from either empire. They had fashioned a neutral diplomacy—centered on simultaneous peaceful relationships with either empire—from an increasingly feeble position, as European colonialism continued to shift the balance of power on the continent away from them.

In the future, the Iroquois hoped to maintain neutrality and the benefits it promised when the imperial peacetime initiated by Ryswick wore off. Addressing the French governor of Canada, Iroquois diplomats stated their new desires for free trade, imperial peace and balance, and military neutrality in future imperial conflicts:

We thank you for the establishment which you have made at Detroit, because when we hunt in those parts, it will be very easy for us to procure what we need. We will be displeased if you reopen the war with the English, because you and they are both our friends, however if that should happen, we would leave you smoking peaceably on our mats, as you have asked us.¹⁴⁰

Newly “friends” with both sides, the Iroquois hoped to be “smoking peaceably” in future imperial wars. As the origins of the Iroquois policy of neutrality, these parallel negotiations in 1701 reveal

¹³⁹ Richter, *Ordeal*, 255-257

¹⁴⁰ Quoted in Anthony Wallace, “The Origins of Iroquois Neutrality,” *Pennsylvania History, a Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 24, no. 3 (1957): 230.

how the confederacy used diplomacy, rather than warfare, to resist the claims of sovereignty over them made by each empire. Through negotiations, rather than military strength, the Iroquois continued to resist imperial domination. In the 1750s, the secretary to New York Indian affairs, Peter Wraxall, described “the great ruling principle of the Modern Indian politics,” initiated in 1700 and 1701, as “[preserving] the Ballance between us and the French.”¹⁴¹

Most importantly, as Brandão and Starna have usefully pointed out, securing peace with the French and their indigenous allies and simultaneously renewing the Covenant Chain with the English constituted a significant instance of successful Iroquois diplomacy: “that colonial officials tried to appease the Iroquois, and moreover, agreed to control their native allies in order not to provoke the Iroquois, is acknowledgment of both the power of the Iroquois and the legitimacy of their claims.”¹⁴² In 1701 the Iroquois had renewed peaceful relations with the British and initiated a neutrality with the French. In securing what was essentially a double peace, the Iroquois toed a fine line: they had promised the French to remain neutral in imperial conflicts, but asked the English to protect their lands from French and western Indigenous encroachment. Though each side was curious of the true nature of terms the Iroquois had established with the other, the Iroquois entered the eighteenth century with their lands protected by English troops and their bloody battles with the French and their Indigenous allies finally at a merciful end. Indeed, when warfare had no longer sufficed to secure the interests of the confederacy, the Iroquois turned, successfully, to a performance of neutrality to the French audience at Montreal, and of alliance to the British at Albany.

¹⁴¹ Peter Wraxall, *An Abridgment of the Indian Affairs Contained in Four Folio Volumes, Transacted in the Colony of New York, from the Year 1678 to the Year 1751*, ed. C. H. McIlwain (Cambridge, MA, 1915) (hereafter cited as WR), 219

¹⁴² Brandão and Starna, “The Treaties of 1701,” 232.

Balancing Between European Empires and Keeping the Peace

By the 1720s, the neutral policy of maintaining peace and balance between the French and British empires was orthodox Iroquois diplomacy. Though warring Iroquoian outfits had on several occasions engaged in raids on European settlement themselves or allied with one empire for raids on outposts of the other during the tumultuous first years of the 1700s, Jon Parmenter has pointed out that such actions were not anathema to the greater league's commitment to neutrality; generally, when either empire offered the war hatchet to the Iroquois, it was taken up only by minority factions of league-affiliated warriors, who often provided nothing beyond limited assistance. In 1710, for example, although all five confederate nations provided warriors to the British for a raid on the French in Canada, Iroquois warriors only served "limited reconnaissance and provisioning duties."¹⁴³ Moreover, Teganissorens, an Onondaga headman, quietly alerted the French of that particular raid before it took place.¹⁴⁴ In this instance, then, the Iroquois postured as allies to the British (in keeping with the Covenant Chain) while maintaining their commitment to neutrality with the French.

Together, diplomatic efforts to maintain peace with each empire secured a new manner of autonomy and prosperity for the Iroquois, even as French and British interests proliferated in and around Iroquoia. For example, the peace the Iroquois maintained with the French improved their ambitions for trade and hunting to the west; the warfare that had ravaged Iroquois communities at the end of the 1600s was mercifully over. Meanwhile, British favor and protection, a consequence

¹⁴³ Parmenter, Jon. "After the Mourning Wars," 54.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 54.

of the renewal of the Covenant Chain in 1701, helped shelter the confederacy from warfare with rival tribes in Ohio, an essential for nursing the Iroquois league back to health.

Neutrality also promised new economic horizons for the Iroquois in an environment increasingly populated and politically orchestrated by Europeans. Of course, the degree to which the Iroquois depended on each empire for basic necessities and martial protection also evidenced a serious loss of self-sufficiency. By the 1720s, the Iroquois were extremely dependent on trade at Niagara, Oswego, Albany, and Montreal—they were no longer able to survive on their homelands autonomously. With dependence on European goods and protection essentially the new normal in Iroquoia, the Iroquois used neutrality to make relations with their European neighbors as beneficial as possible. Indeed, neutrality allowed the Iroquois to manage their increasing dependence on European settlements without fully relinquishing autonomy. By diversifying the sources of these European necessities, the Iroquois managed to get better prices for goods that they needed.¹⁴⁵

Peacetime, though, appeared to have an expiration date. Indeed, the French presence at Niagara and the English fortification of Oswego, both on the shores of Lake Ontario, encroached on Iroquois homelands, and foreshadowed imperial conflict in the region. It seemed inevitable that imperial skirmishes that the Iroquois were occasionally involved in on the frontier would eventually give way to outright war. What would happen when imperial war found its way to Iroquoia? Neutrality had been explicitly negotiated with the French, but the British still generally assumed Iroquois alliance, and knew that they could always call upon the Covenant Chain to redouble Iroquois allegiances.

¹⁴⁵ Brandão and Starna, “The Treaties of 1701,” 232.

1720-1744: Using the Covenant Chain to Maintain Peace, Autonomy, and Neutrality

Increasingly integrated into the Euroamerican world, the Iroquois adhered to their policy of dual diplomacy and pushed for their own interests in maintaining full autonomy over their traditional homelands, which imperial war and westward expansion threatened. In Covenant Chain negotiations in the 1720s and 1740s, the Iroquois worked to ensure that Iroquoia remained both peaceful and under their control. In a 1726 conference with the New York Governor William Burnet the Iroquois renewed the Covenant Chain with the British and reiterated that they controlled Iroquoia and what could take place within its bounds. The assembled Iroquois headmen in conference with Burnet at Albany asserted that in times of imperial war, “they should sit still...and would not suffer any blood to be shed, nor Acts of hostilities committed there on the Land and Lake belonging to them.” Their land was to be “a path of peace for all Christians and Indians to come and go forward and backward on account of Trade.”¹⁴⁶ As in 1701, neither the French nor British could dictate the rules of engagement within the boundaries of Iroquoia.

Furthermore, in their dealings with Governor Burnet, the Iroquois used the Covenant Chain in order to secure the neutrality that advanced their interest in maintaining autonomous control of Iroquoia. Iroquois headmen at the conference acknowledged their simultaneous “Alliance and Covenant...with the English” and their “peace with the French,” which together ensured Iroquois autonomy and prosperity.¹⁴⁷ In the event of a future imperial war, the Iroquois hoped that the British would abide by the friendship ensured by the Covenant Chain and assent to the essentiality of neutrality to their old diplomatic partner. The headmen acknowledged their continued control over Iroquoia with the request that “if [the British and French] inclined to make contention and

¹⁴⁶ “Conference between Governor Burnet and the Indians,” NYCD 5, 787.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 787.

fight they might end their Dispute at Sea, and not in [Iroquois] Country.”¹⁴⁸ Desiring for imperial entanglements to remain outside their “Country,” the Iroquois asserted that their homeland would be a peaceful ground upon which diverse interests could freely pass and repass, according to the wishes of the confederacy. In this moment, the Iroquois asserted their dominion over their homelands, exemplifying that the agency that their position of neutrality between empires conferred upon them. Demilitarized, Iroquoia would not be sullied by imperial skirmishing; indeed, the Iroquois insisted on setting the diplomatic terms of the geopolitical space that was traditionally theirs. Unsurprisingly, it reflected their desire for neutrality and peace. As the Iroquois were forced to integrate into a Euroamerican world, neutrality appeared to be a way to ensure Iroquois autonomy.

New imperial fortifications at Oswego and Niagara, though, foreshadowed imperial designs on Iroquoia that would undercut the ideological and geographical autonomy that the Iroquois pursued through the Covenant Chain. Moreover, by the 1720s, French and British were constantly attempting to enlist Iroquois loyalties in military movements against each other.¹⁴⁹ In 1727, an Onondaga headman wary of the competitive nature of imperial politics symbolically positioned himself between those imperialists who made aggressive inroads on Iroquoia, reiterating the autonomy of the land and the peace and balance that it ensured:

You appear to me on both sides so full of jealousy, the one against the other, that I have reason to believe you are inclined to come to blows. I therefore interpose myself between you to put a stop to the impetuosity of your ill temper; and for you, Brother Englishman, I recommend you not to rely on numbers, to listen quietly to what may be said to you and to answer it in like manner. Reflect, and remember that you are on soil of which we are the masters.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 787.

¹⁴⁹ Parmenter, “After the Mourning Wars,” 56-57; Richter, *Ordeal*, 253-256.

¹⁵⁰ Quoted in Richter, *Ordeal*, 254.

The right to maintain peace on their homelands—and the desire to keep imperial conflicts well eastward—was already disintegrating in the 1720s. As Daniel K. Richter summarizes, “the two military and commercial outposts [Niagara and Oswego] symbolized the degree to which mastery over events had shifted irrevocably toward the European colonial powers.”¹⁵¹ Increasingly, it appeared that the Iroquois were clinging to peace, knowing that imperial war in the region would likely involve them and ruin the double diplomacy that had become foundational to maintaining their autonomy and neutrality. Luckily, tensions between the British and the French remained muted until the mid-1740s, meaning that some degree of imperial peace and balance continued in Iroquoia (as it did in Acadia), between 1720 and 1744. Throughout this period, the Iroquois became even more dependent on trade at Oswego, Niagara, Albany, and Montreal—the old neutralist edict to avoid empire and “take care of our selves” was no longer viable.¹⁵² ¹⁵³ Indeed, although the Iroquois grew dependent on relations with either empire and the benefits they wrought, they used the doctrine of neutrality to maintain their autonomy and pursue their own interests. Indeed, for the first half of the eighteenth century, the Iroquois successfully resisted imperial domination or warfare and retained superiority over their indigenous neighbors.

In subsequent renewals of the Covenant Chain, the Iroquois advocated for the neutrality that sustained their now-orthodox position of double dependency. In 1735, an official record of continued Iroquois neutrality emerged when a group of Iroquois led by a Mohawk chief at the castle of Caghnawaga renewed the Covenant Chain with the British, but stipulated that “in Case a War should break out between Great Britain and France...he and his people should be Neuter.”¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ Richter, *Ordeal*, 254.

¹⁵² See Barr, *Unconquered: The Iroquois League at War in Colonial America*, 77-95; Daniel K. Richter, *The Ordeal of the Longhouse*, 105-162

¹⁵³ See Richter, *Ordeal*, 255-280.

¹⁵⁴ WR, 193.

This official stance reemerged in 1741 after a meeting at Onondaga, when the Iroquois reported to Albany that they had “concluded a peace” and “engaged never more to make War upon the French unless they should shed the Blood of their People, and that if any difference arose between the English and the French the 5 Nations were to be Mediators between them,” and further that “they desire their allies the French & English shall not make war upon each other.”¹⁵⁵ By the time of this 1741 meeting, tensions were once again high between the British and the French;. King George’s War in broke out in 1744, which would change the expectations either imperial power held for the Iroquois, as it did for the Acadians. Geographically and ideologically caught between now-declared belligerents, and dependent on trading centers on either side, the Iroquois Confederacy found its autonomy-sustaining policy of neutrality facing an entirely new set circumstances.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, 221.

CHAPTER FOUR

Iroquois Neutrality in Imperial Wartime, 1744-1760

Increasingly integrated into the Euroamerican system, the Iroquois had maintained a reputation for military prowess in spite of their depletion in the late 1600s, alongside the ascension of European powers in and around Iroquoia. In the relative peacetime between 1700 and 1744, Iroquois warriors had continued to strike fear, or at least uncertainty, into the minds of their European neighbors, which helped them maintain autonomy over their homelands and gave backbone to their pursuit of peacetime neutrality.¹⁵⁶ Indeed, both the British and the French understood that Iroquois warriors would be valuable allies and formidable enemies in wartime, though the confederacy continued to counsel neutrality.¹⁵⁷ For Parmenter and Robison, the Iroquois pursued an “armed neutrality” in imperial conflict, in that powerful warriors fortified their desire to remain peaceful.¹⁵⁸ This differed significantly from the notably disarmed neutrality of the Acadians, who had no military capacity. While the parallel negotiations with the English and the French in 1701 were intended to keep the Iroquois from having to intervene militarily on behalf of either empire, when imperial warfare came to the region, the Iroquois could not keep themselves fully beyond it. In a trend that would continue through the period of colonial warfare between 1744 and 1784, the Iroquois used the tenets of neutrality established in peacetime in response to imperial war. This chapter demonstrates that in King George’s War and the Seven Years’ War, the Iroquois used the Covenant Chain—their historical agreement of friendship with the British—to maintain a critical distance between themselves and imperial conflict.

¹⁵⁶ Richter, *Ordeal*, 271.

¹⁵⁷ Parmenter, “After the Mourning Wars,” 57.

¹⁵⁸ Parmenter and Robison, “Perils and Possibilities,” 170.

The Conditions of Wartime Neutrality: King George's War, 1744-1748

During the first of the imperial wars that would dominate the second half of the eighteenth century in North America, the Iroquois Confederacy hoped to avoid alliance with either the French or the British in order to preserve the peace and balance—and autonomy—they had cultivated between empires. In February of 1745, a British interpreter brought news to the Iroquois that French aggression at Saratoga caused the British government “to take up the hatchet against the French and their Indians.” He stressed that the British expected “our Bretheren & fellow subjects”—the Iroquois—to “join the War.” After convening at Onondaga, the Iroquois Confederacy “flatly refused” to join the fighting, noting that they were related to some of the Laurentian Iroquois on the French side.¹⁵⁹ Furthermore, the Iroquois hoped that “the Covenant Chain would not be broken by this Refusal.”¹⁶⁰ Seeing themselves as a separate entity with the capacity to make for themselves the costly decision to go to battle, the Iroquois desired to remain beyond imperial fighting. Indeed, in wartime, the confederacy argued, “each people must defend themselves as well as they can.”¹⁶¹

As indicated above, the Iroquois did not see their wartime neutrality as breaking their ancient Covenant Chain agreement with the British, as they separated their diplomatic relations from their military involvement. As the Onondaga council argued, there were Iroquois factions sympathetic to either side of imperial conflict, making it impossible for the confederacy to commit to an alliance with the British. This reality made British requests for allegiance unrealistic, and thus the Iroquois did not heed them. Iroquois peoples on both sides of the intercolonial boundary

¹⁵⁹ WR, 244.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, 244.

¹⁶¹ Quoted in Parmenter and Robison, “Perils and Possibilities,” 174.

had made “alliances and marriages with one another, which meant that they could not go to war against one another,” and moreover:

It was one matter for Europeans to go to war, since they had kings who ordered their subjects when to make war and when to stop for peace, and their subjects had to obey. It was not so with them. They have no king, every Indian was his own master, so if they should once enter into a war with one another, there could be no such thing as to come to a Peace, but the War must continue forever.¹⁶²

By highlighting the lack of hierarchy or centralization throughout the Iroquois Confederacy, the Onondaga headmen argued that they and the other chiefs could not force the confederacy to intervene on one side or the other. The headmen also warned the British to be careful what they wish for, suggesting that if Iroquois warriors entered the conflict, it may last longer than the British intended, because “every Indian was his own master.” Still, the Iroquois were powerful allies, and the British pressed for their loyalties during the King George’s War by calling on the Covenant Chain, even though the Iroquois saw the Covenant Chain as a guarantee of their continued right to neutrality.

In 1746, pressure from George Clinton, the Governor of New York, and William Johnson, the future Superintendent of Indian Affairs who was already making inroads amongst the Mohawks, convinced the Iroquois into accepting the war hatchet in order to maintain beneficial Covenant Chain relations.¹⁶³ Though accepting the hatchet offered by Johnson seemed a capitulation to the wishes of the British, it was a nominal allegiance and did not mean that the Iroquois pledged true loyalty to the crown, and the league-wide policy of neutrality remained practically intact through the remainder of the war.¹⁶⁴ Indeed, Parmenter and Robison have pointed out that Clinton and Johnson’s 1746 efforts to turn Iroquois neutrality into military alliance by

¹⁶² Quoted in Parmenter and Robison, “Perils and Possibilities,” 174.

¹⁶³ WR, 248

¹⁶⁴ WR, 248

invoking the Covenant Chain yielded a mere sixteen Iroquois warriors, several of whom died of smallpox before taking to the battlefield.¹⁶⁵ Though Johnson managed to recruit a handful of Mohawk warriors during the rest of the conflict, they largely defied the league-wide decision to remain beyond the fighting; these warriors took bribes from Johnson and, according to a Pennsylvania Indian Agent, acted “on their own accord, without the approbation of the Six Nation Council, they having been persuaded by their Brethren, some of the white people at Albany.”¹⁶⁶ In this way, though the British could request Iroquois alliance through the Covenant Chain, they were powerless to secure it, except through private negotiations with certain Iroquois factions (mainly among the Mohawk), which acted against the league-wide policy of neutrality. By not intervening definitively on one side or the other in King George’s War, the Iroquois propelled their neutrality policy into the 1750s.

Altered Peacetime Neutrality After Imperial War

Conditions in Iroquoia were volatile with imperial tensions heightened following King George’s War, and the Iroquois negotiated with the British to re-establish their autonomy. In a 1753 conference between the sachems of the confederacy and Governor Clinton, the Mohawk headman Hendrick Theyanoquin used the Covenant Chain to advance the confederacy’s agenda. Acknowledging that the British and the Iroquois “were united together by a Covenant Chain,” Hendrick told Clinton of several circumstances making it seem as though the Covenant Chain was “likely...broken not from our Faults but yours.”¹⁶⁷ Though their involvement in King George’s War had been limited, the Iroquois had taken up the war hatchet at the behest of Clinton and

¹⁶⁵ Parmenter and Robison, “Perils and Possibilities,” 175.

¹⁶⁶ Minutes of the Provincial Council of Pennsylvania, V5, 86.

¹⁶⁷ “Conference between Governor Clinton and the Indians,” NYCD V6, 781.

Johnson, which, Hendrick charged, placed the Iroquois in danger, as “the French...now daily stand with a knife over our heads to destroy us and we are forced to be upon our guard because nothing is as yet settled between us.”¹⁶⁸ In other words, the French, with whom peace had long been essential for Iroquois autonomy, were once again a danger to the Iroquois. Indeed, troubled relations with the French had caused “a great deal of Damage” at Ohio, where, recently, French and Indians “killed Six Englishmen and Fourteen Indians.”¹⁶⁹ By breaking their neutrality during King George’s War, the Mohawk had tarnished the Iroquois peace with the French, who saw them as allies to their enemies. Western Iroquoia was no longer peaceful. As Hendrick noted, “that Road seems now to be spoiled.”¹⁷⁰

Moreover, Hendrick charged, the British were not holding up their end of the Covenant Chain in the years following the war. Used to gifts, protection, and respect for their land autonomy, Hendrick told Clinton that “the indifference and neglect shewn towards us makes our hearts ache, and if you don’t alter your behavior to us we fear the Covenant Chain will be broken.”¹⁷¹ Indeed, Hendrick further charged British settlers with defrauding the Iroquois, complaining to Clinton that “we have sold several small Parcels of Land to our Brethren and they have taken up a much greater quantity...it had been done by stealth and deceit.”¹⁷² Land-hungry colonists were greedily encroaching on Iroquoia, a transgression that Hendrick implored the colonial government to address, and a trend that would continue throughout the following decades. On behalf of all six Iroquois nations, Hendrick asked the colonial government to address the concerns he raised, or forfeit the Covenant Chain: “if you don’t endeavour to redress our Grievances the rest of our

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, 782.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, 782.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, 782.

¹⁷¹ Ibid, 782.

¹⁷² Ibid, 783.

brethren the five nations shall know of it and all paths will be stopped.”¹⁷³ Aware of the benefits of good relations with the Iroquois, especially because of their desire for peaceful passage through the “paths” of Iroquoia, the colonial government of New York began to address these concerns. But the necessity to regulate colonial-Iroquois relations required a more systematic overhaul, which would emerge in 1754 and 1755 at Albany and Fort Johnson.

In the summer of 1754, an unusually formal meeting adjourned at Albany between the British colonies of North America and the Iroquois Confederacy. The Albany Congress of 1754 brought seven British colonies together in hopes of regulating Indigenous relations, reflecting the confederacy’s continued ability to move the colonial government to address its concerns. With a tenuous imperial peace established in 1748, this conference developed in response to the series of fraudulent land dealings made by frontier colonists on Iroquois lands, which had been unsatisfactorily addressed by Clinton following Hendrick’s 1753 meeting. Indeed, the calling of the Albany Congress reflected the continued strength of the Iroquois Confederacy to influence both imperial politics *and* its own collective future. Unsurprisingly, European land hunger—and frontier duplicity—lay at the root of Iroquois concerns. At the conference the Iroquois managed to actualize this agenda through a commitment to diplomatic neutrality, expressed, as ever, through the language of the Covenant Chain.

At the treaty, Hendrick skillfully mobilized neutrality in order to secure greater autonomy for his people. Speaking on behalf of the Iroquois Confederacy, Hendrick repeated the grievances he had articulated to Governor Clinton in 1753: French aggression in the west and land fraud by British settlers proved that the British had not been holding up their end of the Covenant Chain.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷³ Ibid, 782.

¹⁷⁴ “At a Council Held in the City of Albany, the 28th June 1754,” in EAID X, 30.

Indeed, Hendrick argued, “the Covenant Chain was broken, because we [are] neglected.”¹⁷⁵

Further, Hendrick noted, British neglect was attracting the Iroquois to the French:

When you neglect business, the French take advantage of it, for they are never quiet. It seemed to us that the Governour hand turned his back upon the Five Nations, as if they were no more, whereas the French are doing all in their power to draw us over to them.¹⁷⁶

By invoking the threat of French overtures for Iroquois loyalty, Hendrick hoped to gain commitments from Albany for improved, more mutually beneficial, Anglo-Iroquois relations. Indeed, the Iroquois were hoping that they could re-establish distance between themselves and the British, in keeping with the neutrality that had sustained their autonomy over the preceding half century.

When the council reconvened the following week (Tuesday, July 2nd, 1754), Hendrick again pushed the British colonists to address Iroquois land concerns by positioning the confederacy *between* British and French territory, rather than along the frontier of British North America. By this distinction, he hoped to remind the British that the Iroquois remained valuable (and dangerous) precisely because of their neutrality. Speaking “on behalf of the Six Nations,” Hendrick renewed the Covenant Chain, acknowledging that “this is the ancient place of Treaty where the Fire of Friendship always used to burn,” in spite of it having been “three years since [the Iroquois] were called to any public treaty [there].”¹⁷⁷ Hendrick then threatened to allow the French passage through Iroquoia, making it so that “the French may easily come and turn you out of your doors.”¹⁷⁸ Invoking the 1701 treaty with Governor Nanfan which sanctioned the British’s claim on the Ohio region—and secured their protection—Hendrick hoped he could reinvigorate Iroquois land

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, 30.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, 30.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, 33.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid, 33.

autonomy, which had diminished as land-hungry colonists trudged westward into eastern Iroquoia, and the French and their Indigenous allies raided western Iroquoia.

Neutrality Prescriptions at the Outset of the Seven Years' War

During the Seven Years' or French and Indian War (1754-1763), the Iroquois clung to their traditional position of neutrality as tightly as their increasingly contingent position would allow. More existential than King George's War, the Seven Years' War ended with the removal of the French Empire from North America. For the first several years of the conflict, the Iroquois Confederacy maintained neutrality in order to keep their homelands demilitarized and preserve the advantageous trading relationships they had cultivated with both empires. Moreover, they hoped that this position would minimize ethnic Iroquoian casualties. By the end of the conflict, with British victory imminent, the Iroquois renewed the Covenant Chain with the British so as to garner better treatment in the peacetime that would follow.

Colonel William Johnson's appointment as Superintendent of Northern Indian Affairs, a Crown directive meant to cultivate improved Iroquois allegiance to the British, challenged the league-wide policy of neutrality. In June of 1755, Johnson made a forceful overture for Iroquois military support in the imperial conflict when he reaffirmed to the assembled headmen at Mount Johnson that the British "have no ill designs whatsoever against you," and assured the Iroquois that if they declared their loyalties to the British, it would "make more strong and bright than ever the Covenant Chain of Love and friendship...and that your friends and enemies shall be ours."¹⁷⁹ The promise of British protection over the Iroquois had always been a facet of Covenant Chain

¹⁷⁹ "The Honorable William Johnson's second speech to the Sachems and Warriors of the Confederate Nations" EAID X, 94.

relations, and had been a main concern of the Iroquois at the Albany Congress. Though Johnson's call promised protection, it also asked Iroquois warriors to intervene militarily, something which the Iroquois hoped to avoid.¹⁸⁰ With war on the horizon, the Iroquois renewed the Covenant Chain with Johnson but had no intention of truly allying with the British. In their response to Johnson and his officers' speeches, the Iroquois generally acknowledged that "the great King of England our Father is the Master of our confederate nations and we do put our trust in him," assured Johnson that they did not speak "with a double heart," they rejoiced at the prospect of renewing the Covenant Chain, hoping to "renew and strengthen the Ancient Love and friendship which hath ever subsisted between your forefathers and ours."¹⁸¹ Indeed, the Covenant Chain's potential to advance Iroquois interests always made its renewal an exciting prospect.

However, though they strengthened the Covenant Chain in these meetings, they hardly abandoned their neutrality. Later in the deliberations at Fort Johnson, Kaghswughtioni, an Oneida sachem, related the following:

You have desired us not to listen to or be afraid of the French. We will not regard their insinuations, but remain dutiful to the Great King of England our Father, and though our neck is but small, we do not dread the French or any of our Enemies, and though we are not inclined to enter into quarrels without reason, we will stand by our Brethren the English.¹⁸²

Theoretically, the Iroquois could remain neutral to the French and renew the Covenant Chain with the British, a balance they had successfully navigated during the peacetime that had dominated the first half of the eighteenth century. With the French and their Indigenous allies aggressive, as ever in the west, the Covenant Chain promised the same protection it always had; Iroquois promised to "stand by" the British without, ideally, intervening militarily. In 1755, the Iroquois renewed their

¹⁸⁰ Ibid, 94.

¹⁸¹ Ibid, 101.

¹⁸² Ibid, 101.

mutual agreement of friendship with the British, but made a point to note that they did so to retain the Covenant Chain, and would still refuse to “enter quarrels without reason.”¹⁸³ Having desired to renew the Covenant Chain since before the outbreak of the Seven Years’ war, the Iroquois continued to pursue a diplomatic allegiance with the British while making clear their continued desire for neutrality to the imperial conflict.

In this vein, despite pledging general support to the British and acknowledging their historical bond, the Iroquois had serious misgivings about military involvement in the Seven Years’ War that reflected a continued neutralist agenda. Indeed, mirroring earlier efforts to limit ethnic Iroquois bloodshed in King George’s War, sachems of the Cayuga nation balked at the notion of fighting French-allied Iroquois at Caughnawaga, a Mohawk village in French Canada. The prospect that some French allied Indigenous peoples were “our own flesh and blood and many of us have brothers, sons, etc who live among them” gave sachems of the Six Nations serious pause in pledging military allegiance to the British.¹⁸⁴ The British response reflected this input, with Johnson answering that “we have no desire or intention to spill one drop of their blood.”¹⁸⁵

Alongside adhering to neutrality to avoid fighting their own kin, the Iroquois leveraged renewing the Covenant Chain with the British in order to secure autonomous control of their homelands, which had been increasingly encroached upon by Anglo-American land speculators, even after the proceedings of the Albany Congress. The Iroquois voiced their desire “that your people may not be suffered to buy any more of our land,” hoping that it “may not be settled by Christians,” and endeavored to solicit a promise from Johnson that “if any [settlers] come there

¹⁸³ Ibid, 101.

¹⁸⁴ “Sachems of the Cayuga Nation to William Johnson” EAID X, 102-103.

¹⁸⁵ “Answer of Johnson to Sachems of Cayuga Nation” EAID X, 103.

they may be called away so we may have land left for ourselves and our allies.”¹⁸⁶ Johnson responded that he was “convinced that many frauds have been made use of in the purchasing of your lands,” expressed his apologies, and promised to “prevent these evil doings for the future...and punish those who have been guilty of these proceedings.”¹⁸⁷ In renewing the Covenant Chain with Johnson the Iroquois advanced a diplomatic agenda intended to preserve autonomy within Iroquoia and gain protection of their western lands in the war to come, ideally without having to intervene militarily in the coming imperial conflict.

Partisan Iroquois Involvement, Interethnic Bloodshed

The Battle of Lake George in 1755 provides a useful example of the existential challenge that involvement in the Seven Years’ War posed on Iroquois peoples. In pitting Iroquois against Iroquois, it reiterated the necessity for the confederacy to remain neutral in wartime, which it would until British victory became an inevitability. While in peacetime factional neutrality rarely pit Iroquois warriors against each other, wartime saw Catholic Iroquois under the influence of French missionaries and Mohawks under the influence of William Johnson and the British on opposite sides of the same battlefield at Lake George. Symbolic of the degree to which Iroquois settlements had grown reliant on Euroamerican society, these Anglophile and Francophile Iroquois warriors were defying a continued league-wide verdict to maintain neutrality in imperial conflict, although at several moments before and throughout the battle, these partisan Iroquois warriors acted in ways that displayed the unnaturalness of their alliance to empire and their reluctance to make war against their own kin.

¹⁸⁶ “Sachems of Several Nations to William Johnson,” 3 July 1755. EAID X, 106-7.

¹⁸⁷ “Col. Johnson’s Rejoinder to the Reply of the confederate Nations,” 4 July 1755. EAID X, 109.

Just before the battle, French plans for a siege on Fort Edward, a British fortification, faltered, thanks in large part to the Iroquois' historical commitment to neutrality. In early September, the Commander of the French forces in Canada, Baron Dieskau, sailed down Lake Champlain with "two hundred and sixty French Grenadiers, eight hundred Canadians, and seven hundred Indians," and then encamped a short distance from Fort Edward, which Dieskau intended to siege the following day. On the eve of the attack, Dieskau called his Indigenous allies (around 300 Catholic Iroquois and 400 Abenakis) to outline final preparations. The Iroquois warriors told Dieskau that they "would not join the attack, as they had resolved not to act against the English on their own territory."¹⁸⁸ Instead, they consented to participating in an ambush of Johnson and his allied Mohawk troops near their encampment at the head of Lake George. Given the historical protection that the British had provided for Iroquois lands—a tenet of the Covenant Chain—it is unsurprising that even the Francophile Iroquois that allied with Dieskau and the French refused to attack the fort. Moreover, the notable presence of a large contingent of Mohawk warriors amongst Johnson's ranks appeared to have shaken the commitment of the Catholic Iroquois.¹⁸⁹

In the British encampment, William Johnson and his troops were accompanied by Hendrick and around 200 Mohawk warriors, who were the only Iroquois warriors not, in Johnson's words, "extremely averse to taking part with us in the present active measures against the French."¹⁹⁰ Indeed, the rest of the confederacy had resisted Johnson's calls, and Hendrick and his warriors acted in defiance of the counsel of the league. As with Mohawk involvement in King George's War, these warriors' decision to take up the hatchet with Johnson produced tension amongst the

¹⁸⁸ "Account of the battle of Lake George September 8th, 1755." Morris P. Ferris. (compiled by the Committee on historical documents and Lake George Memorial Committee of the Society of Colonial Wars in the State of New York.), 7.

¹⁸⁹ Barr, *Unconquered*, 123.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 122.

Iroquois Confederacy. Though allied, accounts of the battle itself suggest that both Hendrick and his warriors and the Catholic Iroquois on the other side initially took steps avoid Indigenous casualties.

On the morning of the battle, Hendrick and his warriors led the procession of British-allied colonial troops as they traveled from their encampment along Lake George toward Fort Edward, which they believed was the target of the French forces they knew to be in proximity. The Catholic Iroquois' refusal to attack Fort Edward meant that the French had instead staged an ambush just four miles outside of Johnson's encampment on the path to Fort Edward. Leading the British procession, the Mohawk were the first to encounter the ambush, where, they "were challenged in the Iroquois Tongue" by the Catholic Iroquois who lay in wait. They revealed that they came "in conjunction with our Father the King of France's Troops to fight his Enemies the English without the least Intention to quarrel or trespass against any Indian Nation." Thus, the Catholic Iroquois hoped that Hendrick and his warriors would "keep out of the way lest we transgress and involve ourselves in a War among ourselves," to which Hendrick responded that "they, the Six Nations, came to assist their Brethren the English against the French who were encroaching upon the Territories of the English as well as Indians on the Ohio." For his part, Hendrick also desired to avoid shedding Iroquois blood, and told the Catholic Iroquois that "it was their place rather to join them, or at least follow their advice and keep out of Harm's way."¹⁹¹ Even in the moment of ambush, supposedly partisan Iroquois peoples attempted to negotiate a way out of fighting one another, as both factions had ulterior interests for allying with the British, and hoped to avoid harming their brethren.

¹⁹¹ "Account of the Death of King Hendrick" EAID X, 121.

A young Mohawk warrior—who, like many of his kind, did not think on the level of the confederacy—fired a shot at the French-allied Iroquois who spoke, and the brief negotiation between Hendrick and the Catholic Iroquois descended into bloodshed.¹⁹² Hendrick and a number of his warriors, as the first line of English defense, were killed in the first few minutes of the fighting. Following the initial skirmish, the French-allied Iroquois symbolically “took possession of a rising ground and remained inactive, while “other Indians also halted,” leaving Dieskau and his French and Canadian forces unsupported.¹⁹³ British forces were mostly able to retreat back to the edge of Johnson’s encampment along Lake George, where fighting continued throughout the day, with both Johnson and Dieskau receiving wounds. Johnson’s forces captured Dieskau and drove back the French assault, in a British-American victory that was later described as the battle that “[inspired] them with the zeal and energy which drove the French power and dominion from the country,” and as having been “the most important battle fought on New York soil prior to the Revolution.”¹⁹⁴ Coming after a string of French victories, the Battle of Lake George tilted the war in the British direction.

Perhaps lost in such American remembrances of the battle of Lake George was the complexity of Iroquois imperial alliance that it captured. As has been established in this thesis, the onslaught of European settlement into Iroquoia and the imperial warfare such settlement wrought at some junctures prevented the Iroquois from pursuing an unarmed neutrality in imperial conflict, and so it is unsurprising that in some instances the Iroquois found themselves on opposing sides of the same battlefield. The refusal of the Catholic Iroquois to invade the British fort and the discussion “in the Iroquois tongue” between Hendrick and one of the French-allied Iroquois who

¹⁹² Ibid, 121.

¹⁹³ “Account of the Battle of Lake George,” 8.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid, 11.

lay in ambush suggest that Iroquois on either side of the battle did not want to make war against each other (in spite of the zealous actions of a trigger-happy young Mohawk warrior).

Another account of the battle summarizes this initial exchange between the Iroquois on either side in a similar fashion, suggesting that when the French-allied Iroquois saw the Mohawk at the front of the British procession, they tried to alert their kin to the ambush that awaited them:

Some of the Senecas, with the French forces, espying their Mohawk brethren fired their muskets into the air as a warning of the ambush. Then the war-whoop sounded, followed by the discharge of musketry from behind rocks and trees.¹⁹⁵

Though it was the Mohawk and the British that were ambushed, it might also be said that the Catholic Iroquois were ambushed in learning that they were expected to kill their ethnic brethren and political confederates, which perhaps led to them to scurry to higher ground and abandon Dieskau after the initial volley.

The Lake George episode reminded the Iroquois Confederacy that imperial conflict truly had the power to pit kin against kin, nation against nation, Indian against Indian. Hendrick's peacetime insistence upon diplomacy had given way to partisan involvement in wartime, probably after accepting a bribe from Johnson, a mistake for which he paid his life. Indeed, following the battle, the Mohawk were chastised by the confederacy for their overzealous military support, and would adhere to the league-wide policy of neutrality for the next four years of the conflict.¹⁹⁶ In spite of the Battle of Lake George, and precisely because of its disastrous outcome for Iroquois peoples, neutrality was still the wisest course of Iroquois diplomacy during the Seven Years' War.

1757-1759: Covenant Chain Justifies Neutrality, Appeases the Ascendant British

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, 8.

¹⁹⁶ Barr, *Unconquered: The Iroquois League at War in Colonial America*, 124

Even during imperial war, and especially because of the existential consequences it wrought, the Iroquois continued to pursue neutrality so as to avoid the wrath, or conscription, of the belligerents in the conflict. In April of 1757, an Iroquois delegation at Montreal reiterated its commitment to remaining neutral in the imperial warfare that engulfed their homelands, reasoning that “we are resolved to keep friends on both sides as long as possible & not to meddle with the hatchet but endeavor always to pacify the white people our arms shall be between you endeavoring to keep you asunder.”¹⁹⁷ Between warring imperial powers, both of whom they had treated with and relied upon during peacetime, the Iroquois declared their continued intention to remain neutral and “pacify” both sides. Consistent with their prewar stance toward the French, this position reflected Iroquois desire to keep retain independent ownership of Iroquoia and keep it as peaceful as possible; moreover, knowing as they did that the war was for dominion over northeast North America, there was no reason to choose sides between empires who both fought for control of Iroquoia.

Alongside reiterating their neutral stance to the French, the Iroquois continued to advocate for themselves and their interests to the British through the Covenant Chain. In 1757, Iroquois sachems reiterated their simultaneous commitment to the renewing Covenant Chain and desire for neutrality in the present conflict. Hoping to maintain peace throughout the villages of Iroquoia, as had been their primary agenda in pursuing peacetime neutrality, the Iroquois tried to secure William Johnson’s blessing for their neutrality through their adherence to the Covenant Chain, just as they had done in peacetime. By harping on the mutuality of the Covenant Chain, the Iroquois hoped to receive imperial sanction of their commitment to neutrality. In the end, Johnson would

¹⁹⁷ “Account of proceedings of Six Nations with Montreal,” Apr 7, 1757. William Johnson Papers, V2, 705

allow for Iroquois neutrality only insofar as it was sympathetic to the British, a trend that would continue in Anglo-Iroquois and American-Iroquois relations during the American Revolution.

During negotiations at Fort Johnson in June of 1757, members of the Cayuga, Seneca, Onondaga, and Mohawk spoke on behalf of the entire confederacy (the Oneida and Tuscarora were not present) with the intention of securing military neutrality and reasserting the traditional trade benefits of the Covenant Chain. They began by justifying isolated incidents of Iroquois involvement on behalf of the French (like those of the Catholic Iroquois at Lake George), which defied the league's counsel. Assembled sachems of the Cayuga nation acknowledged that some "Seneca warriors" had recently "smote" a number of English soldiers while fighting alongside the French, an action which had "concerned" the Cayuga, prompting them to take action to "prevent the like for the future."¹⁹⁸ The Cayuga then admitted that "one or two" of their own young warriors may also have been "friends of the French," but that as a confederacy they remained "determined to hold fast to the Covenant Chain and not let it slip out of our hands."¹⁹⁹ In the same way that limited military involvement in King George's War had not shaken the league's commitment to neutrality, the actions of these warriors did not reflect the policy of the confederacy. For the sachems who spoke to William Johnson, some young warriors' involvement with the French did not shake the greater confederacy's commitment to the Covenant Chain, by which they continued to abide, and through which they claimed their right to protect their homelands and remain neutral to the imperial conflict that raged around them.

Indeed, this desire to "hold fast to the Covenant Chain" did not mean that the Cayuga or others of the confederacy committed to intervening on behalf of the British. Rather, they wished

¹⁹⁸ "Proceedings with the Six Nations," Fort Johnson, 13 June 1757, EAID X, 211.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 213.

to remain “neuter,” as such a policy would most effectively allow Iroquois to protect their communities from the French and their Indigenous allies. An Onondaga sachem reasoned that Johnson should allow Onondaga warriors, “in justice to our country and our families to stay at home and take care...to protect them from the attempts our enemies.”²⁰⁰ Indeed, the Iroquois acknowledged that they and the British had a mutual desire “to remove the French from their encroachments on your and our country,” but reasoned that they needed to protect themselves before they could intervene actively for the British. As the sachems summarized, “we have given you our several reasons for not using the hatchet you sharpened for us...if we were to be absent from our Castles, our women and children would be at the mercy of the enemy; and therefore we think it necessary to stay at home in our own defense.” It may also have been that their assurances to the French at Montreal of their continued neutrality meant that if the Iroquois hoped to avoid French aggression, they would have to limit their military involvement alongside the British. In the end, the Iroquois reminded Colonel Johnson, “the Covenant Chain was made for our mutual advantage,” and the Iroquois needed to protect their villages instead of serving alongside British forces.

Johnson’s angry response indicated his alternate interpretation of the terms of the Covenant Chain, which, he felt, necessitated Iroquois allegiance. Reminding the Iroquois that the ancient agreement ensured that “the English and the Iroquois shall consider themselves as one flesh and one blood,” he reacted angrily to the prospect of Iroquois warriors not coming to the aid of the British, and suspected that they had recently let French allied Indigenous groups “come through your habitations” and attack British forts.²⁰¹ Moreover, he did not agree that the Covenant Chain

²⁰⁰ Ibid, 213.

²⁰¹ Ibid, 217.

allowed for the Iroquois to opt out of fighting on their behalf, rejecting that it sanctioned one “brother [to] look quietly on, smoke his pipe at his own door and say he can’t help him because perhaps his own house may take fire.”²⁰² Indeed, Johnson charged that the Iroquois’ end of the Covenant Chain “is grown very rusty, and without great care will be in danger of being eaten through.”²⁰³ The Iroquois shot back that “we have reason to charge you on your side with inactivity and neglect towards us,” mainly evidenced by their inability to support Senecas, Onondagas, and Oneidas, when they were attacked by French forces.²⁰⁴ Acknowledging the strain war placed on the Covenant Chain, the Iroquois reiterated to Johnson that they were not abandoning it, but rather needed to protect their people, first and foremost.

In spite of high tensions produced by misaligned interpretations of the Covenant Chain, the council at Fort Johnson concluded with Colonel Johnson dictating terms of Iroquois neutrality that would be acceptable to him—indeed, Iroquois neutrality had been negotiated successfully. First, in their “neutrality,” the Iroquois could not “commit any hostilities upon the person or property of any of His Majesty’s subjects”; second, they could not “permit the French or their Indians to pass through your settlements in order to come and make war upon the English”; third, they were not to “directly or indirectly give our enemies or their Indians any intelligence to our prejudice”; and fourth, in order to maintain the Covenant Chain, Johnson expected that the Iroquois would “give us without delay all such intelligence as may be in your power, which in any way relates to our welfare.”²⁰⁵ Any failure to abide by those rules, Johnson warned, would result in the British “[looking] on the Covenant Chain as absolutely broke between us.”²⁰⁶ Importantly, though, the

²⁰² Ibid, 217.

²⁰³ Ibid, 217.

²⁰⁴ Ibid, 220.

²⁰⁵ Ibid, 222.

²⁰⁶ Ibid, 222.

Iroquois had effectively fought for their ability to remain neutral during wartime by clinging to the Covenant Chain. Essentially, then, Johnson sanctioned Iroquois neutrality to military conflict, but secured their sympathy and tactical support. For the remainder of the war, such a policy of neutrality to war but allegiance to the British cause held court in Iroquoia, and Covenant Chain—along with the neutrality it allowed for—remained intact through the British victory and into the 1760s. This manner of allied neutrality would be the demise of the Iroquois Confederacy during the American Revolution.

CHAPTER FIVE

Neutrality Between Colonists and the Crown, 1760-1777

Following the Seven Years' War, the French counterbalance that had ensured the Iroquois' ability to play one dependence off the other disappeared. The American Revolution, though, created a new imperial binary wherein both the rebelling colonies and British crown invoked the Covenant Chain to garner Iroquois sympathy; meanwhile the Iroquois hoped to secure neutrality in pursuit of the well-established tenets of avoiding interethnic bloodshed and maintaining peace and autonomy in Iroquoia. In wrestling for control of the Covenant Chain, the polarized belligerents of the American Revolution eventually fractured the Iroquois Confederacy—the Oneida and Tuscarora would side with the Americans, and the Mohawk, Seneca, Cayuga, and Onondaga eventually tended toward the British. The neutrality that the Iroquois espoused did not provide them with the autonomy or peace that it had in wars past. Ultimately, after several nations took up the war hatchet against the British—which they thought would best guarantee their nations' interests—and thus broke the long-held, league-wide commitment to peace and balance, the Americans conducted a retaliation campaign against the Iroquois, which aided in their now decades-long desire for possession of Iroquoia. With the faltering of neutrality, so expired Iroquois autonomy, peace, and homeland control.

Altered Peacetime Neutrality After the French Exit

Adhering to the Covenant Chain throughout the Seven Years' War proved vital for the maintenance of Iroquois land rights after that conflict ended, as the agreement of mutuality between them and the British had not faltered in spite of the only limited military aid they had provided. As the end of Chapter Four makes clear, the Iroquois had managed to convince the British of their need to remain at home in 1757, and they were not punished for it after the war. The confederacy had used the threat of the French to justify this decision, however, and that would not be an option after the British vanquished the French at Quebec in 1759; indeed, the paradigm

within which the Iroquois had successfully navigated imperial politics by pursuing neutrality disappeared. The French would cede virtually all of their North American colonial holdings to the British at the Peace of Paris in 1763; no longer could the Iroquois retain even symbolic geopolitical space between empires—there was now only one empire around. The French were also no longer a bargaining chip for the Iroquois to play in future Covenant Chain renewals to help secure concessions or promises from the British, which had often facilitated the Iroquois’ ability to pursue neutrality, as opposed to alliance, through the Covenant Chain. Moreover, the fight for North American supremacy had been, half-implicitly, a fight for dominion over the Iroquois’ and other Indigenous peoples’ homelands. With the French expelled, the British gained control of all the forts that surrounded their territory in Canada and the Great Lakes region.

To anyone in the region, Iroquoia appeared a British spoil of the war. Indeed, one theme in Anglo-Iroquois negotiations during the war had been the land question. William Johnson, for example, noted that the Iroquois continually made the claim that the Seven Years’ War “was carried on to see who would become masters of the property of neither the one nor the other”—namely, of Iroquoia.²⁰⁷ Without the French counterweight, the Iroquois found themselves virtually surrounded by land-hungry British colonists. They hoped that late-war treaties with Johnson and some limited military involvement alongside British troops would translate into favorable policies that might secure Iroquoia for the Iroquois and stave off the British colonists that encroached continually. Those colonists often despised and defied British imperial edicts, which created a new conflict in which the Iroquois could play both sides against the middle. As Colin Calloway neatly summarizes, “the clash of French and British ambitions gave way to a clash of British and

²⁰⁷ “Sir William Johnson to the Lords of Trade,” NYCD, 7:575.

American ambitions.²⁰⁸ The Proclamation of 1763, for example, drew a longitudinal line through the Appalachians that was to demarcate Indigenous America from British America, forging a new direction in British-Indigenous diplomacy. Alongside the Niagara Council the following summer, the Proclamation has been remembered by the First Nations of Canada as “a reaffirmation of their preexisting rights of self-government,” and was the first in a series of British efforts to separate Indigenous American from Anglo America.²⁰⁹ Unsurprisingly, then, it infuriated American colonists on the frontier, for it acknowledged continued Iroquois dominion on land over which British colonists had just fought a war, and proved an obstacle for private land speculators. These speculators included future American founders like George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, who began to grow weary of imperial directives. Moreover, the Proclamation Line was ignored by land hungry colonists who began to view such British directives as tyrannical, and knew they were powerless to stop land encroachment in practicality, though they advocated against it in theory.²¹⁰

Simultaneously, the Proclamation showed that the British continued to recognize Iroquois agency on the frontier; indeed, it reflected the calls Hendrick and other Iroquois sachems had made in the 1750s, when land speculation and fraud went unchecked. The protection of the Covenant Chain ensured Johnson’s commitment to some measure of fair treatment as peace returned. In other words, at least in theory, Iroquois land rights, often an agenda item in Covenant Chain negotiations, received much respect from the British crown but little from British colonists. American encroachment on Indigenous lands continued throughout the mid-1760s, leading to the Treaty of Fort Stanwix in 1768, in which the Iroquois negotiated directly with William Johnson and the British government to more directly secure their land rights, having not been present for

²⁰⁸ Colin G. Calloway, *The Scratch of a Pen*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006) 98.

²⁰⁹ Calloway, *Scratch of a Pen*, 97.

²¹⁰ *Ibid*, 98.

the drawing of the more symbolic Proclamation Line in Paris four years prior. Positioning themselves between some of their subsidiary tribes, the Shawnees and the Delaware, and the British Crown, the Iroquois strengthened the position and security of their confederacy by ceding the lands of the Delaware and Shawnee to William Johnson and the colonial Crown government. Reminiscent of the 1701 treaty with Governor Nanfan, where the Iroquois had also advanced their agenda by ceding lands that were not theirs, the Treaty of Fort Stanwix recognized the Iroquois unique standing in relations with the Crown. As William Campbell has argued, at Fort Stanwix, the Iroquois became “speculators in empire,” drawing upon their privileged status in the eyes of the British to secure gains for themselves at the expense of more “savage” or “rebellious” nations.²¹¹ Following the Treaty, which, of course, also renewed the Covenant Chain between the British and the Iroquois, the Iroquois continued to endure land encroachment from westward-looking British-American speculators; skirmishes, disputes and fraud were common. For the last six years of his life (he died in 1774) William Johnson endeavored tirelessly to normalize peaceful Covenant Chain relations with the Iroquois and their dependents, well aware that good relations with the Confederacy would be useful in the colonial crisis that appeared to be brewing by the early 1770s.

The American Revolution: Iroquois Neutrality in a New Wartime Binary

Rebellious colonists, incensed with the British for a laundry list of reasons including those some related to British respect for Iroquois lands, began rousing anti-Crown sentiment throughout the British colonies on the Atlantic coast, and in April of 1775, the first shots of the War for

²¹¹ William Campbell, *Speculators in Empire* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012), 3-14, 167-202.

American Independence were fired at Lexington and Concord. Although it would take nearly two years for the Revolutionary War to reach Iroquoia, Patriots and Loyalists alike countenanced the powerful Iroquois Confederacy in their initial imaginings of the conflict to come. For their part, the Iroquois bemoaned the outbreak of war, and quickly recognized that the most prudent option was to stay a neutral course between two belligerents and try to keep the fighting away from their homelands. With a new dichotomy bifurcating allegiances on the continent, finding neutral ground seemed eminently possible. Perhaps, as in previous periods of Euroamerican warfare, the Iroquois could manage to play one side against the other in order to secure their own autonomous interests, which, as always, specifically concerned the well-being of Indigenous communities, the maintenance of beneficial trade relations, and the retention of their homelands on the frontier of an ever-expanding colonial society.

The Americans as much as the British accounted for the political and military relevance of the Iroquois in their initial imaginations of the conflict; eventually, both would claim control of the Covenant Chain in hopes of securing Iroquois loyalties. American figurations of what Iroquois involvement would look like centered around a desire to keep the conflict a white man's war, which reflected both their fear of Indian warfare and their suspicion that the British had a better claim on Iroquois allegiances. In 1775, Continental Congressman John Adams wrote a letter to fellow patriot James Warren that included an assessment of the role that Indigenous peoples were to play (or not) in the war. The letter depicted, simultaneously, a pointed reverence for the military and strategic importance of the Iroquois and a conviction of their inferiority. He described "the Nations of Indians inhabiting the Frontiers of the Colonies" as simultaneously "numerous and warlike" and "disposed to Neutrality."²¹² This contradiction, between the inherent

²¹² "From John Adams to James Warren, 7 June 1775." Founders Letters Online (hereafter FL).

bloodthirstiness of the “Indians” and their apparent desire for neutrality in the coming conflict characterized the paradoxical position that the Iroquois occupied in the minds of the Americans at the outset of the Revolution. Indeed, their supposed savagery on the colonial frontier had appeared on the Declaration of Independence as a grievance against the British. The 1776 document charged the British Government with encouraging Anglo-Indigenous conflict, arguing that the King “[endeavored] to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian Savages, whose known rule of warfare, is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions.”²¹³ Yet noting their simultaneous desire for neutrality, Adams previewed the American solution to the potential Iroquois military threat: to treat with them in order to secure neutrality, a stance in imperial conflicts to which they were known to be predisposed.

Later in Adams’ letter, he suggested an explanation for pursuing a policy of neutrality with the Iroquois that would come to be the Americans’ official policy for the first few years of the war. Claiming that Indian warfare style was “so entirely without Faith and Humanity, that it would bring eternal Infamy on the Ministry throughout all Europe,” Adams hoped to keep them out of the conflict.²¹⁴ As involving Indigenous warriors in the conflict would in his mind have mired it in “savagery,” Adams hoped that the Americans could treat with the Iroquois and other Indigenous peoples so as to not have them “scalping men and butchering children.”²¹⁵ Indeed, he suggested that securing Iroquois neutrality would save what was to be a civil conflict between Anglo Empire and Anglo-American Republic. Had such there been such an option for Iroquois during the Seven Years’ War, they surely would have taken it.

²¹³ “Declaration of Independence,” Archives.org.

²¹⁴ “From John Adams to James Warren, 7 June 1775,” FL.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

Oneida Declaration of Neutrality, 1775

Some evidence suggests that remaining beyond the Anglo-American warfare was exactly what the Iroquois wished to do. In 1775, the Oneidas declared their neutrality to the coming conflict on behalf of the entire confederacy:

These may Certify all whom it may concern. That we the Chiefs, head men, councilors warriors, & youngmen of the Oneida nation, this day assembled together [considering] affairs of importance, we say that these and not only we of the Oneida nation. But the other nations with whom we are connected. Our desire is to be nutrail in these critical times—in these times of great confusion: we desire not to meddle with any disputers that are now in agitation.²¹⁶

The neutrality that these Oneida sachems espoused emerged from their inability to take sides in a conflict that was essentially amongst a singular people. Indeed, the declaration indicated that the Iroquois wished to “let our English Brethren be assured of this truth that if we were called to assist them against any other Power that would not find us Backward in the Least,” and would “evidence to the world our regards for the English nation by fighting for their defence as in time past.”²¹⁷ Simultaneously, they assured their “New England Brethren” who were in rebellion, that the Oneida give “the token of friendship” so long as it was understood that “no one shall prevail with us, or persuade [us] to take up arms against you our English Brethren.” Wishing to be left alone, the Oneida promised that they would not give either side any “disturbance,” and assured to “exert our utmost Endeavours to keep our brethren the Six Nations and others further back from disturbing you.” Ultimately, the Oneida desired that “peace may be restored soon between Great Britain and her Colony.”²¹⁸

²¹⁶ “Oneida Declaration of Neutrality, 1775.” Kirkland Papers (hereafter KP).

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

Broadly, the Iroquois faced an unprecedented dilemma at the outset of the Revolution, in that traditional Iroquois factionalism, which had sustained their neutrality between the French and the British in the intercolonial wars, no longer carried any significance in this new North American war. Instead, the Iroquois faced a conflict in which the belligerents shared a singular historical relationship with the confederacy. As a result, both the British and the Americans fought for Iroquois sympathy by claiming the ancient Covenant Chain agreement as truly theirs. The task of officers on either side thus became one of convincing the Iroquois of the disingenuousness of the other side, and, secondarily, of the righteousness of their own cause. With resources and history on their side, the British called for Iroquois allegiance through the Covenant Chain, whereas the Americans asked for neutrality, which aligned more succinctly with Iroquois desires.

American Hands on the Covenant Chain

The Patriots' desire for Iroquois neutrality reflected several facets of their relationship to the Iroquois. Most centrally, as a rebellious faction they had an inferior claim on Iroquois allegiance—and the Covenant Chain—in comparison to the British. With over a century of diplomacy to draw upon, the British hoped to secure the allegiance of the Iroquois in the coming conflict, as they had managed through a negotiated neutrality—which was really an assurance of allegiance—during the Seven Years' War. Less ambitiously, the Americans conducted Iroquois diplomacy with the goal of securing their neutrality, which aligned with Iroquois desires for the conflict. American military strategists, led by Major General Philip Schuyler, understood that if the Iroquois were to intervene militarily alongside the British, the Western frontier would become

a serious problem.²¹⁹ Grand-nephew to Peter Schuyler, an original British Indian Agent to the Iroquois in the late seventeenth century, the Major-General was a prominent member of the Board of Commissioners that oversaw American diplomacy with the Iroquois during the Revolution. He was often assisted by James Dean and Samuel Kirkland, ministers who had been forging ties in Iroquoia (mostly in Oneida) during the 1750s and 1760s. Kirkland's missionary work in Oneida promised some sympathy among them, and Kirkland was charged in July of 1775 by the Board of Commissioners with "securing friendship and to continue them in a state of Neutrality with respect to the present Controversy between Great Britain & these Colonies."²²⁰

In July of 1775, the Continental Congress representing the thirteen colonies disseminated a long speech to throughout the Six Nations that described their reasons for rebelling against the King and expressed their hopes that the Six Nations would remain neutral in the coming conflict. The way that the Americans framed the emerging conflict between the rebelling colonies and the British in this speech reveals their desire for the revolution.

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. In the name and in behalf of all our people, we ask and desire you to love peace and maintain it, and to love and sympathize with us in our troubles; that the path may be kept open with all our people and yours, to pass and repass, without molestation.²²¹

Underneath this argument was the reality that the Iroquois were far more disposed to ally with the British Empire, who had resources and precedent on their side, than with the pugilistic Americans,

²¹⁹ For a treatment of colonial propaganda about Indian war, and about anti-Indian sentiment and its relation to the Revolution, see Peter Silver, *Our Savage Neighbors* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 2008).

²²⁰ "U.S. Commissioners to Samuel Kirkland" 18 July 1775, KP.

²²¹ "A Speech to the Six Confederate Nations, Mohawks, Oneidas, Tuscaroras, Onondagas, Cayugas, Senekas, from the Twelve United Colonies, convened in Council at Philadelphia." *Journal of the Continental Congress* (JCC).

whose “quarrel” concerned, among other grievances, the lines of demarcation (the Proclamation Line and the Treaty of Fort Stanwix) that legally protected Iroquois lands. At a council at German Flats on August 15, the Americans invited the Iroquois to Albany, where they hoped to “rekindle the council fire which our ancestors and yours formerly kindled up at that place, and there sit down and converse together.”²²² Indeed, the commissioners made reference to a shared ancestry in an attempt to wrest control of the Covenant Chain—and thus of Iroquois sympathy—from the British.

At Albany ten days later, the Americans used the language of the Covenant Chain to describe their quarrel with the British, which they hoped would make the Iroquois aware of the righteousness of the war that they declared, show them that the British did not have their best interest in mind, and convince them that the Covenant Chain was theirs to renew. The commissioners, who spoke “in the Name of the Twelve United Colonies,” wished to “rekindle the ancient council fire” and “renew the covenant,” appropriating the traditional customs of British-Iroquois diplomacy.²²³ Indeed, the Americans used the Covenant Chain as an analogy to describe the deterioration of their relationship with the British Crown:

When our fathers crossed the great water, and came over to this land, the King of England gave them a talk; assuring them that they and their children should be his children, and that if they would leave their native country, and make settlements, and live here, and buy and sell and trade with their brethren beyond the water, they should still keep hold of the same covenant chain, and enjoy peace.... Trusting that this covenant should never be broken, our fathers, our fathers came a great distance...and grew tall and strong.²²⁴

The Americans painted Crown-Colony relations as analogous to the ancient Covenant Chain between the Iroquois and the British in order to show the Iroquois that the British did not honor mutual agreements. Complete with the notion that their covenant made the King and the colonists

²²² “Conference with the Six Nations at German Flats,” 15 August 1775. EAID XVIII, 5.

²²³ “Conference with the Six Nations at Albany,” 25 August 1775. EAID XVIII, 9.

²²⁴ *Ibid*, 10.

“one blood,” just as the Covenant Chain symbolically did for the Iroquois and the King, and that, in times of imperial conflict “their enemies were our enemies”—especially, they noted, during the French and Indian War—the American deputies worked to position the British as breakers of the Chain and the Americans as the truly honorable keepers of it. The deputies also framed the grievances that had led them to rebellion and animated the Declaration of Independence as evidence that the British were breaking the chain, hoping the Iroquois would understand both the reasoning behind their rebellion and recognize the Americans as the truer heirs to the Covenant Chain. Indeed, the speech continued, the “quarrel between the counsellors of King George and the inhabitants” arose because voices in England “persuade the King to break the covenant chain, and not to send us any more good talks.”²²⁵

In explaining the lead-up to their rebellion in this way, the American commissioners implied that the Covenant Chain between the Iroquois and the British was also in danger, and that the rebelling colonies would be safer keepers of it. After relating this analogy, the American commissioners promised to renew the true Covenant Chain with the Iroquois, and provided terms that aligned with the interests of Iroquoia—namely, that they desired the Iroquois to “remain at home and not join either side, but keep the hatchet buried deep.”²²⁶ In this way, the Americans strengthened the rightfulness of their claim on the Covenant Chain asking the Iroquois for something they knew was of true mutual interest—namely, neutrality. Desiring the conflict to be “a family quarrel,” then, the Americans hoped that they could count on Iroquois neutrality, which had long been the confederacy’s preferred course of action in conflicts that were not of their own making, and especially between colonial entities.

²²⁵ Ibid, 11.

²²⁶ Ibid, 12.

The British Reclaim the Covenant Chain

For their part, the British Indian officers downplayed the power of the rebellious colonists, denied their hold on the Covenant Chain, and encouraged the Iroquois to ignore American attempts to turn their heads away from the British. Indian Agents were led by the new Superintendent of Indian affairs, Guy Johnson (nephew of William) and Colonel John Butler, who would soon become acting Superintendent when Johnson returned to England. The prospect of the Iroquois remaining neutral did not sit well with Butler, whose strategy for diplomacy in Iroquoia followed that of Johnson: gift giving and assurance of homeland protection.²²⁷ At Fort Niagara in October of 1775, Butler expressed to the Iroquois that the Americans were “telling them lies in order to break that chain of Friendship which they and their Father the King had made so strong,” but hoped that the Iroquois were “a people of more sense than to believe what they said or to attend any of their meetings that they and their father the King had established at Niagara, at that Fire they would never be deceived but always hear the truth.”²²⁸ He wished to convene council fires from his military post at Niagara, where he would be able to debunk the claims of the Americans, whom he framed as “those troublesome people who want to do all in their power to hurt [Iroquois] interests.”²²⁹ As the war began, after the Iroquois renewed the Covenant Chain with the Americans and declared their neutrality in a conflict that was not of their own making, the British scrambled to reaffirm that their interests were those that truly aligned with the Iroquois. Butler made this case by citing the land protection that the British had historically provided to the Iroquois, which the

²²⁷ Barbara Graymont, *The Iroquois in the American Revolution* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1772), 86.

²²⁸ “October 21, 1775,” *Journal of John Butler*, Guy Johnson Papers (hereafter JBJ).

²²⁹ *Ibid.*

American rebels, desiring to expand their future republic westward, had little interest in maintaining.

Thus, alongside a battle for independence, a battle for Iroquois sympathies had begun. Butler and the British Empire's case rested on the established fact of American, not imperial, hunger for Iroquois lands. In a council with Iroquois sachems at Niagara in 1776, Butler further explained to gathered Iroquois leaders the falsehoods he perceived behind the Americans' desire for their neutrality:

Consider those peoples advice to you, and then judge whether they are sincere or not. They tell you they don't want you to assist them, and advise you not to assist the king, but follow your hunting and not hinder them. Consider where you are to get powder and ball, the Americans cannot make powder, it is well known they never made any, and the King will not allow any more to be brought to America but for his own Warriors and his faithful Indians, even the very Cloths we wear are made in England, from thence consider, can they supply you or not.²³⁰

In what could only be described as a veiled threat, Butler asserted that the Iroquois would not be adequately provided for by the Americans if they remained neutral, because the British would stop providing for them. Moreover, Butler explained potential problems that the Iroquois might face if they allowed the Americans passage through Iroquoia, which had been one of the terms proposed at Albany:

Consider very seriously which you think will be most to your advantage, to allow those drunken people to stop the Door of Canada, as they have the rest of America, by which you must be entirely at their mercy, if they think fit to quarrel with you as the Virginians did with the Shawanees, would you be able to find yourselves without powder or Ball, consider whether it is not your land they aim at, as they can't get them by a fair purchase, as the King and you have fixed a line which they cannot cross by fair means.²³¹

²³⁰ "At a meeting held at Niagara, 22 January 1776," JBJ.

²³¹ "Niagara, 26 February 1776," JBJ.

Throughout the 1760s, the British had proven their commitment to keeping land hungry colonists from encroaching on Iroquois lands. Butler argued that the Iroquois would be naïve to think that, although the Americans desired the Iroquois to remain neutral (which was music to their ears) they truly had Iroquois interests in mind. Rather, Butler argued, the Americans advocated Iroquois neutrality from a position of weakness, hoping to appeal to their desires in order to avoid them on the battlefield; if they managed to oust the British, which Butler considered a virtual impossibility, Butler argued that they would immediately turn on the Iroquois and their lands. In March of 1776, he assured them: “you have it in your power to prevent their having it in their power to ruin you, by sticking to your engagements with the King...you must see through their design.”²³²

That May, Iroquois sachems recounted another recent meeting with John Butler at Niagara, which told of his incensed reaction to their engagement with the Americans in pursuit of neutrality. The chiefs had informed Butler of the confederacy’s resolution to remain “all united and resolved to maintain peace, both with the king and the Bostonians, and receive no axe from either,” an outcome that reflected their Covenant Chain renewal and negotiation with the Americans. Butler’s threatening response clarified the expectations of Iroquois neutrality. Crucially, he felt that by offering the Americans safe passage through Iroquoia, the confederacy acted against the crown. Long had the Iroquois desired for their homelands to be demilitarized, yet Butler insisted that the Iroquois not let the Americans through Iroquoia. Moreover, Butler felt that treating the King’s government and the American rebels as equal parties to balance constituted an ideological win for the American cause. His threatening rhetoric sent a clear message to the Iroquois chiefs that what they thought was a defensible, attainable political position between the belligerents of a rapidly escalating conflict was not so:

²³² “Niagara, 12 March 1776,” JBJ.

Brothers, your resolutions are very surprising. Where is there any one body of men to be compared with the King? As for General Schuyler of whom you boast so much, what is he? He was born but yesterday: just now, as it were, started up out of the ground, and tomorrow will return into the earth, whence he came. It will not be the space of a month before you hear him cry. He has no men, guns, cannon and ammunition, or clothing; and should he survive the summer he must perish by the cold next winter for want of blankets. But the king wants neither men nor money; there is no computing his numbers.²³³

Refusing to allow the Iroquois to treat the British and Americans as if they were equal, Butler minimized the legitimacy of the rebels' forces, downplaying the threat they posed to the mighty British crown. He made his side out to be a well-resourced, bountiful, amply armed juggernaut and painted the Americans as a childish, rabble-rousing faction whose short-lived flicker of legitimacy was moments from permanent extinguishment.²³⁴

In May, a Seneca speaker related to Butler the confederacy's desire to keep the war outside of Iroquoia, as they had advocated for in the intercolonial wars of the 1740s and 1750s. recounting Butler's request that the Iroquois keep the Americans "quiet and out of this Country," and the speaker mirrored it with a request from that the British, too, "not to enter and disturb our country, and be the means of blood being spilt, and we have made the same request to the Kings children in the Colonies."²³⁵ The Iroquois still felt that they could keep the conflict out of their country, and thus remain beyond the bloodshed in a war that they understood to be a "family quarrel." Later on in the speech, the Seneca speaker once again declared the confederacy's desire for "peace...conducive to our own interests" and declared:

We have resolved to preserve a Strict Neutrality. Brothers, you have always on the part of the King & his children for themselves desired us to live and remain quiet, which we are determined to do. You may perhaps soon settle your differences, but

²³³ Oneida Chiefs to Philip Schuyler, May 22 1776. KP.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ "At a meeting held at Niagara, 5 May 1776," JBJ.

should we engage for either party, we know not so well to bury the hatchet after having once taken it up.²³⁶

In response, Butler warned that the Iroquois' "future happiness much depends on your present behavior," and, in the language of the Covenant Chain, reiterated that the Iroquois pursue their own interest, but insisted that they still "consider our interest and yours the same."²³⁷

In a council with the Iroquois later that month, Butler mocked the Iroquois for not taking up the hatchet, and reasserted his desire that they strengthen their hold on the Covenant Chain by allying with the British. Butler told the Iroquois that "if you chuse to be defenceless We have no Objection, and it shews you are afraid of Offending those people & will Rather allow them to laugh at your folly then disoblige them." Furthermore, he reiterated that it was, truly, he and the British crown that held control of the Covenant Chain in order to secure their interests:

It was that covenant we thought Necessary at this Time to be renewed by you, as well as to consult together for your mutual interests there never was a Time, nor do we think there ever will be a greater necessity for your being Unanimous than at present in assisting the King and supporting his Gov't in helping him to bring you cloths as usual, as yourselves your women & children, your Lands in short everything, your very all depends on your acting a wise part at this time, which we expect you will do, & thereby prevent your Children & your grandchildren from Reflecting on you & scoleding your bones in your Graves.²³⁸

Such a renewal, though, also seemed to imply that the Iroquois "join in assisting the King & to defend your peace which might be dearer to you than your Lives."²³⁹ In concluding this conference in which he asked for the Iroquois to renew the Covenant Chain and aid the British, Butler returned to the question of Iroquois land autonomy and the maintenance of unity amongst the confederacy:

We now tell you again in the name of the King if you listen to those wicked designing people you will soon be disunited, and of course soon become an easy conquest to them, which we sincerely believe is their intention, to distress you as

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ "At a meeting held at Niagara, 7 May 1776," JBJ.

²³⁸ "At a meeting held at Niagara, 31 May 1776" JBJ.

²³⁹ Ibid.

soon as they are able which you must prevent by listening only to him & not to your Enemies.²⁴⁰

In Butler's prescient eyes, the Iroquois would "become an easy conquest" to the Americans if they listened to Philip Schuyler.

Cognizant of Butler's attempts to undermine the Americans' cause and convince the Iroquois of their fraudulent intentions in treating with the Iroquois, Schuyler and the Americans continued to appeal to the Iroquois by making clear that they advocated for Iroquois neutrality and did not ask for anything else, as Butler had implied. In January of 1777, for example, Schuyler addressed a letter to the sachems of the Six Nations, in which he praised the confederacy for "so strictly observing the neutrality you promised to abide by," and gave them two reasons that they should be permitted neutrality: first, "because we do not wish to involve you in a war," and second, "because we are capable of defending ourselves against our Enemies."²⁴¹

Iroquois Civil War

Late in July of 1777, however, Butler and his fellow Indian agents Daniel Claus and Barry St. Leger managed to obtain the war hatchet from four of the six Iroquois nations, dissolving the league-wide policy of neutrality and evidencing the power of Butler's arguments, inducements, and threats over the last eighteen months. According the remembrances of Blacksnake, a Seneca warrior, a council at Three Rivers ended thusly:

The ceremony of taking up the hatchet was then formally gone through with: Brant was the first to accept the war-belt, which he did in behalf of the Mohawks: Then Gi-engwah-toh, Gi-ya-sa-da and other Senecas: Then Jug-ge-ta, or the Fish Carrier, or the Cayugas; Then Gah-kon-de-noi-ya, or the Rail-Carrier, of the Oneidas:

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Schuyler to Six Nations, 1777 FL.

Lastly, the War-belt was accepted by She-gwoi-e-she, or the Dragging-Spear, of the Tuscaroras. Not many of the Oneids and Tuscaroras were in attendance.²⁴²

The remaining years of the Revolution were to be an Iroquois civil war, that in the words of Colin Calloway, “in some cases literally, brother killed brother.”²⁴³ Days later, the Battle of Oriskany marked that war’s beginning, as allied factions of Iroquois fought each other alongside British and American belligerents. Though recently Karim Tiro pointed out that, as in previous conflicts, the Iroquois worked to minimize interethnic bloodshed, the fact remains that with the taking up of the hatchet by four of the six nations of the confederacy, and the continued commitment of the Oneida and Tuscarora to the Americans, the Iroquois Confederacy’s pursuit of peace, balance and continued autonomy dissolved into a period of warfare that increased their dependence on Euroamerican colonial powers.²⁴⁴

Taking up the war hatchet suggested the weight Butler’s arguments held amongst most Iroquois: they trusted Butler and the British to remain truer to Iroquois interests than the Americans, even though the Americans only claimed desired their neutrality. In partially taking up the hatchet, and because of the internecine blood spilled at the Battle of Oriskany and in other battles in the Saratoga Campaign that summer and fall, the Iroquois Confederacy fractured. At a December 1777 council with Butler, Onondaga headmen vowed “never again to go to the Councils of the Oneidas, or of the Rebels.”²⁴⁵ Moreover, Butler had been right to suggest that the Americans would not be able to provide as many gifts to the Iroquois as could the British. The degree to which the Iroquois became dependent on the belligerent powers can be seen in the complaints of 1778,

²⁴² Quoted in Graymont, *The Iroquois in the American Revolution*, 127.

²⁴³ Colin Calloway, *The American Revolution in Indian Country*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 34.

²⁴⁴ See Tiro, Karim M. "A 'Civil' War? Rethinking Iroquois Participation in the American Revolution." *Explorations in Early American Culture* 4 (2000): 148-65.

²⁴⁵ Quoted in Graymont, *Iroquois in the American Revolution*, 161.

Good Peter, a chief of Oneida who sided with the American. He compared the benefits (or lack thereof) that his tribe was receiving in contrast to his brothers who aligned primarily with the British:

We have adhered to you from the beginning of the war. The other Nations of the Confederacy scoff at us and frequently ask us whether we have as yet received a sufficient supply of Cloathing to cover our Nakedness. They are wallowing in plenty, while we are pining in poverty and all this is occasioned by our attachment to you.²⁴⁶

Conditions were far better for the tribes who continued to cultivate friendship with the crown, though they had sacrificed autonomy and peace.

The Americans Fulfill Butler's Prophecy

Following the commencement of the Iroquois civil war in the late summer of 1777, the Americans did not long continue in their pursuit of Iroquois neutrality. In a speech that December, Schuyler reminded the Iroquois that “far from desiring you to hazard your lives in our quarrel, we advised you to sit still in ease and peace. We even entreated you to remain neuter; and, under the shade of your trees, and by the side of your streams, to smoke your pipe in safety and contentment.”²⁴⁷ But such terms were already those of times past. By January of the following year, the Americans no longer made pretences that they would accept Iroquois neutrality, with the hatchet already taken up against them. U.S. Commissioners reasoned that the Americans must “evinced [Iroquois] contrition for past misconduct and the sincerity of their future views by joining our Arms and immediately committing hostilities on the enemy and if they will not give us this reasonable satisfaction to inform them that we shall take an early opportunity so effectually to

²⁴⁶ “Meeting with Peter the Oneida,” October 21 1778 EAID XVIII, 72.

²⁴⁷ “Speech to the Six Nations, Dec 3, 1777” EAID XVIII, 60.

chastise them as to put it out of their power will hereafter to disturb their repose.” In August of 1778, American Commissioners addressed the Onondagas at Albany, and suggested retaliation directly against the Iroquois Confederacy, troubled by the fact that their overtures. In a threat meant to co-opt Onondaga support for the Patriot cause, the commissioners threatened to take vengeful actions against the Iroquois:

You tell us that Tegoteowanea’s men our Friends went to War against some of our people to convince the Kings Party that they were not cowards. The Kings Party call us cowards also perhaps we may in dew (due) Time make War too upon some of our pretended Friends among the Senecas and Cayugas to convince the Tories of the same Thing.²⁴⁸

Alongside fighting the British, the Americans thought it prudent to “make war” solely against the Iroquois after their overtures for neutrality failed.

In 1779, the Americans fulfilled Butler’s prophesy that they would fracture the confederacy and turn on Iroquois lands, when an American war initiative targeted Iroquoia itself. The Sullivan Campaign, as it would be known, originated in a letter from George Washington to John Sullivan in May of that year:

The immediate objects are the total destruction and devastation of their settlements and the capture of as many prisoners of every age and sex as possible. It will be essential to ruin their crops now in the ground and prevent their planting more.²⁴⁹

Indeed, the U.S. objective was to raze Iroquoia to secure the western frontier and unseat Iroquois autonomy in Western New York. Moreover, by capturing prisoners and burning crops, Washington clearly eyed future American settlement of Iroquoian lands, something which he personally had desired since the conclusion of the Seven Years’ War. Other than sparing a dozen warriors Philip Schuyler deemed as friendly to the American cause amongst the Oneida and Tuscarora, Sullivan’s orders were to scorch the earth of Iroquoia. The scourge through Iroquois villages began in earnest

²⁴⁸ “Talk of the U.S. Commissioners to the Onondagas, 15 August 1778” EAID XVIII, 70.

²⁴⁹ “George Washington to John Sullivan, 31 May 1779” FL.

in late August, led by Generals Sullivan and James Clinton. Patriot forces well outnumbered the combined British and Iroquois forces, and marched on Iroquois settlements which were not well-supported by John Butler—little help came from Canada or Niagara. Conscripted into service in a war for independence, Iroquois communities were ultimately left to fend for themselves. The era of autonomy and security that neutrality negotiations had long ensured was over.

CONCLUSION

This thesis historicized neutrality negotiations in Acadia and Iroquoia, demonstrating that they were measures of political complexity and skill rather than of simplicity and apathy. The neutrality of the Iroquois and the Acadians, which was temporal and performative as opposed to inherent, allowed these groups to pursue independent agendas centered on desires for peace, land control, and autonomy in imperial contexts. Neutrality often disguised itself as quotidian alliance or apathy in times of imperial peace, and took on more outward expressions in times of war. The Iroquois Confederacy's ability to fortify its neutrality with a political structure and a military presence made it more durable than the comparatively weak neutrality of the Acadians. Both of these groups, however, acted positively and coherently to pursue neutrality; they used it to shield themselves from the empire, and, even, as a mode of resistance. As borderland peoples with idiosyncratic identities that did not conform to imperial subjecthood, both the Acadians and the Iroquois turned to neutrality in the hopes that such a posture would stave off the onslaught of European colonialism, which, for significant periods of time, it did. In the end, sitting still, as the Acadians attempted in 1755 and the Iroquois attempted in 1777, turned out to precipitate the end of neutrality.

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