

Native Americans in the Revolutionary War

The Revolutionary War was a defining moment not just for the future of colonists, but also for the future of the Native Americans. When war broke out between the colonists and the crown, it was not just the colonists that had to choose sides. There were Native Americans involved on both sides of the American Revolution, and some even tried to stay neutral. The majority of Native Americans sided with the British during the Revolutionary War. The British worked hard to encourage the Native Americans to fight against the colonists, while the Continental Congress at first asked the Native Americans to stay neutral. Many Native Americans sided with the British not only because they were better able to supply provisions to them, but because they felt that the Americans were stealing their lands and destroying their cultural heritage. However, there were many allies to the continental army including large numbers from the Oneidas, Tuscaroras, Mohicans, and the Stockbridge-Munsee Nations (NPS). Many Native Americans had created working relationships and friendships with colonists. In 1776, General George Washington asked the Passamaquoddy tribe to send him warriors. They sent 600. Throughout the war, the Massachusetts government continued to supply the Passamaquoddy, and in return, after the war ended they worked to prevent white encroachment on their lands in Maine.” (Brooks). At Valley Forge, General George Washington had warriors from both Oneida and Tuscarora with his army to help with the British raids in the area. The Native Americans helped with preventing desertions, capturing enemies, scouting, raiding, and were strong fighters. General Washington wrote to General Philip Schuyler that, "The Oneidas and Tuscaroras have a particular claim to attention and kindness, for their perseverance and fidelity." (NPS)

In contrast, however, other tribes aligned themselves with the British. The Iroquois Confederacy which had held together six Indian nations for two hundred years broke apart as tribes decided to attempt to stay neutral, side with the colonists or side with the British. Four of the six Iroquois nations joined Joseph Brant, the Mohawk Chief, in an alliance with the British. They lead combined Indian, British, and Loyalist raids in western New York and Pennsylvania. In response, General Washington destroyed their towns and crops so as to limit the military threat posed by the Indian-British alliance (ushistory.org). Some of the choices made by tribes were in direct response to the relationships and experiences they had prior to the beginning of the war. If they had lost their land to colonist encroachment, they were more likely to side with the British. Those who had remained on their lands and developed mutually beneficial relationships with the colonists were more likely to stay neutral or even support the colonists, such as the Oneida (amrevmuseum.org). Despite their involvement in the war, on both sides, the Native Americans were not involved with, nor mentioned, in the 1783 Treaty of Paris that ended the war. However, the war and its outcome had impacted the lives of the Native Americans forever.

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