

Handout: Choosing Sides in the American Revolution

Abenakis

The Abenakis were an Algonquian-speaking people who lived near Quebec. From their important position on the St. Lawrence River, they had connections to the Iroquois Confederacy as well as other Indian communities in New England and Canada. They had relied on French trade routes and gifts before the Seven Years' War, and as this new conflict emerges, they are already short on essential supplies like clothing. Both the new British government in Quebec and colonial Americans in New England treated them with suspicion. After the Seven Years' War, Abenaki towns faced floods of British settlers and traders who moved to the newly formed British colony in Canada. In 1775, the Continental Army's invasion of Quebec puts the Abenaki directly at the frontline of the conflict.

Catawbas

The Catawba Nation lived on the border between North and South Carolina, where European connections developed more slowly than they had for other American Indian nations. By 1715, the Catawbas invaded South Carolina in an alliance with the Yamasees. However, by the middle of the 1700s, the Catawbas regularly engaged with British colonial officials in trade and negotiations. They also engaged in exchanges with colonial Americans, selling animal pelts, renting land to settlers, buying manufactured goods, and selling back escaped enslaved people to plantation masters. By the early 1763, the Catawbas had secured treaty rights to the heart of their ancestral homeland.

Cherokees

The Cherokee nation lived in the southeastern woodlands in Appalachia (in the modern eastern Carolinas, Tennessee, northern Georgia, and northern Alabama). Colonial encroachment on Cherokee lands sparked clashes between the Cherokees and settlers. The Treaty of Sycamore Shoals in 1775 sold Cherokee hunting grounds in modern Kentucky and Middle Tennessee to American land speculators, which angered particularly the younger warriors like Dragging Canoe who had become intent on declaring war against the invaders. However, the Cherokees also had familial ties to Anglo-Americans. Nancy Ward, a "Beloved Woman" who held political power and Dragging Canoe's cousin, married a British trader Bryant Ward.

Choctaws

The Choctaw confederacy was made up of a multiethnic group of people who joined together in a loose political arrangement after disease and warfare disrupted American Indian life in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Pro-French and anti-French Choctaw factions fought a bloody civil war in 1746-50, but they were increasingly drawn into a British orbit. After the Seven Years' War, the British Empire gained control of



Choctaw lands, including a settlement at Natchez on east bank of the Mississippi north of New Orleans. Natchez became a hub of trade between British merchants and Indian traders, but it also increasingly became a plantation economy as settlers purchased lands. When tensions emerged between the Native and settler communities at Natchez, the British Crown routinely appeased the Choctaws to preserve peace and protect British territory.

Mohawks

The Mohawks belonged to the Iroquois Confederacy and were the farthest east of any of the Iroquois nations. From this position, they were vulnerable to raids from colonials in New York, but this close contact was also a strength. They had some of the best knowledge of Anglo-American culture and ways. In particular, Joseph Brant (or Thayendanegea), worked alongside the British Superintendent of Indian Affairs William Johnson as a go-between moving fluidly between British and Iroquois cultural divides. Brant's sister, Molly, was Johnson's common-law wife. Brant is a well-known and trusted figure among British colonial officials. Understanding the importance of the Iroquois, the Continental Congress recently sent agents, including a Connecticutian who had been adopted by the Oneidas, to link the Patriot cause into the framework of the Covenant Chain.

Oneidas

The Oneidas had been in contact with Europeans for 150 years by the time of the American Revolution. The Oneida belonged to the Iroquois Confederacy and lived in modern-day central New York, where they had close communications and trade with the colonial settlement at New York. The Oneidas relied heavily on trade with the British at Ft. Stanwix, and many Oneida spoke both an Iroquoian language(s) and English. A Congregationalist (New England Puritan) missionary named Samuel Kirkland was living among the Oneida, and many Oneida had converted to Christianity in recent years. They have been receiving pressure from some of their Iroquois confederates to support the British. Even as tensions have been rising, the American Continental Congress promised that they would continue supplying goods to them, and the colonists are keeping their promises.

Quapaws

The Quapaws lived on the west bank of the Mississippi River north of New Orleans (in present day Arkansas), where they had been a client of the French. For more than 75 years, the Quapaws had been avowed enemies of the British and Chickasaws. After the Seven Years' War, however, the Quapaws found themselves sandwiched between Spanish lands (to the west of the Mississippi River) and British lands (to the east). In recent years, the Quapaws have been promising friendship to both the Spanish and British, and in 1774, the daughter of the chief of Osotouy was married to an Englishman



who had taken up Indigenous dress and customs. The Quapaws' situation as the only potential sizeable ally in the region gives them particular power.

Shawnees

The Shawnees lost their lands in the Treaty of Fort Stanwix in 1768, in which the Iroquois Confederacy sold lands belonging to other tribes in modern-day Kentucky and West Virginia in to protect their own territory in New York. War came early to the Shawnee tribes, who were targeted in Dunmore's War in 1774. The Virginia militia targeted Indians, including the Delaware, Shawnee, and Mingo, in Ohio Valley lands desired by white settlers and speculators. The Shawnees occupy an important—but dangerous—position. The Treaty of Fort Stanwix and Dunmore's War had isolated the Shawnee diplomatically, despite repeated attempts at developing a confederacy. Although many Shawnee people are advocating for peace, a devastating war seems all but inevitable.