

A Thesis  
entitled  
Iroquois Symbolic Language in the Firearms Exchange 1700-1760

by  
Erik James Lopinski

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
Master of Arts Degree in History

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This project examines the incorporation of European manufactured firearms into Iroquois society between 1700 and 1760. I posit that the proliferation of the gun trade and adoption of firearms into Iroquois society illuminates the dynamic and self-determining nature of the Iroquois despite the encroachment of European colonial powers. The Iroquois consistently entered into relations with the British on Iroquois terms to obtain firearms and supplies related to the weapons upkeep and maintenance. Furthermore, the Iroquois approached these relationships through their own cultural lens, adopting and assimilating European goods and their meanings into their own society.

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## Preface

This project examines the incorporation of European manufactured firearms into Iroquois society between 1700 and 1760. I posit that the proliferation of the gun trade and the adoption of firearms into Iroquois society illuminates the dynamic and self-determining nature of the Iroquois despite the encroachment of European colonial powers. The Iroquois consistently entered into relations with the British on Iroquois terms to obtain firearms and supplies related to the weapons upkeep and maintenance. Furthermore, the Iroquois approached these relationships through their own cultural lens, adopting and assimilating European goods and their meanings into their own society. The Five Nations showed great fortitude and cultural resilience to maintain their niche in the Colonial Northeast. The Iroquois's maintenance or adaption of new objects and meanings into their cultural fabric illustrates a degree of agency despite considerable exogenous pressure from European colonizers and hostile Amerindian groups.

Examining the nature of trade guns in an Iroquois context provides valuable information pointing to the Iroquois's ability to procure and utilize foreign objects on their own terms. Objects provide a vector into an overlooked portion of Iroquois history involving the Five Nations adaptability and determination in their various confrontations with Europeans. Despite the devastation from disease and warfare, the Iroquois acted in their self-interest and through their own methods born within meanings derived from their society.

The Iroquois perceived firearms as both spiritually and practically powerful increasing their desire for firearms. To obtain the firearms they traded furs driving the fur trade in a cycle of demand for material goods on both sides. The proliferation of the fur

trade affected material culture on both sides of the Atlantic. Utilizing the trade gun as a lens highlights the agency of the Iroquois in their adaptation and assimilation of firearms exchanges into existing Iroquois societal structures.

During the period leading up to the French and Indian War in North America (1754-1763) multiple colonial conflicts occurred between the British and French in the Atlantic World. These included the colonial theaters of Queen Anne's War and King George's War. Both groups of Europeans sought Native American allies to assist them in these conflicts. The Iroquois during the early to mid-eighteenth century often shifted alliances to maintain neutrality. Eventually, the Iroquois found themselves drawn closer to the British through trade and mutual interests illustrating the central Iroquois role in North American colonial politics during the eighteenth century. Iroquois interactions through diplomacy and trade often included exchanges for British firearms. In many circumstances, the Iroquois actively participated in the colonial politics surrounding the Great Lakes and Ohio Valley. Acquiring and maintaining firearms became a paramount concern of the Iroquois during this period. The Iroquois often sought out favorable deals to maintain their supplies and expand their hunting territories. The Iroquois treated the British as they did any other non-Iroquois group diplomatically. They drew the British into a Covenant Chain that was similar to Iroquois tributary Native American groups.

My thesis examines the broader role of Iroquois agency and actors within the complex tapestry of eighteenth-century colonial battles for empire and trade. The Iroquois pursued diplomatic and military goals of their own choosing and continued to view interactions with the British through an Iroquois conception of the world. I argue that the Iroquois exhibited cultural resilience through their utilization of Iroquois

symbolic language and rituals in their negotiations with adjacent European empires about firearms. Daniel Richter and James Merrell state “Iroquois preeminence...stemmed less from ‘martial ardor’ or ‘thirst for glory’ than from extraordinary ability to adapt familiar customs and institutions in response to novel challenges, they convert weaknesses into strengths, and to forge alliances...that helped preserve native political and cultural autonomy.”<sup>1</sup> The adaptability of Iroquois societal and cultural structures allowed the Iroquois to carve a niche out of the competitive imperial melee in the early eighteenth century Colonial North America. The Iroquois occupied a position of respect in seventeenth-century North America resisting European influences through cultural adaptability not as “Romans of North America” as the nineteenth-century historian Dewitt Clinton once suggested. The Five Nations represented a diverse and dynamic group of peoples who responded to dire circumstances with rational and practical solutions to retain a degree of cultural and political autonomy.

My thesis builds on several decades of scholarship emphasizing Iroquois agency in interactions with Europeans. Before the 1980s Historians treated Native Americans of North America (the Iroquois included,) as passive objects acted upon by Europeans either directly through conquest and assimilation, or indirectly through disease. In the early 1980s however, authors James Axtell, Richard White, James Merrell, and Francis Jennings published significant works focusing on the agency and dynamism of Native Americans in both pre-contact and post European contact periods.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel K. Richter and James Hart Merrell, eds., *Beyond the Covenant Chain the Iroquois and Their Neighbors in Indian North America: 1600-1800* (University Park (Pa.): Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 7.

<sup>2</sup> James Axtell, *The Invasion Within: The Contest of Cultures in Colonial North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Francis Jennings, *The Ambiguous Iroquois Empire: The Covenant Chain*

This new scholarship focusing on Native American agency in historical study led to a proliferation of additional studies from the Native American perspective greatly increasing diversity in the field of study. In his 1984 book *The Ambiguous Iroquois Empire: The Covenant Chain Confederation of Indian Tribes with English Colonies from Its Beginnings to the Lancaster Treaty of 1744*, Francis Jennings explores interactions between the French, British, and Iroquois between 1600 and 1744. Jennings argues Iroquois power in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries relied upon the complex alliance with the British called the Covenant Chain.<sup>3</sup> Despite arguing for European dominance over the Iroquois, the work illustrates the complex dealings between the Iroquois and the English. Through this Jennings laid the foundation for future works providing a greater role for the Native American in North American colonial history.

James Axtell also built upon Jennings' with the 1986 work *The Invasion Within: The Contest of Cultures in Colonial North America*. In particular, Axtell focuses his work around European and Native American attempts at religious and cultural conversion in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Axtell documents the efforts of Native Americans to convert Europeans, particularly French frontiersmen, to Native American ways of life. This work is one of the first to acknowledge the active role played by Amerindians in European-Native American interactions. Moreover, the work illustrates the European adoption of Native American cultural concepts providing a foundational

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*Confederation of Indian Tribes with English Colonies from Its Beginnings to the Lancaster Treaty of 1744* (New York: Norton, 1984); James Hart Merrell, *The Indians New World: Catawbas and Their Neighbors from European Contact through the Era of Removal* (United States: University of North Carolina Press, 2012); and Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> Jennings, *The Ambiguous Iroquois Empire*. The term Covenant Chain describes the complex series of alliances between the Iroquois, British, and other Native Tribes. An endemic system to the Iroquois the Covenant Chain illustrates a system of relationships born from Amerindian ingenuity in the face of paradigm shifting circumstances affecting their world.



example of cultural exchange on Native terms. According to Axtell, Europeans learned to “think as Indians, to share unconsciously the values, beliefs, and standards of Indian culture.”<sup>4</sup>

In addition, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (1991) by Richard White discusses the mixing and interchanging of ideas, cultures, objects, and religions between Native Americans and settlers in the Great Lakes regions from the seventeenth until the nineteenth centuries. A groundbreaking work, it established the theoretical idea of the “middle ground” an area of transcultural exchange taking place in border areas where diverse cultures interacted.<sup>5</sup> White discusses the formation of diverse population centers in the upper Great Lakes containing Algonquian, Siouan, Iroquoian, French, and English speaking residents. The adoption of Native American practices by French settlers illustrates the active and important role of Native peoples in the creation of new cultures and societies. Building upon the legacies of Jennings and Axtell White created a work that thrusts cultural transformation and Native American agency to the forefront of discourse.

In the 1992 book *The Ordeal of the Longhouse: The Peoples of the Iroquois League in the Era of European Colonization*, Daniel Richter developed the study of Native American agency, explicitly focusing on the Iroquois themselves. Richter posits the traditions and spiritual rituals associated with maintaining the Iroquois League of Peace allowed the Iroquois to resist attempts by European colonizers to change Iroquois

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<sup>4</sup> Axtell, *The Invasion Within*, 325.

<sup>5</sup> Richard White, *The Middle Ground*, 142.

society.<sup>6</sup> The Iroquois actively worked toward maintaining their cultural independence through the mid-eighteenth century. Thus, over the last several decades the field of Native American history has greatly evolved, highlighting and furthering our knowledge of the Amerindian perspective and agency in the colonial period. Jennings, Axtell, Richter, and White provide a platform from which a new group of scholars can investigate additional pathways in Native Americans' relationship with Europeans in colonial North America.

More recently, scholars also have begun to use material culture in new ways to study Native American History. This contributes a new and fruitful dimension to the previous generation of scholars' work. Native American History scholars often employ and blend anthropological, ethnohistorical, and traditional historical research allowing alternative avenues of investigation into Iroquois and European encounters in Colonial America. The scholarship that has resulted from this more interdisciplinary approach elucidates portrays the dynamism of Native Americans in interactions with Europeans in the early eighteenth century.

Specifically, material culture studies that analyze Native American objects have enhanced the exploration of various cultural slices of Native American society that historical scholars have often overlooked due to a relative lack of traditional textual sources. Applying systems of meaning to European material goods and the process of commoditization within Iroquois society uncovers new threads of meaning attached to

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<sup>6</sup> Daniel K. Richter, *The Ordeal of the Longhouse: The Peoples of the Iroquois League in the Era of European Colonization* (Chapel Hill: Published for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Virginia, by the University of North Carolina Press, 1992) 22.

the symbolic valuation of new goods within an endemic cultural context separate from European cultural attachments.

The utilization of ethnohistorical methods stemming from interdisciplinary concepts in contemporary scholarship illuminates the example of Native American agency through their incorporation of European trade goods firearms included into their spiritual and social culture. The Iroquois decision to adopt new trade goods of their own volition and within their own cultural context illustrates the ability of the Iroquois to shape the contours of historical circumstances. Material cultures studies also illuminate lost Iroquois meanings overlooked or absent in studies focused upon European authored documents that often contain inherent cultural biases.

For example, Bruce White in 1994 argued for increased use of ethnohistorical methods including material culture studies to investigate Native American societies in North America through their lens. White asserts “Although it may appear that native people greeted the French with superstitious veneration, the evidence suggests that the French were called spirits because their technology was perceived to be powerful.”<sup>7</sup> This statement shows the material nature of European goods inspired a spiritual dimension in Native American and European interaction. Words and ritual had inherent ties to material objects in the Amerindian world. White’s work illustrates the spiritual dimension of objects in early Atlantic exchanges and the power granted through control of those exchanges.

Bruce White laid the groundwork for future historians to utilize studies of material culture to examine the complex and dynamic cultures of Native North America.

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<sup>7</sup> Bruce White, “*Encounters with Spirits*,” *Ethnohistory* (1994), 369.

In his book, *The Feast of the Dead* Erik Seeman examines the mortuary practices of the Huron. Particularly, he studies how they intersect with Jesuit conversion efforts and increased demand for European trade goods. The increasing use of European trade goods in Huron ritual practices drove up the demand for various implements mainly kettles and beads for use in funerary practices.<sup>8</sup> Seeman excellently illustrates the dual material and symbolic nature of material goods and detailing an example of Indian agency acting upon European influences.

In *Indian Giving*, David Murray further examines the various types of material exchanges between Native Americans and Europeans, and the power dynamics contained within those interactions. An interesting power relationship existed between Europeans and Native Americans at the intersection of trade and conversion.<sup>9</sup> Europeans had both spiritual and material gained motivations to convert Native Americans. These motives drove increasing missionary and trade interactions in North America. The dual spiritual and material nature of trade, illustrates that power stemming from the control of material goods further enhanced spiritual conversion attempts, as Native Americans became more reliant on European goods. The increased reliance on European goods stemmed from both increased demand, and the disruption caused by new goods entering traditional Amerindian societal structures.

In addition, Sophie White's recent scholarship utilizes material culture in new ways to highlight Native American agency. White argues that analysis of objects "foregrounds the role of culture, especially dress, in explaining the process of

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<sup>8</sup> Erik R. Seeman, *The Huron-Wendat Feast of the Dead: Indian-European Encounters in Early North America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 60.

<sup>9</sup> David Murray, *Indian Giving: Economies of Power in Indian-white Exchanges* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000) 103.

racialization in colonial Louisiana throughout the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a key period for the study of transformations in conceptions of difference against the backdrop of religious conversion.”<sup>10</sup> Native Americans delineated their identities through clothing and other material goods to denote a variety of culturally constructed meanings independent from European meanings. This exemplifies the use of material goods in a symbolic fashion to determine identity among those who possess them. In particular the use of clothing to determine the racial category of various people dictated by the cultures they inhabited.

In *French Fishers, Fur Traders, and Amerindians* David Turgeon also discusses the early contexts of Native American and European interactions with one another. The work discusses the trade between French fishermen and Amerindians in the early sixteenth century. The fishery and fur trade developed alongside one another. The proliferation of the fur trade increased Native American interactions with European traders attracted by the fisheries of the North American coastal waters. Turgeon asserts that North America in the seventeenth century had frequent European visitors pursuing trading interests marking the continent and its inhabitants as potential trading partners for various types of exchange.<sup>11</sup> Early Amerindian interactions with copper kettles only whetted their appetites for further European trade goods for use in both practical and ritual circumstances. Native Americans utilized European trade goods for their own motivations during the earliest periods of trans-Atlantic interactions.

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<sup>10</sup> Sophie White, *Wild Frenchmen and Frenchified Indians Material Culture and Race in Colonial Louisiana* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 2.

<sup>11</sup> Laurier Turgeon, "French Fishers, Fur Traders, and Amerindians during the Sixteenth Century: History and Archaeology," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 55, no. 4 (1998): , doi:10.2307/2674446.

In short, Iroquois scholarship in the 1980s and 1990s focused new attention on Native American agency in the face of European encroachment, and illuminated Iroquois agency in eighteenth-century North America. Furthermore, material culture and ethnohistorical methodologies became integral to Native American historical discourse directly resulting from earlier historical studies focusing on Native American dynamism in their contacts with Europeans.

My thesis builds upon this ethnohistorical and material culture scholarship to argue the adoption of European firearms into Iroquois ritual and society exemplifies the resilient and dynamic nature of Amerindian cultures in North America.

I explore the gun trade as a lens through which I can investigate Iroquois agency. In addition, my examination of the adoption of European goods into Amerindian society elucidates Native American agency in interactions with Europeans. The Iroquois actively courted European powers and sought to increase trade and diplomatic contact in part to trade furs for firearms. The Iroquois sought to bring Europeans into their “Covenant Chain” mirroring earlier interactions with other Native American tribes. Acquiring firearms through trade contact with Europeans allowed the Iroquois to increase their power spiritually both through the inherent power they attached to the firearm as an implement of war, and the increased efficacy of Iroquois ritual warfare aimed at their fellow Amerindian neighbors. The conflicts called “mourning wars” allowed the Iroquois to both physically and spiritually refill the role of a lost member of their community through the taking of a captive to fulfill the vacated role. Firearms granted the Iroquois a greater degree of physical security. Firearms are also a good lens through which to analyze agency because guns became important symbols of power in Iroquois culture

becoming important commodities to convey status and ability to protect their culture. Furthermore, the Iroquois prized weapons from certain companies looking for specific trademarks near the breech of the trade gun. The Iroquois also decorated their firearms with brass tacks applying a more personal meaning to each weapon.<sup>12</sup>

There are a number of methods and theories shaping my thesis. The idea of creating a biography of a material object stems from Igor Kopytoff's 1986 *The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process* argued that "From a cultural perspective, the production of commodities is also a cultural and cognitive process: commodities must be not only produced materially as things, but also culturally marked as being a certain kind of thing."<sup>13</sup> Both the process of commodification and the production of commodities are indicators of identity for both individuals and society. The commoditization of the firearm into Iroquois society offers a window into their historical identity during this period. In *Agency, Biography and Objects*, Janet Hoskins examines the evolution of biographical approaches in material culture studies, and their use in historical discourse. Hoskins argues that material goods can have a biography, treating them like humans in historical inquiry.<sup>14</sup> Both of the theories inform my work. Looking through the "eyes" of a trade gun illuminates previously inaccessible threads of meaning tying together British, Iroquois, and colonial culture to one another. The symbolic meaning of firearms through various perspectives illustrates the agency of the Iroquois in adopting firearms on their own terms.

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<sup>12</sup> Karl Parcher Russell, *Guns on the Early Frontiers* (Berkeley, CA, 1957).

<sup>13</sup> Igor Kopytoff, "The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process," in Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things* (Cambridge, 1986), 64.

<sup>14</sup> "Introduction," Chapter 4: "Objectification," Chapter 5: "Agency, Biography, and objects" in *Handbook of Material Culture*, ed. Chris Tilley, et.al. (Sage, 2006), 82.

Furthermore, the Iroquois exhibit a degree of structural power as defined by Eric R. Wolf. Wolf asserts “Structural power shapes the social field of action so as to render some kinds of behavior impossible.”<sup>15</sup> The Iroquois exhibit a great deal of structural power through insisting the British adhere to Iroquois language and customs during their interactions. Through doing so the Iroquois influenced interactions with the British and held some power over the proceedings relating to the firearms exchange.

The Iroquois also operated on a gift-economy paradigm. This involved the reciprocal exchange of gifts that signified the bonds between social groups. Gifts can not be separated from the person who gave or received them. Marcel Mauss argues material goods confirmed the positive intent behind agreements and established a form of social contract between those involved in their exchange. The Iroquois drew the British into their system of reciprocal exchange granting the Five Nations a degree of control over official proceedings between the two groups.<sup>16</sup>

Two other recent and esteemed examples utilizing biographical approaches to examining historical objects inform my approach. In *Portrait of a Woman in Silk: Hidden Histories of the British Atlantic World*, Zara Anishanslin explores the biography of a single painting across the Atlantic World examining four people intimately connected to the painting, and how its “life cycle” illuminates new facets of trade, mercantile life, art, and consumption in the colonial Atlantic World. Similarly, *The Age of Homespun, Objects and Stories in the Creation of the American* by Laurel Thatcher Ulrich examines material culture through the role of women in producing and consuming goods in the

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<sup>15</sup> Eric R. Wolf, “Distinguished Lecture: Facing Power - Old Insights, New Questions.” *American Anthropologist*, vol. 92, no. 3, 1990, pp. 587.

<sup>16</sup> Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies* (London: Routledge Classics, 2010), 3.



British Colonies.<sup>17</sup> These demonstrate the importance of exploring the cultural slices of information surrounding the inherently symbolic nature of material goods from the perspective of their consumers.

Overall the use of a biographical approach to material culture allows an examination of the cultural meanings from the producers and consumers of commodities. Thus applying material culture studies methodology to the gun trade demonstrates material exchange facilitated cultural exchange between Native Americans and Europeans. “In the homogenized world of commodities, an eventful biography of a thing becomes the story of the various singularizations of it, of classifications and reclassifications in an uncertain world of categories whose importance shifts with every minor change in context.”<sup>18</sup> This statement by Kopytoff illustrates the practical use of biography to examine the various cultural slices of historical meaning surrounding an object or class of objects. The adoption or rejection of objects can illuminate the identity, agency, and values of individuals and groups of people interacting with them.

The thesis is broken down into three chapters. The first chapter examines the geopolitical circumstances of the Iroquois and British relationship entering the eighteenth century to give context to their somewhat unique relationship. The centrally located Iroquois homeland in upstate New York granted practical and symbolic benefits to the Iroquois but also provided obstacles. The geo-politics preceding the eighteenth century allowed the Iroquois to carve a unique niche in the imperial politics of North America. Furthermore, the conflict and devastation of the years before 1701 provide historical

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<sup>17</sup> Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *The Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of an American Myth* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2002).

<sup>18</sup> Kopytoff, *The Cultural Biography of Things*, 90.

context to the position the Iroquois found themselves during the early to mid-eighteenth century.

Chapter two of my thesis investigates the exchanges between Native Americans and Europeans predicated on Iroquois desire to obtain firearms for their spiritual and practical power. This chapter contains a dissection of the dominant position granted to Europeans by controlling access to firearm-related goods. The advantages of the British control of exchange illustrate the symbolic nature of exchange and the benefits of controlling exchange whether it is cultural or material in nature. The exchanges between the British and Native Americans created a power relationship based on control over the physical exchange of goods establishing a culturally significant connection between the material and symbolic. The chapter examines the increased cultural mixing between the British and Iroquois due to the proliferation of the fur trade between 1700-1760, illustrating the dynamic nature of the Six Nations in the face of British encroachment. Furthermore, the Covenant Chain linking the British and Iroquois strengthened during exchanges of firearms for use in war or hunting. Exchanges of goods signified the relative power of Iroquois compared to other Native Americans. The Iroquois proved active agents in the diplomatic machinations of Northeastern North America. They actively courted European powers to increase material trade in Iroquoia, allowing the Iroquois as a whole to increase their material and spiritual power in the context of their own culture.<sup>19</sup>

The third chapter of my thesis examines the importance of trade guns to maintaining Native American ritual culture and society among the Iroquois. The chapter

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<sup>19</sup> Richter, *The Ordeal of the Longhouse*, 242.

explores the changes in Amerindian society resulting from the proliferation of trade with the British. The Iroquois adopted firearms through the meanings of their culture taking an implement produced by Europeans and assimilating it into the Iroquois cultural and societal fabric of negotiations. The use of British manufactured weapons in the perpetuation of “mourning wars” a traditional Iroquois form of punitive captive focused warfare.<sup>20</sup> The Iroquois rendered spiritual power from firearms through their successful execution of mourning wars to replace deceased family members and obtain a release of grief. Through exhibiting some control over firearms exchanges with their use of symbolic language, the Iroquois obtained goods crucial to maintain their physical and spiritual landscape in eighteenth-century North America.

The Iroquois maintained their niche in imperial affairs due to their geographic position, their uniquely resilient cultural institutions, and their ability to leverage those benefits in interactions with the British. The Iroquois geographic position astride the river trade routes allowed them to meter trade to Albany and the Native American tribes in the Great Lakes. Their ability to adapt longstanding cultural forms to include European participants allowed them some leverage in trading negotiations with British officials and traders. The Iroquois obtained leverage over part of firearms exchanges with the British due to their insistence on the usage of Iroquois ritual and symbolism in negotiations, and their strategically convenient location.

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<sup>20</sup> George T. Hunt, *The Wars of the Iroquois* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), 12-15.

# Chapter One

## Five Arrows

“The Peacemaker took a single arrow and broke it in half. He then tied five arrows together and demonstrated they could not be broken.”<sup>21</sup> The short excerpt from the oral traditions of the Seneca indicates the importance of unity amongst the Five Nations. Their unity allowed the Iroquois to retain a significant amount of autonomy despite, the presence of their imperialistic Europeans during the early eighteenth century. Their decision to remain neutral in imperial conflicts allowed the Iroquois to retain a significant amount of their pre-colonial governance and forced Europeans to court them to obtain Iroquois assistance in pursuit of their own goals in the colonial Northeast. In part, the Iroquois interacted favorably toward colonial administrators, who learned and adhered to Iroquois conceptions of exchange and diplomacy.

The Northern Iroquoian peoples refers to groups of linguistically and culturally connected peoples in Northern United States occupying the St. Lawrence River vicinity, north shore of Lake Ontario, and what is now central upstate New York. These groups shared many cultural traits including settlements surrounded by palisades, bark longhouses, maize based subsistence farming, hunting, fishing and gathering.<sup>22</sup> The social organization of Iroquoian peoples was matrilineal and based around clan membership. The political organization involved village councils, nations of affiliated villages, and

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<sup>21</sup> Arthur Parker, *Seneca Myths and Folk Tales*, (Buffalo: Buffalo Historical Society, 1923), 423.

<sup>22</sup> Jennifer Birch, "Current Research on the Historical Development of Northern Iroquoian Societies," *Journal of Archaeological Research* 23 (2015): 265.

regional confederacies. The pre-contact period during the fifteenth century saw an increasing coalescence of Iroquoian communities.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, the formation of the Iroquois confederacy is dated to approximately this time period.

The Iroquois or Five Nations represented were a relatively unique loosely affiliated confederation of Northern Iroquoian tribes in Northern New York during the seventeenth century.<sup>24</sup> The Iroquois, in pursuit of furs to trade for European goods, expanded their influence throughout the Northeast in this era. However, their animosity toward their enemies resulted in significant external pressures, both cultural and economic around the control of the fur trade and the access to European markets. Firearms and related supplies represented an important object acquired via European sources. Iroquois individuals possessed a large degree of autonomy to form their course of action in both trade and diplomacy. War and European microbes devastated the Iroquois in the late seventeenth leading to a shift toward more neutral Iroquois foreign policy pursued from the late 1720s until the French and Indian War. The Iroquois played the two European powers off of each other to maintain peace at home. Furthermore, the Iroquois continued their pattern of warring against the Catawba in the Carolinas maintaining peace at home but still enacting captive taking raids into the territory to their far south.

The Iroquois operated under a gift-based economy before contact with Europeans. Many facets of the reciprocal giving inherent to gift-based economies continued through the early to mid eighteenth century. The Iroquois viewed objects as inseparable from the

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<sup>23</sup> Birch, "Current Research on the Historical Development of Northern Iroquoian Societies," 271.

<sup>24</sup> After the year 1722 the Tuscarora joined the confederation already containing the Mohawk, Seneca, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Oneida. I utilize the term Five Nations to describe events even after 1722 for clarity.

person who distributes them to another. All property amongst a particular group of Iroquois effectively belonged to the whole group. The exchange of material goods represented the character of the person and the implicit agreement to a social contract between the giver and receiver of the gift. The British adoption of Iroquois practices indicates they were drawn into the reciprocal constructs of a gift-based economy.

The Iroquois behavior in the eighteenth century requires an explanation of the geo-political atmosphere surrounding them at the time. The events of the seventeenth century brought a rise and fall in Iroquois fortunes as warfare and disease decimated their numbers. The Iroquois similar to many other Amerindian groups possessed a vastly different conception of governance than their neoteric European neighbors. Furthermore, the Iroquois homeland and their conception of the Great League of Peace and Prosperity dictated their behavior toward outgroups including Europeans. To be successful British colonials found they needed to adhere to Iroquois procedure during diplomatic and trade overtures. Successful colonial agents adhered to various practices of Iroquois conception. Those officials who did not, seemingly found it difficult to garner support among the Iroquois.

The traditional Iroquois homeland occupied a strategically important position in Northeast North America in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Iroquoia, the homeland of the Iroquois laid in upstate New York and near the St. Lawrence in Canada. The Iroquois homeland adjacent to the Finger Lakes lays on an east-west divide in the Northeastern United States. Most rivers in the region ran through their homeland and the Iroquois became adept middlemen in the later 16<sup>th</sup> and early seventeenth centuries. The central position and ability of the Iroquois to block river trade encouraged European

interactions. Furthermore, the Iroquois themselves sought out interactions with their European neighbors mainly to obtain European goods.<sup>25</sup>

Overall the Iroquois in the eighteenth century cannot be disconnected from the imperial contest between France and Britain. The Iroquois sought many goods through their interactions with Europeans and often occupied rivers surrounding key trading posts at Montreal, Fort Orange, and New Amsterdam. The Five Nations warriors took numerous European goods from various peoples amongst the other tribes attempting to trade at posts. In doing so, the Iroquois partially ameliorated a disadvantage of all rivers flowing outward from their homeland in the Northeastern United States. Their central location meant a substantial buffer of mainly unfriendly Native American tribes between themselves and the Europeans. The Iroquois in the early seventeenth century found themselves disadvantaged through metered access to European trade goods. Firearms being of paramount importance to the Iroquois in the competition against neighboring tribes, due to their ability to increase the efficiency of hunting methods and therefore increasing the number of furs to trade for increasingly more European goods. Despite the influx of these goods and their unmistakable and permanent changes made to Iroquois society. Iroquois political, social, and ritual society remained largely unchanged. However, their traditional bow-hunting methods fell into disuse due to the increasingly ubiquitous nature of firearms in eighteenth-century North America, and the efficacy of firearms in hunting and warfare.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Cadwallader Colden, *The History of the Five Indian Nations of Canada, which are Dependent on the Province of New-York in America, and are the Barrier Between the English and French in that Part of the World ....* United Kingdom: T. Osborne, 1747, xii.

<sup>26</sup> Daniel K. Richter, "War and Culture: The Iroquois Experience," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 40, no. 4 (1983), 531.

Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the fate of the Iroquois became increasingly intertwined with the imperial ambitions of the French based in Canada and the English in New England. The geographic location of the Iroquois homeland in part drove these interactions.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, it allowed the Iroquois to interact with tribes to their west in both trade and warfare.<sup>28</sup> The central location of the Iroquois and the importance the location had to military and imperial ambitions helped guarantee an eminent place in colonial politics.

An understanding of Iroquois concepts of exchange is essential to making sense of their relationship with the British. The Iroquois concept of exchange and wealth differed greatly from European contemporaries. In a reversal of many economic and political systems common to Europe the individual who gave the most material wealth to others in their community often recouped higher status in return. The most valued gifts included captives and European goods including firearms. Therefore the leader who acquired objects of importance found themselves occupying positions of higher status.

The Iroquois sachems, a form of civil chief, represented the 50 civil chiefs from the principal villages of the Five Nations. Their total numbers separated into two different groups an elder group consisting of the Mohawk, Onondaga, and Seneca. And a younger group consisting of the Oneida, Cayuga, and later Tuscarora the different groups met in Onondaga the location of the sacred council fire.<sup>29</sup>

The Iroquois Five Nations consisted of a loose decentralized confederacy of culturally interconnected tribes. The Five Nations originally included the Oneida,

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<sup>27</sup> Richter, *The Ordeal of the Longhouse*, 19.

<sup>28</sup> Jon Parmenter, *The Edge of the Woods: Iroquoia, 1534-1701* (Winnipeg, Manitoba: University of Manitoba Press, 2014), Introduction.

<sup>29</sup> Richter, *Ordeal of the Longhouse*, 58.



Mohawk, Cayuga, Seneca, and Onondaga. The Tuscarora originally from the Carolinas joined the confederation in the early eighteenth century changing the confederacy to the Six Nations. The Five Nations tribes all belonged to the Iroquoian language group. Furthermore, the tribes shared a common cultural background and cosmogenic myth. Their shared cultural and spiritual beliefs provided a fundamental meeting point between the tribes comprising the confederation.

The Iroquois confederacy was a unique Amerindian institution uniting the tribes in a loose confederacy under a set of ideals called the Great League of Peace and Power. The Great League of Peace and Power colored all conceptions of the world in Iroquois society. Scholars date the origins of the Great League of Peace and Power and therefore the Confederacy of the Five Nations to around 1450. The League originated with its semi-mythical organizer Dekanawida born in Southeastern Ontario and his Mohawk spokesman Hiawatha.<sup>30</sup> The Great League ended a period of conflict between the tribes and tied them together in a spirit of amity and cooperation. The League exemplified an egalitarian Amerindian societal organization. A shared set of values and reciprocity guaranteed cooperation within the internal power structures of the Five Nations, while allowing for large amounts of personal autonomy among citizens. Daniel Richter provides an excellent summation of the Great League of Peace and Power, “To Iroquois at the turn of the seventeenth century, power meant the kind of spiritual and temporal force marshaled by alliances among the people kind groups, and villages of the League it not only united the Five Nations but exemplified relations among fellow villagers.”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Parker, *Great League of Peace and Power*, 1916.

<sup>31</sup> Richter, *Ordeal of the Longhouse*, 45.

An important part of the traditions passed down by Hiawatha and the Peacemaker included the Condolence ceremony when one of the 50 sachems died. The condolence ceremony wove British officials into an important Iroquois tradition. Officials who recognized the importance of the death of a civil chief during interactions with the Iroquois found greater success through their participation. By providing gifts and symbolic words of condolence to the grief-stricken Iroquois British officials followed the cyclical pattern inherent to many interactions in Iroquois life. During a time of mourning “It was the nation that mourned not the family; with it mourned the brothers of its class.”<sup>32</sup> The condolence council and the rituals bled into diplomatic and economic negotiations between the Iroquois and Europeans. The Iroquois’s insistence on British adherence to their traditional constructs of exchange and diplomacy granted them some control over the exchanges. European officials found greater success in achieving their own goals when they followed Iroquois rituals of exchange.

Iroquois conceptions of kinship are also important to understanding how they viewed European interactions. The Iroquois possessed a vastly different conception of the world than their European counterparts. A primary difference between European and Iroquois societal structures lay in their kinship systems the Iroquois possessed a matrilineal kinship system. The matrilineal kinship system provided women in Iroquois villages a preeminent role in affairs within the village. The sexual division of labor between Iroquois men and women created important distinctions between functions of the sexes in Iroquois home life. The women were responsible for tending fires, foraging, farming staple crops, rearing children, and managing the personal and political affairs

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<sup>32</sup>William Martin Beauchamp, *An Iroquois Condolence* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and, 1895), 313.

within the village. Men focused outwardly on hunting, trade relationships, war, and diplomacy amongst other Iroquois villages and with immediate neighbors. Importantly, unlike in European society, women held a distinct position of political power. Effectively senior women internally decided the political agenda, while men conveyed that agenda to external neighbors whether European or Native American. Iroquois women possessed a great deal of influence in Iroquois society.<sup>33</sup>

The matrilineal kinship systems in Iroquois society meant the family structure differed from European patrilineal kinship systems. Divorce proved common and often the maternal uncles performed a more active role in a child's life than his or her father. The matrilineal nature of family relationships provides another identifying and contrasting factor to the European systems of kinship. While men did the speaking the women in Iroquois provided the brains behind the mouth so to speak. Women played a central role in calls to war in Iroquois society.

Iroquois ritualized conflicts referred to as mourning wars characterized Iroquois warfare. The Iroquois learned earlier than Europeans aim small arms accurately at individual targets. However, the mourning war placed a greater emphasis on taking captives to replace fallen or lost family members to regain both the physical and spiritual power lost through warfare and the introduction of European diseases.<sup>34</sup> The focus on captive taking and not outright destruction of an enemy indicates the ritualized nature of the mourning war.

During the mid-seventeenth century, the Iroquois consolidated their preeminent position among Native Americans in the Susquehanna and Ohio River Valleys and

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<sup>33</sup> Richter, *Ordeal of the Longhouse*, 45.

<sup>34</sup> Richter, *Ordeal of the Longhouse*, 55.

extended their control to parts of Canada due to the Beaver Wars. The Iroquois often opposed the French and their Indian allies during the Beaver Wars (1640-1701).

Eventually, the Iroquois signed a peace treaty with France in the Great Peace of Montreal in 1701. The treaty and resulting nineteen-year peace resulted from a series of devastating French raids on the villages of the Five Nations. Depopulation due to disease and warfare throughout the seventeenth century motivated the Iroquois to walk a path of neutrality between European players in North America, defining their central role in eighteenth-century North America.<sup>35</sup>

The period between 1715-1760 illustrates the dynamic nature of the Iroquois after the Great Peace of Montreal and the devastation of the Five Nations homelands at the hands of the French and Francophile Native American allies in North America. The Five Nations flexibly entreated with European powers to maintain a policy of neutrality. However, the decisions of the Iroquois depended upon the various existential threats European empires posed to the Five Nations. Despite their metered path of the negotiation, the Iroquois maintained a large degree of their cultural heritage. The period of adiaphorous behavior and the strategic position of the Iroquois in North American colonial geo-politics allowed for the Five Nations to dictate the terms of many exchanges and maintain a large degree of autonomy compared to other contemporary Amerindian groups. The Iroquois maintained neutrality amongst themselves to a fervently high degree. In most cases, Iroquois raiding parties participating in imperial conflicts on opposing sides avoided conflict or casualties despite their different allegiances to the chagrin of their European allies. The Neutrality extended from the Five Nations Iroquois

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<sup>35</sup> Jones, Eric E. "Population History of the Onondaga and Oneida Iroquois, A.D. 1500–1700." *American Antiquity* 75, no. 2 (2010): 387-407.

to the Iroquoian speakers occupying the area around the St. Lawrence.<sup>36</sup> The Iroquois participated in a limited fashion on both sides of the Anglo-French Conflicts in the early to mid-eighteenth century.

In obtaining Iroquois assistance in the Colonial conflicts between New France and the British Colonies, firearms and their supplies proved a particularly important tool from the European perspective Richard Aquila asserts, “the Five Nations also knew that they could obtain French economic assistance if they declared war against the southern tribes. In 1706, the French gave the Iroquois warriors powder and shot so they could attack southern and western Indian tribes that were pro-English.”<sup>37</sup> Firearms and munitions provide an excellent lens and material object through which to examine the strategies employed by the Iroquois in maintaining their neutrality between two Imperial powers. Displaying their agency in interactions with Europeans, the Iroquois accepted assistance in the form of powder and shot from the English in the 1710s and 1720s in exchange for a redirection of Iroquois aggression toward tribes in the Southern United States.<sup>38</sup>

The Iroquois began their dalliance with firearms in the mid-seventeenth century. The Five Nations first acquired firearms from the Dutch, the central location of the Iroquois homeland proving beneficial due to their proximity to Fort Orange. The Iroquois first acquired considerable numbers of arquebuses from the Dutch in 1641.<sup>39</sup> The Five Nations quickly adapted the firearm to existing ambush tactics providing them both a

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<sup>36</sup>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.

<sup>37</sup> Richard Aquila, "Down the Warriors Path: The Causes of the Southern Wars of the Iroquois," *American Indian Quarterly* 4, no. 3 (1978): 214.

<sup>38</sup> Aquila, *Down the Warriors Path: The Causes of the Southern Wars of the Iroquois*, 215.

<sup>39</sup> George C. Vaillant and George T. Hunt, "Wars of the Iroquois," *American Journal of Archaeology* 49, no. 1 (1945): 169.

technological and tactical advantage over neighboring tribes during the 1640s.<sup>40</sup> Up to the eighteenth century, Iroquois demand for firearms increased, at the same time the European demand for furs also increased, particularly Beaver. The resulting constructive feedback loop encouraged increasingly close interactions between the Iroquois and Europeans. The British continuously attempted to engage the Iroquois in trade and diplomacy for both political and economic goals. The resulting “Covenant Chain” (to be further detailed in chapter two) brought the Iroquois and British closer together despite being a concept of Iroquois rather than British invention.<sup>41</sup> The British adoption of an Iroquois concept to further relationships with the Five Nations indicates the agency of the Iroquois through the flexibility and resilience of their cultural frameworks, and their ability to persuade Europeans to utilize Iroquois forms of exchange. Moreover, the British adoption of an Iroquois concept exhibits the degree of structural power asserted by the Iroquois over negotiations between the two groups.

The firearms that the British manufactured for Native American use on the frontier began their lives in the factories of Birmingham and London. The assembly of the firearms occurred mainly in British North America. Gunsmiths assembled the barrels, locks, and triggers from England often combining the manufactured components with stocks crafted from North American trees like walnut.<sup>42</sup>

In the late seventeenth through the mid-eighteenth century the guns the British traded had identical features to guns utilized by early settlers and frontiersmen.

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<sup>40</sup> Keith F. Otterbein, "Why the Iroquois Won: An Analysis of Iroquois Military Tactics," *Ethnohistory* 11, no. 1 (1964): 58.

<sup>41</sup> Jennings, *The Ambiguous Iroquois Empire*, 106.

<sup>42</sup> Karl Parcher Russell, *Guns on the Early Frontiers* (Berkeley, CA, 1957), 23.

“The prototypes of the true trade gun were cheap; light fowling pieces which could be had in quantity from England and the Continent. Not until the first years of the nineteenth century were rigid specifications established deliberately by the great trading companies, although there was ample empirical knowledge of what the Indians would and would not accept. The tradition of the short and light fusil had been well established; English makers had been supplying weapons of the general dimensions the Indian customers had been insisting upon since the late seventeenth century.”<sup>43</sup>

The guns the Iroquois actively sought until the mid-1750s proved to be identical to firearms utilized by settlers and frontiersmen. Furthermore, Native American consumers including the Iroquois insisting upon certain aspects altered the makeup of a European product. Something European became more Native American upon continued interaction with Amerindians in North America. The firearms preferred by Native American groups often had shorter barrels and larger trigger guards, to better move through brush and inclement weather. The larger trigger guards allowed the use of mittens in winter and colder months.

The British and Iroquois found themselves motivated to trade with one another due to circumstances offering both parties the ability to protect their own interests. The British primarily sought to utilize the trade of European goods especially firearms to control the behavior of Native Americans and the Five Nations by extension of this policy. For example, in 1726 Virginian William Byrd II corresponding with the Indian Commissioners in Albany suggested the British utilize firearms to control the behavior of Amerindian groups.<sup>44</sup> William Byrd II directly states that to regulate the behavior of Native Americans British policy toward Native Americans necessitates the use of

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<sup>43</sup> Karl Parcher Russell, *Guns on the Early Frontiers* (Berkeley, CA, 1957), 63.

<sup>44</sup> William Byrd, *William Byrd to Indian Commissioners at Albany, 1726*, Writings, ed. by J. S. Bassett, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901, pp. 97-98.

firearms and the supply of powder and shot. William Byrd II suggested controlling the flow of firearms to tribes uncooperative toward achieving British interests.

The embodiment of self-serving British policy concerning the Five Nations coalesced in Sir William Johnson Jr. Johnson proved to be a capable administrator possessing an almost singular talent to ingratiate himself to the Five Nations in New York from his base at Mount Johnson near Albany. A letter from Governor George Clinton of New York to William Johnson in 1746 illuminates the utilization of firearms to secure the assistance and control the behavior of the Five Nations “Whereas Several Tribes of the Six Nations of Indians have engaged to go to war against the French their Indians & Settlements in Canada and as the said Tribes will want to be supplied occasionally in arms ammunition, clothing & provisions, &ca. when they go to war, as aforesaid you are therefore hereby empowered to furnish the said tribes.”<sup>45</sup> The specific and prominent mention of arms and ammunition lays bare the British intention to use firearms to ingratiate themselves to the Iroquois. Through that ingratiation British sought to convince the Iroquois to act as British auxiliaries against New France.

Fear of French influence over the Iroquois motivated the British to push for increasingly strong ties with the Five Nations both economically and politically. A speech from Sir William Johnson to the Five Nations typifies the prominent place fears of French expansion held in the British colonial psyche of the early eighteenth century,

“After this firm agreement was made our Forefathers finding it was good and foreseeing the many advantages both sides would reap of it, Ordered that if ever that Silver Chain should turn the least rusty, offer to slip or break, that it should be immediately brightened up again, and not let it slip or break on any account for then you and we were both dead. Brethren these are the words of our Wise Forefathers which some

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<sup>45</sup> George Clinton to Mr. William Johnson, August 27<sup>th</sup>, 1746, in *Sir William Johnson Papers*, Hamilton, Milton Wheaton, United States: University of the State of New York, 1921. Vol 1, 59.



among you know very well to be so. Now Brethren understanding or hearing that the French our and your Common Enemy were endeavouring to blindfold you and get you to slip your hands out of that Chain, which as our Forefathers said would certainly be our destruction.”<sup>46</sup>

The excerpt from Johnson’s speech displays the adept nature of Johnson to adopt symbolic language to deal formally with the Five Nations. However, the incident illustrates the agency of the Iroquois. Through insisting on usage of Iroquois language in agreements, the Iroquois exhibited a degree of structural power over the British. Structural power is the “power to deploy and allocate social labor.”<sup>47</sup> Through controlling the language of some exchanges the Iroquois affected the number of possible outcomes for British actors, while retaining Iroquois cultural and political structures. Johnson came to appease the Iroquois to incite them to continue the war effort against the French to do so he found it necessary to utilize Native American terminology to parley in Iroquoia.

Economic reasons further motivated the British to interact heavily with the Iroquois in the early to mid-eighteenth century. The British increasingly demanded furs to export to Europe. The unique position of the Five Nations to provide a buffer between New France and New England and the Iroquois demand for firearms presented a unique opportunity to achieve both diplomatic and economic goals to further English imperial ambitions.<sup>48</sup>

Here an explanation of some Iroquois symbolic language becomes necessary. The language in treaties between the Five Nations and the British clouds certain meanings behind a sacral symbolic language. The Covenant Chain provides an important term and

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<sup>46</sup> William Johnson Speech to the Five Nations, April 25<sup>th</sup>, 1748, in *Sir William Johnson Papers*, Vol 1, 158.

<sup>47</sup> Eric R. Wolf, “Distinguished Lecture: Facing Power-Old Insights, New Questions,” 587.

<sup>48</sup> Richter, *War and Culture: The Iroquois Experience*, 528.

symbolic framework originating from the Five Nations. The Covenant Chain began in treaties and agreements between the Dutch at Fort Orange and the Five Nations in the mid-seventeenth century. The term Covenant Chain first appears in 1677 specifically referring to the bilateral alliance between the Iroquois and their tributaries and the colony of New York and other British colonies. The Chain metaphorically representing the various links comprised of treaties, agreements, and benevolent relations. Furthermore, the Chain needed polishing at regular intervals to keep rust or dirt representing strain on the relationships from accumulating. Any mention of the chain in Iroquois-British interactions refers to the special relationship represented by the Covenant Chain.<sup>49</sup> From 1700-1760 the Covenant Chain strained but did not break despite a brief break from the relationship in the 1750s eventually smoothed over on the British side by Sir William Johnson.<sup>50</sup>

Kinship terms make up another crucial aspect of symbolic language in Iroquois-Anglo relations. The kinship terms utilized in treaties throughout the eighteenth century in Iroquois affairs reflect the Iroquois conception of familial ties in a Matriarchal kinship-based system very different from European conceptions about the same Iroquois terms. For example, Count Frontenac in the seventeenth century referred to himself as “father” and the Iroquois his “children” in an attempt to assert dominion over the Iroquois in the name of France. The count did not conceive of a different kinship system aside from the patriarchal European paradigm. “Fathers” did not possess power over “children” in Iroquois society foiling Frontenac’s semantic method of conquest. The flexibility of

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<sup>49</sup> Francis Jennings, *The History and Culture of Iroquois Diplomacy: An Interdisciplinary Guide to the Treaties of the Six Nations and Their League* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1995).

<sup>50</sup> George Clinton to William Johnson, 1746, in *Sir William Johnson Papers*, Vol 1, 103.

Iroquois kinship terms in treaty deliberations makes context crucial to understanding the nature of relationships between the Iroquois and any external diplomatic actor. The terms couched in Iroquois society places greater value on maternal uncles, nephews, and grandfathers due to the matriarchal nature of the kinship system. The maternal uncle often played a greater role than the child's father in raising and educating the child in Iroquois society.<sup>51</sup>

The hatchet or ax played a crucial symbolic role in Iroquois treaties. The hatchet or ax symbolized warfare utilized to symbolize the commencement of hostilities and their conclusion. To "take up the hatchet" meant to begin hostilities against a common enemy, often France, in interactions between the British and the Five Nations. The second usage of the hatchet to denote peace became a common idiom in the American lexicon. To "bury the hatchet" meant to cease hostilities with adversarial elements ending the fighting and preserving the hatchet until it became necessary to take up the hatchet once again. Often in treaties discussing the hatchet implied the provisioning of the Iroquois by the British. The provisions often included firearms, powder, and shot. Furthermore, gifts of muskets and powder often accompanied diplomatic overtures to provide the gifts necessary to make serious proposals to Iroquois Council Fire at Onondaga.<sup>52</sup>

In addition, the term fire represents another important symbolic term in treaty negotiations. The term fire often indicated a place of habitation, negotiation, or reconciliation. The symbolic representation of fire as a place for meeting an discussion indicates a certain kinship between participants whose relationship stems from sitting around the metaphorical fire to discuss issues. For treaty negotiations, the term council

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<sup>51</sup> Jennings, *The History and Culture of Iroquois Diplomacy*, 119.

<sup>52</sup> Jennings, *The History and Culture of Iroquois Diplomacy*, 119.

fire often referred specifically to the Onondaga. The specific symbology refers to a predetermined place of meeting for negotiations. Meetings at the council fire occurred at regular intervals and provided a crucial element to British Iroquois interactions in the eighteenth century. The Onondaga hosted the traditional council fire and major decisions affecting all the Five Nations necessarily had to receive approval from Iroquois representatives there.<sup>53</sup>

Following their defeat at the hands of the French and a failed invasion of Canada in the 1690s, the British similar to their European counterparts sought to curry influence and increase their control over various Native American tribes to keep them from the influence of competitors. In doing so the British examined a number of avenues to entice Native groups to flock to their banner and provide much-needed assistance in the defense of British Colonial America.

The Iroquois and British began the eighteenth century in a precarious geo-political spot. The Iroquois faced existential threats from the French and the Western tribes in the Great Lakes particularly the Miami and Wyandot. Suffering humiliating defeat at the hands of the French the Iroquois found themselves forced into neutrality between the British and the French. The British during from 1700-1710 struggled to renew and strengthen the Covenant Chain as it had been in the seventeenth century. The appointment of uninformed New York governor Edward Hyde, Viscount of Cornbury in 1702 did little to ameliorate the conditions of either group concerning one another. Edward Hyde failed to adhere to Iroquois etiquette and tradition in formal treaty negotiations. During his 7 years as governor of New York, Edward Hyde alienated the

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<sup>53</sup> Jennings, *The History and Culture of Iroquois Diplomacy*, 120.

Iroquois further from the British interest due to a lack of concern over Indian affairs in general. The period witnessed a brief return to the strong-arm trading tactics of the past and relationships between British colonists and the Iroquois suffered.<sup>54</sup>

The British in internal colonial discussions during the eighteenth century often referred to the Five Nations as “our Indians” illustrating the domineering intentions of the British.<sup>55</sup> However meaningful negotiations between the British and Iroquois relied upon the use of Iroquois customs and methods of assembling to facilitate agreements between the two groups.<sup>56</sup> Edward Hyde did not adhere to Iroquois customs including the most basic reciprocal act of gift-giving and adhering to the agreed meeting time. His most heinous act in the eyes of the Five Nations included a disastrous series of meetings in 1708 culminating in his absence at an important meeting incensing the Iroquois. Edward Hyde damaged the British relationship with the Five Nations. The Iroquois found it difficult to negotiate with an individual who did not adhere to their most basic societal concepts of exchange.<sup>57</sup>

During the early eighteenth century, the Iroquois developed a strategy of appeasing both the French and British to remain neutral. From the Great Peace with the French in 1701 until 1709 the Iroquois developed a fragile system of diplomacy and trade with the Western Indians and Albany. The ability of the Iroquois to rise from the ashes of the disastrous end to the Beaver Wars of the seventeenth century by, interacting flexibly

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<sup>54</sup> Richter, *Ordeal of the Longhouse*, 224.

<sup>55</sup> Colden, *The history of the Five Nations*, 123.

<sup>56</sup> Common phrasing in almost all British correspondence I’ve read from 1700-1730s used interchangeably with “our nations.”

<sup>57</sup> Jennings, *The History and Culture of Iroquois Diplomacy*, 167.

with Europeans illustrates the agency of the Iroquois to maintain their autonomy despite dire circumstances and depopulation from the seventeenth century.

However, interactions between the British and the Iroquois frayed during the first decade of the eighteenth century. The appointed officials paid little mind to Iroquois symbolic language or rituals in their actions and found it difficult to recruit the Five Nations on military or economic endeavors. Governors like Hyde found little success among Native American tribes as a result of their unwillingness to adopt some customs of the Iroquois. The Covenant Chain began to corrode under their watch. In the 1720s and 1730s, Iroquois maintained their neutrality in colonial conflict often exploiting their knowledge of the competing colonial powers, and importantly avoiding the infighting common during the Beaver Wars. Iroquois leaders despite the increased influence of European empires in the Northeast, made decisions based upon Iroquois motives during the early to mid-eighteenth century.

After the disastrous relations of Governor Cornbury with the Iroquois, the British worked to renew the Covenant Chain and entreat the Five Nations to partner with the British colonies in their conflict with the French. These efforts however failed on two separate occasions and Iroquois concerns over their supplies of powder and lead became pressing. The increased prices at Albany for both powder and shot concerned the Iroquois. Iroquois fears reached a fever pitch when the British upon removed a French blockhouse from Iroquois lands, before placing the Royal Arms on the vacated fort. That action evoked Iroquois concerns the British planned to claim their land. The high prices of munitions raising concerns, the British sought to weaken the Iroquois to better facilitate an armed expedition against them. Schyuler, an effective British agent relative

to the eighteenth century, sought to repair the relationship with the Five Nations. The actions of Schyuler partially repaired the relationship with the Five Nations, but a second disastrous invasion attempt on Canada in 1711 resulted in a widening rift between the English and the Iroquois.<sup>58</sup>

In the decades leading up to the French and Indian War, the Iroquois found themselves increasingly negotiating amongst the British, as their poor relations with the French continued to deteriorate. However, the Iroquois did not fully commit to the British cause either. Issues with British settlers encroaching upon Iroquois land caused significant discord between the two groups. Disagreements about treaty terms often created further animosity between them. Furthermore, groups of settlers often ignored their colonial government's stance on expansion into Iroquois controlled lands, exacerbating land use issues between the British and Iroquois.

Issues relating to land use and other Iroquois concerns required the British to continuing maintaining the Covenant Chain. Reciprocal exchange presented a means to mend the frayed relationship between the Iroquois and the British. The exchange of firearms in treaties continued unabated throughout the eighteenth century, continuing to mend and maintain the Anglo-Iroquois Covenant Chain. The same guns and supplies lubricating the imperial war machine polished and maintained the Covenant Chain. Furthermore, the Iroquois in their endeavors to gain firearms had importantly forced changes in British manners of diplomacy.

In June 1711, the Iroquois publicly announced their neutrality in conflicts between the English and French. In private, they informed the successor of Hyde, Robert

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<sup>58</sup> Richter, *Ordeal of the Longhouse*, 300.

Hunter, they intended to follow his order. The exchange indicated the Iroquois ability to play Europeans off of one another to maintain safety within their immediate homeland. Furthermore, Hunter improved damaged relations with the Iroquois.

The second chapter further details the unique exchange of culture and economic ideas between the Iroquois and the British. Despite the military and economic dominance of Europeans over the Iroquois in the early eighteenth century, the Iroquois managed to utilize and leverage a variety of resources including their geographic position, reputation amongst other Native American tribes, unique political makeup, and their societal structure to maintain their relative autonomy. Allowing the Iroquois to react with alacrity to their circumstances in their own way despite the devastation suffered during the conflicts of the seventeenth century.



## **Chapter Two**

### **Council Fire**

The geo-political atmosphere surrounding the Iroquois at the turn of the eighteenth century placed them in a unique niche in colonial politics and economic exchange. The Iroquois sought to maintain cultural and political autonomy from their European neighbors. To do so the Iroquois assimilated the exchange of firearms into their own societal and symbolic structures. British officials found greater success when adhering to Iroquois rituals surrounding exchange, including the use of symbolic language and reciprocal exchange during negotiations. Indirectly the Iroquois encouraged the British to adopt some Iroquois conceptions of exchange and symbolism. The Iroquois showed resilience in maintaining cultural traditions in the face of European pressures. Because of their key geographical and economic position of the Iroquois Nation British officials who wanted to maintain good trade and diplomatic relations with the Iroquois needed to adhere to Iroquois norms of exchange, specifically symbolic language, the Covenant Chain, and reciprocal gift-giving related to the Condolence council rituals.

Historians view material objects for both their practical and symbolic use in human societies. Outside of their practical use objects in part determine the identity of those who produce, use, and wear them. For example, the commoditization and the objects that are chosen for commoditization can explain the value system and manner of determining identity amongst the two groups. In this case, firearms are the objects of

commoditization helping the Iroquois maintain their agency throughout an unstable time in eighteenth-century North America.<sup>59</sup>

The process of commoditization takes material objects within a sphere of exchange and ascribes both meaning and a value of exchange to the objects. Essentially, this idea posits that objects, similar to human beings, possess a societal status. Objects receive their status from the groups that produce or consume them, and in part, people receive their status in society based upon the material objects they possess. The introduction of new objects into a group rewrites both the status of objects within the current spheres of exchange and the status of individuals within those spheres of exchange.<sup>60</sup> The introduction of firearms into the Iroquois society in the seventeenth century represents a similar moment of revision amongst the societal norms of the Iroquois. Within two generations the traditional skills of hunting with the bow had disappeared in practical Iroquois life, giving way to the firearm.<sup>61</sup> In warfare, the firearm brought about alterations to the Iroquois martial paradigm. Warfare with the goal of captive taking continued but new tactics became necessary to facilitate the use of the firearm in both attack and defense. By the eighteenth century, the Five Nations assimilated new meanings surrounding firearms and fur hunting facilitating their trade for them.

The British and French realized they could utilize firearms to control the behavior of strategically important Native American groups to protect their imperial interests in

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<sup>59</sup> Sophie White, *Wild Frenchmen and Frenchified Indians Material Culture and Race in Colonial Louisiana* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013) 13.

<sup>60</sup> Kopytoff, *The Process of Commoditization*, 72.

<sup>61</sup> Richter, *War and Culture*, 71.

North America.<sup>62</sup> Firearms in the British conceptions presented a means to an end. The commoditization of beaver furs facilitated the commoditization of the gun in Colonial North America. Amerindian groups throughout North America desired the firearms produced in Europe. Furthermore, they traded beaver fur for these firearms at favorable rates to Europeans. The adoption of firearms into Amerindian practices of war further drove the feedback loop.

The use of Iroquois language and concepts alludes to the intersection of material and spiritual in material culture exchanges. Treaties and agreements between the Five Nations and the British contain a large amount of symbolic language directed at fulfilling the symbolic requirements of any agreement with Iroquois illustrating the ability of the Iroquois to direct interactions with the Europeans to their own ends. The presence of this language and the consistent use of the gift-giving medium to exchange promises of present and future support while solidifying future relationships in both a symbolic and practical manner between the Iroquois and British indicates an important relationship between the two. In other words, the meaningful exchange of words meant the meaningful exchange of material objects.<sup>63</sup> The importance of gift-giving in a gift economy like the Iroquois relies upon the indivisibility of the identity of the gift-giver from the properties of the gift. The gift in part determined the motivations of the giver to carry out interactions in good faith.<sup>64</sup>

Amerindian groups generally place great importance on the act of exchange of materials to seal symbolic agreements. Native groups throughout North America from the

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<sup>62</sup> Parmenter, *After the Mourning Wars*, 40.

<sup>63</sup> Bruce Trigger, *Children of the Aatensic*, 343.

<sup>64</sup> Mauss, *The Gift*.

Northeast to the Southwest heavily involved the exchange of material goods when making agreements both within their own societies and with external actors. The gift of material goods acted similar to a signature on an exchange, a sign of overall trust and the hope for a continuing benevolent relationship with the recipients.

Wampum provides an important example of the nexus between the symbolic and material in Northeastern Amerindian culture. Wampum belts made from beads manufactured from Quahog clam shells sealed agreements, started and ended wars, started alliances, and signified great historical events. The beads required a massive investment of labor taking multiple man hours to complete one bead. European manufacturing processes expedited the process of manufacture resulting in large amounts of beads to enter the economy of the colonial northeast. These belts even entered into relations between the British and the Five Nations with most official treaties and agreements between the two involving the exchange of wampum in both a symbolic and material manner.

For example, a wampum belt containing a large number of purple beads represented a great compliment and foundation to begin a relationship with the receiving group.<sup>65</sup> The labor-intensive method of producing purple beads provided greater material value therefore a belt made of them provided a greater compliment and more serious request for future cooperation.<sup>66</sup> In fact, the exchange of wampum facilitated any serious agreement, the lack of wampum called into question the seriousness of the statement. The traditions surrounding wampum belts and the Amerindian focus on gift-giving provide excellent examples of the gift-giving economy relied upon by the Five Nations.

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<sup>65</sup> Bruce Trigger, *Children of the Aatensic*, 56.

<sup>66</sup> Michael Foster, *Another Look at the Function of Wampum in Iroquois-White Councils*, 99.

The exchange of Wampum and the ability of astute colonial administrators to adhere to the Iroquois ritual for success in their endeavors, illustrates the differences in conceptions of exchange between the Five Nations and the British. The Five Nations viewed Europeans who were anxious to get down to business as forgoing the proper relationship building necessary to nurture continuing relationships.<sup>67</sup> Through the establishment of ritual and their reenactment at treaty meetings, the Iroquois concept bled into the British colonial world. Colonial agents who at least recognized the importance of the rituals the Iroquois utilized them to further their ambitions. The Iroquois viewed the exchange of wampum as necessary to establish a psychological connection between two groups during an exchange. The ability of the Iroquois to force colonial administrators to adhere to Iroquois exchange rituals indicate their ability to self-determine and make autonomous decisions despite the overbearing nature of European colonial dominance.<sup>68</sup>

The eighteenth-century wampum belt often contained the important pictographic elements of a chain, path, or fire. All of the metaphors are important indicators of relationships and exchange in the Iroquois worldview. Furthermore, belts involving two abstract figures holding hands joined by longitudinal bands indicate the Covenant Chain. The Covenant Chain proved an important theme in the belts exchanged between the Iroquois and British during official diplomatic or trade interactions.<sup>69</sup>

The gift-giving paradigm encompassed many facets of Iroquois society. Most areas of Iroquois life involved gift-giving and reciprocity to maintain harmony amongst

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<sup>67</sup> Michael Foster, *Another Look at the Function of Wampum in Iroquois-White Councils*, 103.

<sup>68</sup> Michael Foster, *Another Look at the Function of Wampum in Iroquois-White Councils*, 104.

<sup>69</sup> Michael Foster, *Another Look at the Function of Wampum in Iroquois-White Councils*, 104.

members of the Five Nations.<sup>70</sup> The Great League of Peace and Power referred not only to the *amicabilis concordia* between the Five Nations binding them together into a semi-cohesive political entity, the league also provided a blueprint for interactions with outsiders including the European Colonists. The British in many cases sought to promote their relationship in trade and military affairs with the Iroquois. In treaties and conferences between the two groups, the highly symbolic nature of the language contained within the documents provides an avenue to examine Iroquois-British relationships to illustrate the agency of the Five Nations. Intentionally or unintentionally cordial relations and alliances depended upon the ability of British Colonial administrators to adhere to the worldview of the Five Nations.<sup>71</sup>

In interactions with the Iroquois, one man in the British administration rose to particular prominence in the Northern British colonies. Sir William Johnson (1715-1774) was an Irish born official who traveled to the New World at the behest of his uncle Peter Warren to manage an estate among the Mohawk in the hopes of developing a settlement there. He gained his title through interactions among the Iroquois rising to become the Commissioner of Indian Affairs in the Northern colonies. Johnson proved to be an astute official amongst the Iroquois learning many of their customs and the Mohawk language. Furthermore, the Mohawk sought relations with Johnson to further their interests with the British colonial administrations. The Mohawk population collapsed to around 580 at the end of the seventeenth century, due to disease and warfare with the French and neighboring tribes. Various types of accounts reflect the nature of interactions between

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<sup>70</sup> Axtell, James. *The European and the Indian: Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial North America*. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1982.

<sup>71</sup> Jennings, *Iroquois Alliances in American History*, 37.

the Iroquois and British. Throughout these interactions, the British utilized Iroquois symbolism and language if they wished for success.

Sir William Johnson provides an excellent example of a colonial agent achieving great inroads with the Mohawk the easternmost member of the Five Nations near his home and trading post Mt. Johnson. Johnson probably did not fully realize the manner that gift-giving and exchange permeated the society of the Five Nations, though he did recognize the results he achieved in economic and diplomatic interactions utilizing Iroquois rituals in the exchanges. However, he undertook the task of improving relations with the Five Nations by exchanging goods with various Iroquois villages and providing a trading post close to Mohawk territory. The location proved lucrative for Johnson, and convenient for the nearby villages associated with the Five Nations. Johnson often brought gifts whenever he met with the Iroquois or made agreements with them. Johnson proved to be greatly successful in improving relations between the British colonial administration and the Five Nations tribes in their homeland in northern New York. Firearms were a particularly persuasive item of trade during the early eighteenth century. Providing both a practical and symbolic benefit the power of the firearm in hunting and warfare transferred into the incorporeal realm increasing the power of the Five Nations in their conception of the world.

Historians who study Native American history and agency often run into a roadblock formed from the relative lack of textual sources compared to European authored sources on the matter. Reading against the grain of European sources to illustrate the British tendency to utilize highly symbolic language in successful interactions with the Iroquois is useful in remedying this problem. The highly symbolic

language improved chances of success and the lack of symbolic language or overtones of humility and brotherhood often spelled failure. Through the use of ceremonial language, and the insistence on gift-giving for most entreaties the Five Nations possessed a form of control over their exchanges with the British colonials. Furthermore, the British spent considerable effort and time working toward improving relations and increasing control over the Five Nations and utilized Iroquois symbolic treaty language in their attempts to do so. Illustrating both the British need to promote interactions with the Iroquois, and the necessity of undertaking those negotiations in terms of Iroquois political and societal conceptions.

In doing so the British examined a number of avenues to entice Native groups to flock to their banner and provide much-needed assistance in the defense of British Colonial America. Britain's colonial holdings began the eighteenth century under threat following defeat at the hands of the French and a failed invasion of Canada. The British similar to their European counterparts sought to curry influence and increase their control over various Native American tribes to keep them from the influence of competitors.

Despite diplomatic setbacks the economic relationship between the Iroquois particularly the Mohawk and Albany flourished. This compounded French fears of British economic dominance over the Indian trade. Iroquois neutrality and increasingly friendly relations with Western Indians threatened French trade in Montreal. The ability of Western tribes to pass through Iroquois lands proved a consistent thorn to French



trading efforts.<sup>72</sup> The ability to regulate the passage of Western Native American groups gave the Iroquois leverage in their interactions with the British and French.

Perhaps no British official better exemplified a marked ability to entreat amongst the Iroquois with ease. Johnson through years of trading with the nearby Mohawk from Mount Johnson formed lasting and pivotal relationships in the Five Nations. Johnson utilized his knowledge of Iroquois custom to defend British interests while enriching himself. Furthermore, he treated the Five Nations fairly and found great success due to his respect toward their ritual conceptions surrounding diplomatic agreements and brotherhood. During a council meeting at Albany in July, 1751, the Iroquois were distraught at the temporary departure of Johnson from his position running Indian Affairs in the Northern Colonies due to personal expense accrued during his tenure. The Iroquois beseeched Governor George Clinton “We were very much shocked when Col . Johnson sent a Belt of Wampum through the Five Nations, to inform us that he declined acting any more with us, and it was the more terrible, because he was well acquainted with our public Affairs. We had in wartime when he was Like a Tree, that grew for our use, which now seems to be falling down, tho it has many roots; his knowledge of our affairs made us think him one of us.”<sup>73</sup> The Mohawk protests toward Johnson’s departure shows the clear affection the Mohawk held towards him after years of amicable relations and relatively fair trade.<sup>74</sup> The traditional Iroquois ties Johnson made within Iroquois frameworks made him an effective colonial official.

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<sup>72</sup> W. J. Eccles, "The Fur Trade and Eighteenth-Century Imperialism," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 40, no. 3 (1983): 349.

<sup>73</sup> Council at Albany July, 2<sup>nd</sup> 1751.

<sup>74</sup> William Johnson 1761. *Minutes of the several conferences held by Sir William Johnson with the Indians on his way to, and at the Detroits*, 23.

In Johnson, the Iroquois saw an opportunity to advance their interests with the British, eventually resulting in the adoption of Johnson as an honorary Sachem giving him the name Warraghiyagey. Similar to many interactions between the British and the Iroquois the elevation of Johnson to the position of Sachem proved to be in the mutual interest of both groups. The feelings of kinship toward him become clear through the words of the Mohawk.

The beloved status of Johnson came in part due to his position in the colonial administration and his appointment to the position of Superintendent of Indian Affairs for the Five Nations. Johnson's ability to act in the symbolic world and frameworks of the Iroquois granted him great success and renown in both groups. Warren Johnson wrote his brother in 1746 "it likewise gives me vast pleasure to hear that you have been the principal person in bringing the Six Nations of Indians to our interest."<sup>75</sup> The congratulatory words of Warren Johnson likely reflected the popular perception of William in the colonial administration and amongst the Iroquois.

The language Johnson used in numerous treaties belies his crucial understanding of Iroquois traditions giving him an advantage in diplomacy in the Five Nations. For example during treaty negotiations at Mount Johnson in 1755 before the French and Indian War responding to the "hearty thanks for the care you take of us in supplying us with ammunition, large guns, and paint," makes a personal response to each constituent tribe of the Five Nations beginning with the use of a kinship term "brethren" in this case.<sup>76</sup> Iroquois treaty terms reflected the Iroquois kinship system referring to someone as brethren had a similar meaning to the European conception of the term. Meaning Johnson

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<sup>75</sup> Warren Johnson, letter to William, September 1<sup>st</sup>, 1746, in *Sir William Johnson Papers*, vol 2, 26.

<sup>76</sup> Johnson, *An account of conferences held at Fort Johnson 1755-1756*, 7.

respectfully began each response in a conciliatory tone of brotherhood and amity, as opposed to a more domineering approach utilizing paternalistic notions of the dominant position of the father in stark contrast to the less successful efforts of Lord Cornbury. Johnson realized the Iroquois interacted with others in a set of relationships based upon equanimity and mutual assistance. Crucially, Johnson also understood the necessity of Iroquois methods to promote amicable interactions between the colonies and the Iroquois indicating the agency and structural power of the Five Nations to influence British negotiations.

Johnson adheres to another important Iroquois step in negotiating during his meetings with the Sachems in 1755-1756; the exchange of wampum to denote the seriousness of a statement or request. The importance of wampum in every step of negotiations with the Iroquois tied the symbolic and material. For him to achieve his goals with the Iroquois he had to step into their world of symbolic meanings including the exchange of material goods indicating the agency of the Iroquois in negotiations with the English. This becomes clear when he states “I highly approve of your wisdom and timely advice to your elder brothers the Oneidas, and am extremely glad that you and they have at last agreed to build a place of defence, and to join your brethren the English against any attempts of your and our common enemy the French. A belt.”<sup>77</sup> The giving of the belt firmly placed the interactions of Johnson in the Iroquois realm conceptually. The reciprocal gift-giving to display the seriousness of a statement fits firmly within the Iroquois and not the British conception of diplomacy. For words to have real meaning the exchange of material goods like a symbolic receipt for the words became necessary.

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<sup>77</sup> Johnson, *An Account of Conferences held at Fort Johnson 1755-1756*, 8.

Johnson understood that without the belt the statement meant nothing to the Iroquois in terms of negotiating.<sup>78</sup>

Another shrewd diplomatic example of Johnson's negotiating skill and rapport among the Five Nations comes in February of 1756. Fulfilling a request for ammunition and powder from the Five Nations Johnson states

“I will endeavour to ease your minds, and do everything in my power to contribute to your happiness. As for the idle surmises of, or reports spread by any ill minded silly people, who know nothing of your sentiments, or the state of your or our affairs, I- must desire you will not give ear to, nor be in the least uneasy at them, for their words are like wind and not to be noticed.”<sup>79</sup>

In his response, Johnson again utilizes Iroquois forms of speech and negotiation. He once again ends his remark with an exchange of wampum. Furthermore, he utilizes metaphor in his likening of harsh words to the wind a trait of Iroquois diplomacy and treaty format.

In doing so Johnson exemplifies the two traits all successful negotiators with the Iroquois possessed. First, the ability to utilize Iroquois kinship terminology and metaphor in interactions among the Five Nations to ingratiate himself and gain the respect of the tribes, therefore, increasing the chances of successful negotiations. And second an understanding of the gift-giving paradigm enshrined into the daily life exemplified by Johnson's usage of wampum exchange to cement the seriousness of his words. The adoption of Iroquois forms gave Johnson an advantage in his role as Superintendent of Indian Affairs and his private mercantile life in the trade. By supplying the Iroquois with firearms Johnson fulfilled both the practical and symbolic need of security in Iroquois

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<sup>78</sup> Parmenter, “After the Mourning Wars: The Iroquois as Allies in Colonial North American Campaigns, 1676-1760,” 41.

<sup>79</sup> Johnson, *An Account of Conferences held at Fort Johnson 1755-1756*, 17.

society closer tying him to the tribes and increasing his ability to leverage further negotiations.

The fact Johnson so heavily relied upon Iroquois rituals indicates Iroquois control over an aspect of the exchanges. The Iroquois flexibly included Europeans into their systems of exchange guaranteeing the continued existence of an important cultural format for diplomacy. The use of specific Iroquois metaphor and language in treaties indicates a cultural injection of Iroquois ritual into the British framework of diplomacy.

The trade in firearms and furs between the British and the Iroquois provides an opportunity for increased contact between the two different groups of people. The increasing contact centered on firearms in the early to mid-eighteenth century represents a moment of increased understanding between the Five Nations and the British. The British sought to include the Iroquois in their plans of imperial competition with the French. The strategic location of the Iroquois homeland and the great influence they exerted on the mostly Algonquian tribes around them through force and their unique conceptions of governance influenced British policies of cooperation. During the same period 1715-1760, the Iroquois sought to play both the British and French off of one another to maintain their autonomy. The policy of neutrality and attempts to play the two imperial contestants resulted from the depopulation of the Iroquois in the seventeenth century due primarily to disease, and warfare. The Iroquois sought to protect their interests and simultaneously avoid agitating either the French or the British by fully siding with one or the other until the French and Indian War. The retention of Iroquois cultural and political structures in part resulted from the decisions of Iroquois leaders to maintain neutrality between the two empires. The Iroquois leaders and society, in

general, worked toward the policy of neutrality in part to limit in-fighting amongst the Iroquois and maintain their solidarity. The focus on limiting in-fighting dates back to the formation of the Iroquois league predating first contact with Europeans. The practical advantages of firearms and their effective use in warfare instilled an important symbolic meaning unto themselves in Iroquois societal contexts. The introduction of firearms shifted the paradigm of the Native American world the Iroquois proved to be early adopters. The eighteenth-century only further solidified the Iroquois relationship with the gun.

The Iroquois gained advantages through mundane negotiations with British agents and trading posts outside of official interactions. The British offered a much better price for furs than the French at Montreal during the early eighteenth century. The Iroquois received one rifle for every two beaver furs in New York as opposed to the five beaver furs in exchange for a rifle in Montreal.<sup>80</sup> The exchange rates for the Iroquois provided a competitive trade advantage to the British against the French. The Iroquois often took advantage of these better trading values particularly those tribes closest to the British colonial centers. The Mohawk in particular benefitted from the proximity to Mount Johnson and their interactions with Sir William Johnson.

The British conceptions of pursuing trade ties and including the Iroquois in their sphere of influence through that trade illustrates the implicit power of exchange in both a symbolic and practical function. The Iroquois too sought interactions with the British to stave off French influence in an impressive display of statesmanship and negotiation. Furthermore, the British desire to deepen ties to the Iroquois rested on the strategic nature

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<sup>80</sup> Numerous sources seems to have been common knowledge at the time.

of Iroquois influence over other tribes. Bringing the Five Nations into the British colonial sphere of influence increased the defense of the colonies bordering Canada, in particular New York. And the tribes under within the Iroquois tributary system guaranteed more protection in the Old Northwest and Great Lakes region.

The highly symbolic nature of material objects in determining agreements and confirming many symbolic portions of agreements determined the gift-giving associated with the British overtures toward the Five Nations. Iroquois internal society heavily relied on the concepts of reciprocity and duality amongst their populace to solve internal conflicts and avoid violent consequences amongst themselves. The diffuse internal structures of power in Iroquois society allowed tribal members to mediate disagreements internally. The same power structures granted the Iroquois solidarity in dealing with outside forces. The Iroquois utilized one representative to speak to the concerns of all the tribal members maintaining a united front facing external threats and agents. Furthermore, despite men providing the external representation women provided the driving force behind making the political decisions for the tribe.

At the turn of the eighteenth century, the British found themselves precariously positioned to influence Native American tribes due to the 1701 Great Peace between the French and the Iroquois after French military actions in Iroquoia.<sup>81</sup> The treaty effectively ended the period of autonomous Iroquois campaigns against the French and the Western Native American groups under the French aegis of control. The Iroquois in future conflicts needed the assistance of the British. 1700-1710 represented a time of great peril for the Iroquois; the population of the village centers depleted by warfare and disease did

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<sup>81</sup> John K. Mahon, "Anglo-American Methods of Indian Warfare, 1676-1794," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 45, no. 2 (1958): 12.

not possess the capability to project their power into the Great Lakes region and Ohio country as they did through force of arms throughout the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Instead, the early seventeenth century marked a period of diplomacy to restore the former glory of the Iroquois Covenant Chain. According to the terms with the French, the Iroquois were to maintain neutrality in conflicts between the British and French. The French specifically did not take control of the Iroquois homelands seeing them as a buffer between the French allied Native Americans and the cheaper trading prices of the British.

The British however sought to strengthen ties with the Five Nations to increase the political and martial leverage for their colonies, in particular, the colonies of New York and Pennsylvania interacted intimately with the Five and later Five Nations. The Iroquois represented a lynchpin in colonial society; securing an alliance with them fortified the Western and Northern borders against hostile French-affiliated Native American groups in the Great Lakes and Ohio to the west and Canada to the north. A reflection of British concerns comes in a 1724 Act of Assembly calling for the encouragement of trade between the British colonies and the Iroquois to keep them from falling into the French orbit of control.<sup>82</sup>

The British fear over French encroachment on the Iroquois proved a constant theme from 1700-1760. There are letters, accounts, and assemblies all attesting to the British desire to influence the Five Nations toward the British cause to the detriment of French encroachments. Many officials agreed to increase gifts given to the Iroquois

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<sup>82</sup> "*Papers relating to an [[act]] of the [[assembly]] for the [[encouragement]] of the Indian [[trade]] and for prohibiting the selling goods to the French of Canada*" (Petition; Report; Correspondence, The National Archives, Kew, CO 5/1092 [[1724]]).



subsidized in part by the Crown. British agents in the field acting amongst the Iroquois utilized Iroquois symbology and terms in these agreements.

A primary British goal in controlling the Five Nations involved utilizing them to balance out the power of French-affiliated Native American groups in the Ohio Country and Great Lakes. In 1707 Lord Cornbury reported to the Board of Trade about meeting at Albany with the Five Nations. Furthermore, these meetings indicate another tribe possibly members of the Miami, came to trade at Albany from 800 miles away stating the French had foiled their previous attempts to reach Albany. Perhaps the tribe and the Five Nations represent a coincidence in timing. To the British colonial observer, it served to further the necessity of including the Five Nations in imperial ambitions in North America. British fears over the negative impacts upon trade and military ambitions made Iroquois assistance necessary to British ambitions against the French in Canada until after the French and Indian War.<sup>83</sup> The power play between the British and French dominated Anglo-Iroquois relations from the start of the eighteenth century until the end of the French and Indian War. These early underpinnings illustrate the importance of the gun trade early in the eighteenth century including the Iroquois into plans protecting British interests in North America.

An announcement from the Royal Board of Trade to the colonies in 1722 details the large number of funds given to the colonies, particularly New York, to give gifts to the Five Nations. The board of trade approved a gift of 500 pounds that year to supply the Iroquois against the interest of the French. Despite the gift, the Iroquois remained neutral

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<sup>83</sup> "[[Letter]] to the [[Lord]] [[Cornbury]] from the [[Board]] concerning administrative matters and the security of New York" (Correspondence, The National Archives, Kew, CO 5/1121 [[1707]]/03/26).

in the competition between the imperial powers throughout the 1720s.<sup>84</sup> The desire for the Iroquois to remain neutral despite British desires to control them through gifts of firearms and other goods illustrates their agency in the face of exogenous pressure.

The 1742 Philadelphia treaty conference provides another example how British use of symbolic language between the two groups bred success, in contrast to the more domineering early eighteenth-century attempts of Lord Cornbury to influence Iroquois actions. One exchange between the Pennsylvania Lieutenant Governor George Thomas and Canassatego the Iroquois representative over guns illustrates the uniquely Iroquois treaty structure. Canassatego requests the Governor

“We therefore desire, if you have the Keys of the Proprietor's Chest, you will open it, and take out a little more for us” due to Iroquois knowledge of land values relating to their land on the Susquehanna. George Thomas responded in perfect mimicry and deference toward Iroquois ritual practices “Brethren, We thank you for the many declarations of respect you have given us in this solemn renewal of our treaties: We receive, and shall keep your String and Belts of Wampum as pledge of your sincerity... In Answer to what you say about the Proprietaries. They are all absent, and have taken the Keys of their Chest with them; so that we cannot, on their Behalf, enlarge the Quantity of Goods...the Number of Guns, as well as everything else, answers exactly with the Particulars.”<sup>85</sup>

The exchange illustrates the symbolic nature of treaty negotiations. The giving of wampum to ensure the sincerity of proposals and the language of kinship and metaphor abound throughout the treaty. The specific mention of guns separate from other treaty terms symbolizes the important position firearms held in lubricating agreements between Europeans and the Iroquois.

Furthermore, *The Treaty at Philadelphia 1742* illustrates the dynamism and Iroquois adoption of pseudo-European practices. The land sold in the treaty belonged

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<sup>84</sup> Royal Board of Trade, *Announcement of gifts to Five Nations*, New York, 1702.

<sup>85</sup> "The [[treaty]] [[held]] with the [[Indians]] of the [[Six]] [[Nations]] at Lancaster in Pennsylvania" (Legal Document, The National Archives, Kew, CO 5/1326 1744/06).

primarily to the Delaware, a tributary group of the Iroquois. Putting strain on the Covenant Chain due to the Iroquois' sale of their tributaries' land without their consent to a European power.<sup>86</sup> Iroquois actions show their ability to determine their own circumstances and utilize their geopolitical advantages despite the detriment to their immediate Amerindian neighbors.

Conrad Weiser another skilled British official worked as an interpreter on many treaties and council meetings between the colony of Pennsylvania and the Five Nations, including the *Treaty at Philadelphia 1742*. Weiser spent years of his adolescence living amongst the Five Nations after his father agreed to his stay among the Iroquois. Due to the first-hand experience in Iroquois villages, Weiser understood the meaning of Iroquois symbolic language and societal structure. In 1743, Weiser participated in a council meeting that paid particular attention to the Iroquois practices and rituals involved in diplomacy. Through doing so the council meeting paved the way for larger land deals between the Iroquois and the British in the years leading up to the French and Indian War.<sup>87</sup> Weiser further cemented an excellent reputation as an interpreter when he mediates peace negotiations between the Iroquois and the colony of Virginia. Weiser reinforces the importance of Iroquois ritual in achieving British goals through diplomatic and economic interactions with the Iroquois.

The Iroquois during the early to mid eighteenth century tied themselves closer to the British and still maintained distance with the French. Iroquois strategy during the period sought to play European empires against one another for the Iroquois to rebuild

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<sup>86</sup> *The Treaty held with the Indians of the Six Nations*, at Philadelphia, in July, 1742.

<sup>87</sup> Jennings, *The History and Culture of Iroquois Diplomacy*, 180.

and repair their tributary treaty system the Covenant Chain to establish their position of influence among Northeastern tribes.

The economic advantages of trading opportunities motivated the Five Nations to interact amiably with British officials. The position of the Iroquois astride important trade routes to the Ohio Country to the west and Canada to the North allowed the Iroquois to regulate the trade of Western and Canadian tribes. The Iroquois further benefitted symbolically from their strategic position. Controlling the approaches to Albany and other British trading centers allowed the Iroquois to obtain a position of power through their control of river exchange.<sup>88</sup> By acting as the gatekeepers of the Native American trade from the West and Canada the Iroquois made themselves indispensable to both French and British imperial ambitions. To expand and consolidate trading opportunities the Iroquois proved necessary to the competing imperial powers.

Overall, the British had two intentions in their gun trade dealings with the Iroquois outside of the obvious economic desires for dominating the fur trade. Protecting British imperial interest from Francophone encroachment proved an important factor in the gun trade. The Five Nations represented an idiographic potential ally due to their history of hostility with the French and their strategic position geopolitically wedged in between French, British, and Old Northwestern Indian territory. The British simply could not allow the Iroquois to fall fully into the French orbit due to potential economic losses and lack of physical security from Western Indian tribes in the Ohio Country and Great Lakes. The second intention is the utilization of the gun trade to control the economic and

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<sup>88</sup> A. E. Parkins, *The Indians of the Great Lakes Region and Their Environment* (New York: American Geographical Society, 1918), 505.

military behavior of Native American groups. The British sought to promote economic ties with the Iroquois and utilize their martial assistance in colonial conflict with the French. The British met relative success in both the aforementioned intentions. They succeeded in maintaining the important buffer provided by the Iroquois and benefitting from their trade at Albany and later Mount Johnson, and utilizing the gun trade to somewhat control negotiations with Native Americans.

However, they did not simply dictate the terms of negotiations with the Five Nations. Instead the British adopted Iroquois treaty forms and ritual practices surrounding. Far from being a passive party in negotiations, the Iroquois forced the British to step into the world of the Iroquois if any hope of meaningful discourse was to take place. From the Iroquois perspective, the British occupied an equal spot at the Council Fire to themselves as opposed to a subservient one. Successful British officials like William Johnson and George Thomas played by Iroquois rules and reaped the benefits of adhering to Iroquois ritual and metaphor. Officials did not fully understand the motivations of the Iroquois, but they realized adhering to Iroquois ritual increased their chances of success. Poor officials like Lord Cornbury tried to force European standards of paternal dominance upon the Iroquois, resulting in the breakdown of meaningful negotiations until his replacement. While it is undeniable the influx of European culture and material goods forever changed the culture and society of the Iroquois they still maintained a significant degree of cultural and political autonomy. The Iroquois conversely dictated the behavior of the British in negotiations indicating their agency and cultural resiliency in forcing the colonials to adopt Iroquois conceptions of negotiating

and to recognize the symbolic importance of material goods. The British became slightly more Iroquois.

Through their insistence on British use of symbolic treaty terms the Iroquois preserved a measure of their autonomy and by extension negotiations surrounding firearms allowed them to both protect themselves and exhibit a small measure of control over their interactions with British officials. The officials who utilized the Iroquois symbolic terms in their negotiations with Iroquois about munitions and firearms found greater success in ingratiating themselves to the Iroquois. William Johnson provides an archetype for the type of officials who found the kind of success entering and entreating amongst Five Nations within Iroquoia. Through their success in interacting on culturally familiar terms amongst the Iroquois, the officials found better success in achieving their own goals among the Iroquois.

## Chapter Three

### Firearms Exchange

“We make the House clean, where all our affairs of importance are transacted with these five Otters. We return you thanks for the powder and lead given us; but what shall we do with them without guns, shall we throw them at the enemy? We doubt they will not hurt them so. Before this we always had guns given us. It is no wonder the Governor of Canada gains upon us, for he supplies his Indians with guns as well as powder; he supplies them plentifully with everything that can hurt us.”<sup>89</sup>

The 1696 encounter between British militia leaders and the Five Nations speakers at a council fire during the disastrous British attempted conquest of Canada indicates the agency of the Iroquois in a darkly humorous fashion. The Iroquois demeanor during the exchange indicates their ability to make requests and even mock the British illustrating their relative autonomy and self-determination in the face of Europeans. The interaction begins with the exchange of otter fur an important reciprocal exchange before making an official statement or request. Making the “house clean” indicates the Iroquois wish to clear the air and air their grievances honestly. The Iroquois exhibited a degree of leverage and control over this interaction indicated by their tone and use of Iroquois metaphor. The Five Nations utilized their norms of exchange to obtain firearms from the British allowing them to protect their physical security and by extension their cultural autonomy.

As the above quote indicates, the Iroquois in this circumstance are not junior partners in their relationship to the British colonies in New York and Pennsylvania. Furthermore, the end part of the passage displays the internal divisions present in Iroquois society between Anglophile and Francophile factions. The reference to French

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<sup>89</sup> Cadwallader Colden, *History of the Five Nations* 122.

supplies of guns indicates the Iroquois received recent overtures from French officials and they mention it to the British to extract more firearms from British officials. The internal divisions resulted in the decimation of the Iroquois leading to their pursuit of neutrality both internally and externally from 1700-1760. The cynical attitude of the Five Nations warriors toward Britain indicates their ability to navigate complex circumstances through their own understanding of diplomatic negotiations. The Five Nations fought on both sides during King William's War (1688-1697), with member tribes backing both the English and the French depending on their relationships often relating to the supply of firearms. Firearms provide a lens to examine the agency of the Iroquois in their negotiations with the British colonials.<sup>90</sup>

Examining the exchange of firearms offers an intriguing view into the Iroquois's ability to maintain their adherence to traditional cultural practices, despite the various imperial entanglements present in the Northeastern colonial sphere. Firearms themselves offer an increased capacity to defend Iroquois territory and increase the economic efficiency of hunting to obtain furs. Furthermore, the symbolic exchange surrounding their trade in other objects involved illustrates Iroquois agency and cultural resilience in the face of external existential threats. Iroquois cultural conceptions and practices adapted to the new external and internal pressures brought about by European imperialism and maintained their importance in Iroquois society. The usage of symbolic terminology and the ability to negotiate with British officials allowed the Iroquois to maintain large facets of traditional cultural practices. The gun trade provided very real security to the Iroquois and allowed them to sustain traditional practices despite exogenous European pressures

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<sup>90</sup> Richter, *Ordeal of the Longhouse*, 239.



on Iroquois society. Firearms allowed the Iroquois to maintain their niche in Colonial geo-politics allowing the Iroquois to maintain a degree of cultural autonomy.

The eighteenth-century firearms trade between the British and Iroquois offers perspective into the symbolic importance of exchange and material culture in governing interactions between Native Americans and European empires. The presence of firearms in numerous treaty interactions and negotiations indicates their importance of protecting both British and Iroquois interests physically and symbolically becoming an important representation of continued friendly relationships between the two groups. The negotiations for firearms proceeded similarly to political and diplomatic negotiations. In many cases, diplomatic and political negotiations contained exchanges and negotiations for firearms, lead, and powder. The Iroquois through forcing the British to utilize Iroquois conceptions of diplomacy obtained firearms in exchange for their continued agreements of support against the French. The British recognized the importance of the gun trade and continued promoting interactions with the Iroquois. Firearms offered a medium of exchange allowing the British and Iroquois to pursue relations with one another whilst simultaneously providing tangible benefits to both the Five Nations and the British.

Agreements to trade firearms can be found in various types of documents and negotiations between the British and the Iroquois. The quantities of firearms and supplies or lack thereof often became a topic of at least brief discussion in most official interactions between the British and the Iroquois. The exchange of firearms proceeded along Iroquois cultural vectors forcing the British to adapt to the Iroquois vision of diplomatic agreements. Iroquois concepts of reciprocation and symbolic language

infiltrated the language of successful British agents during their interactions amongst the Five Nations in New York. The aforementioned Sir William Johnson and Conrad Weiser exemplified the successful British agent utilizing Iroquois societal conceptions to facilitate bilateral negotiations. Their negotiations include frequent references to munitions particularly during negotiations relating to military matters opposing French influence during imperial conflicts, or in attempts to sway the Five Nations into the British imperial sphere.

Johnson not only earned the trust of the Iroquois through shrewd utilization of Iroquois tradition, but he also represented a significant purveyor of firearms and their supplies to the Five Nations the Mohawk in particular. Fulfilling the roles of both a merchant and militia leader during times of war Johnson soon took control over Indian auxiliaries in the Northern Colonies during times of conflict. George Clinton, governor of New York in 1746 stated to Johnson at the outbreak of war “The Six Nations of Indians have engaged to go to war against the French their Indians and Settlements in Canada and as the said tribes will want to be supplied occasionally in arms ammunition, clothing & Provisions... You are hereby empowered to furnish the said tribes.”<sup>91</sup> In the role of commissary to the Six Nations Johnson furnished the Iroquois with firearms during times of peace and war in combination with the trading post at Mount Johnson. Providing the Iroquois the means to defend themselves and adhering to Iroquois ritual enhanced the prestige of Johnson amongst the Iroquois increasing his efficacy in diplomacy with the Five Nations.

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<sup>91</sup> George Clinton, Letter to William, in *William Johnson Papers*, August 27<sup>th</sup>, 1746.

The interaction between William Johnson and the Five Nations during the French and Indian War indicates that the two parties had a close relationship that followed Iroquois symbolic procedures. The Five Nations refer to the English utilizing kinship terms of equality. Moreover, the Iroquois indicate their staunch opposition toward the French amongst the particular group entreating with Johnson. The Iroquois mention of the last war against the French, and the Onondaga utilizing British and Powder and Shot against them further follows the Iroquois conception of political discourse, including admitting to past mistakes followed by assurances of improvement in the future. The mention of powder and ball illustrates the central role of firearms in the relationship between the Five Nations and the British. During times when the proverbial war kettle boiled the inclusion and supply of Native American auxiliaries proved a paramount concern of militia commanders like William Johnson. Furthermore, the clear reference to changing allegiances in the past indicates the ability of the Iroquois to change allegiances and retain an important role in Imperial plans. However, the internal autonomy of the Iroquois displays the ability to deflect culpability on to one or more member tribes and avoid any degree of a scathing indictment from the British protecting the overall security of the Five Nations.

“We told you before that we were one Heart, one Blood & one Religion with you. We repeat it & are assured we are determined to remain true to & stand by our Brethren the English to the last, nor shall it be in the power of the French to alter our Resolutions or draw us off from our Union with you. We will not do as some of our Brethren of the Onondaga Nation did last War, received Powder & Ball from you & make use of it against you.”<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> William Johnson, *William Johnson Papers*, Volume 2, 27.

Another very intriguing part of the exchange includes the reference to being of one blood and religion with the British. The importance of blood is hard to understate. William Johnson married a prominent Mohawk woman Molly Brant forming an important bond between himself and the Five Nations. The inclusion of himself into the matriarchal kinship system of the Iroquois provided Johnson a degree of inclusion in Iroquois affairs uncommon amongst European agents regardless of their origin. Johnson thoroughly placed himself to interact prominently in the affairs of the Five Nations through utilizing Iroquois conceptions of kinship. By tying himself and future progeny into the kinship web of the Iroquois through direct commitment indicates the willingness of Johnson to interact on Iroquois terms. The success of Johnson in interactions indicates the importance the Iroquois placed upon kinship ties not only in treaty terms but in reality. Through forming a marriage bond Johnson formed a very real symbolic bond amongst the Five Nations and especially the Mohawk. In tying himself to a prominent woman he embedded himself deeper into the affairs of the Iroquois. The Iroquois society valued maternal ties highly and Johnson ensconced himself into that system. Furthermore, the chain-like tie provides an excellent symbolic representation of the overall Covenant Chain between the British and the Five Nations, furthering the relationship between the two and renewing the agreement in an overall function. Finally, Johnson furthered British ambitions by securing a portion of the Five Nations to assist in the French and Indian War. Johnson's actions indicated that the success of British agents depended upon their ability to operate partially in Iroquois conceptions to achieve favorable results in negotiations.

The Iroquois symbolic language Johnson used in numerous treaties belies his crucial understanding of Iroquois traditions giving him an advantage in diplomacy with the Five Nations. For example, during treaty negotiations at Mount Johnson in 1755 before the French and Indian War the Iroquois state to Johnson “hearty thanks for the care you take of us in supplying us with ammunition, large guns, and paint,” Johnson gives a personal response to each constituent tribe of Six Nations beginning with the use of a kinship term “brethren” in this case.<sup>93</sup> Iroquois treaty terms reflected the Iroquois kinship system referring to a group of people as brethren had a similar meaning to the European conception of the term. Meaning Johnson respectfully began each response in a conciliatory tone of brotherhood and amity, as opposed to a more domineering approach utilizing paternalistic notions of the dominant position of the father in stark contrast to the less successful Lord Cornbury. Johnson realized the Iroquois interacted with others in a set of relationships based upon equanimity and mutual assistance. Crucially, Johnson also understood the necessity of Iroquois methods to promote amicable interactions between the colonies and the Iroquois.

During the first two decades of the eighteenth century, the Iroquois sought to maintain their neutrality between the anglophile and francophile factions internally and the two empires externally follow the Great Peace of 1701 ending the last of Beaver Wars. Through maintaining their neutrality between the imperial forces the Iroquois made themselves indispensable to the plans of both. The importance of the Iroquois to the French and British drove them to entreat with and give concessions to the Five Nations often to the detriment of their own European political interests to the benefit of the

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<sup>93</sup> William Johnson, *An Account of Conferences Held at Fort Johnson 1755-1756, in the papers of Sir William Johnson*, 645.

Iroquois. Firearms presented both a symbolically and materially important medium of negotiation and exchange during the period increasing the real military power of the Iroquois and supporting amiable relationships between themselves and their colonial neighbors. Furthermore, the Iroquois presented a manner of regulating trade amongst the Native Americans in the Great Lakes they often antagonized. The Iroquois presence in European affairs and their cooperation often directly or indirectly involved the trade in firearms.

Firearms play a central role in the 1742 Philadelphia negotiations for the land in Pennsylvania East of the Susquehanna River. Among the gifts provided to the Iroquois were firearms and supplies relating to their upkeep and maintenance that make up a large portion of the goods exchanged. The goods included 45 muskets, 600 Pounds of Lead, 500 Pounds of Powder, and 1000 Flints.<sup>94</sup> These material goods are the primary concern of the exchange on the Iroquois end while being referenced specifically by the British.

Lieutenant Governor Thomas once again exemplified the ability of British officials after the 1720s to utilize Iroquois symbology to influence treaty negotiations. Thomas released a further gift of “24 guns, 600 Pounds of Lead, 600 Pounds of powder” in addition to the aforementioned munitions included in the treaty terms.<sup>95</sup> The example illustrates the quantity and importance of guns to the British ability to garner support among the Iroquois, and the Iroquois interest to defend themselves and British interests from the French sphere of influence. The British official’s present utilized gift-giving and Iroquois ritual practices to ingratiate themselves to the tribes. Iroquois agency springs to

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<sup>94</sup> Cadwallader, *The History of the Five Nations*, 60.

<sup>95</sup> Pennsylvania, 1743, *The Treaty held with the Indians of the Six Nations at Philadelphia, in July, 1742*. Philadelphia: B. Franklin. <http://digital.library.pitt.edu/cgi-bin/t/text/text-idx?c=darltext;view=toc;idno=31735054857549>.

the forefront of colonial politics despite the depleted nature of the tribes in the early eighteenth-century. British officials became obligated to utilize Iroquois conceptions in their agreements. The use of Iroquois symbolic language in British treaty negotiations thwarts the traditionally perceived notion of Iroquois passivity in the eighteenth-century Imperial melee in North America. British officials needed to include Iroquois concepts into their diplomatic efforts to achieve any significant results in negotiations amongst the Five Nations. The Iroquois actively impacted British imperial ambitions through the British adoption of Iroquois treaty conceptions.

The payment in the 1742 *Treaty at Philadelphia*, termed as a present by the British, kept in lockstep with Iroquois societal norms in the interaction rather than British terms. Effectively, the Iroquois sought to sell the land east of the Susquehanna to the British, but kept to their own cultural economic patterns of reciprocal gift-giving to unite groups of people closer together through commonly held political, social, and economic ties involving reciprocal exchanges in diplomatic interactions.<sup>96</sup> Illustrating the British need to utilize Iroquois conceptions to encourage a positive response to an exchange. Furthermore, through the terming of the object as a gift the British show the importance of symbolic meaning inherent to exchanges.

Furthermore, the Iroquois chastised the Delaware from the Susquehanna during the treaty negotiations. The Iroquois did this despite selling the land the Delaware had a claim on to the British. Canasstego a sachem of the Onondaga stated to the Delaware at the treaty meeting “Let this Belt of Wampum serve to chastise you. You ought to be taken by the hair of the head and shaken severely, till you recover your senses...you are

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<sup>96</sup> Richter, *Ordeal of the Longhouse*, 39.

maliciously bent to break the Chain of Friendship with our Brother and his people.”<sup>97</sup> In this case the Iroquois distance themselves from another Amerindian group the Delaware to receive the proceeds from the land sale. This provides an example of Iroquois ability to impact their surrounding environment through their utilization of structural power.

Despite the exchange mirroring many land sales meaning that a set amount of goods is exchanged for the land in question the terms utilized couch themselves in symbolic exchange of gifts and reference to eternal bonds of brotherhood solidified through the act of exchanging goods for land. The passage details the symbolic terminology of Iroquois conception necessary to facilitate future amicable relationships between the two groups. The central role of firearms in that exchange in particular referencing French antagonism and the need for protection in the form of firearms. The governor states

“You have often heard of the care that your great and good friend and brother William Penn, took at all times to cultivate a perfect good harmony with all the Indians: of these, your nations have ever been fully sensible; but more especially a number of your chiefs, about ten years ago, when on the arrival of a son of your said great friend William Penn, large and valuable presents were exchanged by us with you ; a new road was made and clear’d; a new fire kindled; and the Chain of Friendship made “stronger, so as to last while the sun and moon endure.”<sup>98</sup>

The aforementioned interaction between the Iroquois and the British Colonial officials in Philadelphia is a good example of, the British-Iroquois firearm exchanges, and the symbolic nature of the interactions between the two groups, The British utilizing the Iroquois conceptions of exchange through gift-giving shows the power of the Iroquois in determining some facets of exchange whether cultural or economic with Europeans.

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<sup>97</sup> Pennsylvania, 1743, *The Treaty held with the Indians of the Six Nations at Philadelphia, in July, 1742*. Philadelphia: B. Franklin. <http://digital.library.pitt.edu/cgi-bin/t/text/text-idx?c=darlt;text;view=toc;idno=31735054857549>, 21.

<sup>98</sup> Cadwallader, *The History of the Five Nations*, 60.



The continued Iroquois adherence to traditional cultural rituals of exchange to acquire a European manufactured product shows Iroquois control over channels of exchange. Iroquois cultural forms enter the mannerisms of British officials in these interactions rather than British ideas of exchange overtaking Iroquois examples.

The Iroquois stated to the British before a battle against the French in 1700 “Why, say they, do you call us your King’s Soldiers, when you will not sell us Powder at the usual and reasonable Rates?”<sup>99</sup> The Five Nations indicate their knowledge of the market environment surrounding them, and the diplomatic factors driving the British. The ability of the Iroquois to make requests of the British displays their agency during the period. Furthermore, they mention their relationship in fraternal terms reflecting their view of equal relationships with the British. The Iroquois requested their due respect as equalivalents in the Covenant with the British. The Iroquois, inquiring the British regarding their unfair treatment at Albany in the early part of the eighteenth century resulting in the Iroquois distancing themselves from the British until the successes of Conrad Weiser and Sir William Johnson in the 1750s.

Moreover, the firearms supplied the Iroquois with the obvious material and tangible benefit of a greater hunting capability, and an increased ability to defend themselves from external threats. The result of Iroquois external policy increased their probability of retaining autonomy from either imperial power vying to control them. Guns also allowed the Iroquois to protect their remaining hunting lands and search for new ones despite their reduced numbers if they could obtain sufficient numbers of firearms to remain effective against rival tribes.

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<sup>99</sup> Cadwallader Colden, *The History of the Five Nations*, 115.

The Iroquois continued a series of sporadic conflicts against the Catawba from the Carolinas. The conflicts followed the pattern of the mourning war. Often involving the Iroquois taking captives to replenish their spiritual power and manpower the mourning war style conflicts helped to ameliorate some population loss incurred during the Beaver Wars and subsequent friction with the French. Firearms provided the means to continue smaller-scale skirmishes to fulfill a cultural and practical need in their society.

The period between 1715-1760 illustrates the dynamic nature of the Iroquois after the Great Peace of Montreal and the devastation of the Five Nations homelands at the hands of the French and French Native American allies in North America. The Five soon-to-be Six Nations expertly entreated with Europeans to maintain a policy of neutrality. The period of neutrality and the strategic position of the Iroquois in North American colonial geo-politics in the decades before the French and Indian War allowed for the Iroquois to dictate the terms of many exchanges and maintain a large degree of autonomy. The Iroquois maintained neutrality among themselves. In most cases, Iroquois raiding parties participating in colonial conflicts on opposing sides avoided conflict or casualties with one another despite their different allegiances. The neutrality extended from the Five Nations Iroquois to the Iroquois occupying the area around the St. Lawrence.<sup>100</sup> The Iroquois participated in a limited fashion on both sides of the Anglo-French Conflicts in the years preceding the French and Indian War.

A British order encouraging Indian trade and prohibiting trade with the French from 1724 provides an excellent example of the importance of the Iroquois to the British and the general autonomy possessed by the Five Nations. The document mentioned

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<sup>100</sup>Parmenter, *After the Mourning Wars: The Iroquois as Allies in Colonial North American Campaigns, 1676-1760*, 45.

members of the Five Nations who acted as interpreters and guides for a group of Algonquin Native Americans from Michilimackinac near the Straits in between the Upper and Lower Peninsulas of Michigan. The Five Nations acted as interpreters for the western Native Americans and allowed them through their territory to trade in Albany illustrating that the Iroquois had the power to regulate the commerce of tribes in Great Lakes with Albany. The order further prohibits trade with the French and to encourage Indian trade at Albany to draw Native Americans away from the influence of the French. Munitions trading was specifically prohibited with the French or their allied tribes. Indicating the importance of the Iroquois and the manner they could affect their surrounding in the early eighteenth century.<sup>101</sup>

Common people also found Iroquois methods of exchange effective in interacting successfully with the Iroquois. The Quakers in Pennsylvania plead with the Iroquois in 1756 stating

“If you incline to carry on a War against any Nation, we have everything fitt to Kill Men with in plenty, such as guns, swords, hatchets, powder, lead, cloathing and provisions, which we are ready to furnish you with. We know if once you begin a war, it will last till you conquer , or are conquered. If you should determine to strike the English, You must kill the soldiers only, and not us, for we have no hand in the war, nor will we concern ourselves in it, but supply you with everything in plenty, as we have enough, & if you should determine to strike the French, we will likewise furnish you plentifully with everything for that purpose.”<sup>102</sup>

The Quaker request to the Iroquois in 1756 illustrates an instance of Europeans making requests of the Iroquois utilizing firearms and powder to ameliorate issues that might come from the conflict between the English and Iroquois. The Quaker populations humbly request the safety of their population and the lives of settlers if the Iroquois

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<sup>101</sup> *Papers relating to an act of the assembly for the encouragement of the Indian trade and for prohibiting the selling goods to the French of Canada, 1724.*

<sup>102</sup> Quaker Request, *Papers of Sir William Johnson*, appendix, vol 2.

decided to go to war against the English. Interestingly the Quakers offer a tribute for the Iroquois to direct their aggression toward the French, illustrating an example of a subtle Quaker attempt to encourage Iroquois hostility toward the French during the French and Indian War. Furthermore, firearm centric supplies constitute a major portion of the offered goods to the Iroquois. The large focus indicates the importance of firearms in facilitating agreements between the Iroquois and more common settlers. Firearms lubricated relations not only through official interactions but also via more common interactions or entreaties capitalizing upon former amiable relationships at the day-to-day level. An important distinction is the lack of symbolic terms on the part of Quakers differing from the symbolic content of successful negotiations by Sir William Johnson and Conrad Weiser. However, the conciliatory tone of the request indicates a difference from the unsuccessful earlier officials that took a domineering tack toward interactions amongst the Iroquois.<sup>103</sup> Finally, the request from the Quakers displays an amiable attitude of common people toward the Iroquois showing Native Americans and Colonists interacted on a day-to-day basis from standpoints of relative equality in exchanges.

The Iroquois often sought assistance to service and repair their firearms throughout the early eighteenth century alongside their efforts to obtain more firearms, lead, and powder. Services rendered by gunsmiths appear on receipts and account books of various officials including numerous times in the official list of supplies necessary for Indian Affairs kept by William Johnson. Furthermore, evidence the Iroquois requested gunsmiths to either visit or take up partial residence within their borders occurs. The desire for a gunsmith illustrates the sincere request to obtain a manner of control over the

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<sup>103</sup> Cadwallader Colden, *History of the Iroquois*, 777.

supply of firearms on the part of the Iroquois. The ability to receive repairs and extend the life of useful tools toward hunting and defense enhanced the security of the Iroquois. Moreover, their willingness to allow gunsmiths to live amongst them indicates an acceptance of firearms into Iroquois society and an important cultural exchange during the period. The Iroquois and British colonists lived in a world of cultural exchange, both affecting one another as opposed to unilateral domination on the part of the Europeans.<sup>104</sup>

The British provided significantly better pricing for their firearms at Albany compared to the French in Montreal during the early to mid-eighteenth century. The Iroquois could expect to receive a firearm, powder, and shot for 2 beaver furs from the British, compared to the cost of 5 beaver furs for an equivalent weapon in Montreal. Firearms in the British conceptions presented a means to an end. The Iroquois however rationally sought out the best prices they could find. Furthermore, they traded beaver fur for these firearms at favorable rates to Europeans.<sup>105</sup>

British officials from various both common people, and the governors of states reiterate their concern about French influence permeating Iroquois society fearing the removal of a lynchpin in imperial strategy against the French. The Royal Council of trade discussing news from Colonel John Nicholson wrote in 1715 “how necessary it is to give some speedy directions to his majesty’s Governors to secure the Indian Nations.” The letter reiterates the fear of many officials in British North America “lest our Five Nations of Indians should be drawn over to the French.” Furthermore, the correspondence indicates concerns over the allegiances and behavior of the Iroquois became the topic of discussions at the highest levels of British Colonial Administration. The same letter

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<sup>104</sup> Cadwallader Colden *History of the Iroquois*, 118.

<sup>105</sup> Richter, *Ordeal of the Longhouse*, 215.

mentions a lack of “usual presents” from the Governor of New York to the Five Nations resulting in their apprehensive approach to negotiations with the British. The mention of the gifts to the Five Nations indicates a desire to utilize material objects to control the behavior and allegiance of the Iroquois. The British did not realize the Five Nations' motivations for remaining neutral in the conflict but the Iroquois gladly accepted British gifts despite their intentions to remain neutral.<sup>106</sup>

The usual presents mentioned in the correspondence meant a variety of manufactured goods ranging from metalware to clothing. Firearms, powder, lead, and flint composed a part of these constituent goods. The large amounts of firearm-related supplies given to the Iroquois illustrates the important material and symbolic functions of the goods in the defense of the Iroquois and British interest, and facilitating agreements calling for the exchange of goods. An invoice listing gifts exchanged given with the Five Nations illustrates the large number of supplies involved in singular exchanges illustrating a greater trade showing the proliferation of trade and diplomacy between the British and the Five Nations. In December of 1700, an invoice lists four hundred fusils, thirty barrels of powder, ten thousand flints, and a ton and a half of lead given to the Iroquois.<sup>107</sup> The overall volume of even just one exchange indicates the importance placed upon the martial ability of Iroquois to defend themselves and therefore British interests. Furthermore, the Iroquois acquisition of guns increased their ability to retain their cultural forms due to resistance toward British cultural intrusion.

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<sup>106</sup> "America and West Indies: July 1715, 16-31," in *Calendar of State Papers Colonial, America and West Indies: Volume 28, 1714-1715*, ed. Cecil Headlam (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1928), 235-253. *British History Online*, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/colonial/america-west-indies/vol28/pp235-253>.

The number of firearms and related supplies given to the Iroquois rises after the 1720s as the British increased efforts to sway the Five Nations toward British interests. From the start of the eighteenth century to the French surrender of Canada in 1760 the Iroquois received copious gifts from the British crown via colonial officials. Official gifts totaled just under 6950 pounds sterling, 800 firearms, 130 barrels of gunpowder, and 10,000 flints from 1696-1760 representing a significant outlay to secure and maintain negotiations and friendly diplomacy with the Five Nations.<sup>108</sup> The resource expended upon the Iroquois illustrates their importance in the eyes of the British Empire. Moreover, the practice of giving gifts to the Iroquois fits their societal gift-giving paradigm requiring the renewal of amicable relations through ritual periodically. The 1730s lack any Royal gifts to the Iroquois showing the fraying relationship between the Iroquois and British. However, gifts begin again in the 1740s continuing sporadically until 1755.

The numbers in the previous paragraph represent crown sponsored gifts to Iroquois tribes they do not include the numbers of weapons exchanged during land exchanges. For example, the aforementioned Philadelphia treaty mentioned earlier between the Iroquois and Pennsylvania exchanged large tracts of land in Susquehanna Valley on either side of the River to British interests in exchange for a large number of firearms and munitions.

Occasionally, exchanges of firearms accompanied exchanges of land and resolved issues of land use between the Iroquois and British. In exchange for the opening of Iroquois land for settlement, the British often traded the Iroquois guns in exchange for large tracts of land. Oftentimes officials enriched themselves during the process acquiring

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<sup>108</sup> Parmenter, *After the Mourning Wars*, 41.

first looks at prime tracts of newly acquired Iroquois land. Unofficial and illegal settlement upset the relationship between the Iroquois and British as settlers had little respect for the boundaries written in treaties and constantly encroached upon Iroquois land. However, the presence and almost insistence on the exchange of firearms for land indicates the importance of firearms in the cultural and economic exchange between the British and Iroquois. Exchanges of firearms took place not only in diplomatic entreaties and renewals of friendship but also occurred in the exchange of large tracts of Iroquois controlled land. Furthermore, the Iroquois position of middleman between multiple anglophilic and francophilic native tribes provided greater bargaining power and enforcement surrounding illegal expansion by common settlers in British North America. Their central location that proved a disadvantage in obtaining firearms during the early contact period proved to be a greater advantage in preserving their autonomy during the early to mid-eighteenth century. Through their regulation of trade via the river systems running into Iroquoia they maintained their relative autonomy and important position in colonial politics of the eighteenth century. Despite the Five Nations' significant depletion by disease and warfare during the seventeenth century their ability to maintain their cultural belief systems and political systems until the American Revolution represents an indication of their agency during this period.

Another unique exchange relating to firearms occurred on June 25<sup>th</sup>, 1744 in the treaty meeting interpreted by Conrad Weiser. The governor of Maryland addresses the Six Nations during treaty negotiations stating “For this purpose we have brought hither a quantity of goods for our brethren the Six Nations..., and made so bright and large a fire



as may burn pure and clear whilst the sun and moon shall shine.”<sup>109</sup> The Iroquois responded, “If you have made any Enquiry into Indian Affairs, you will know, that we have always had our guns, hatchets and Kettles mended when we came to see our Brethren.”<sup>110</sup> Furthermore, the Five Nations mention the generous help they receive from the New York governor to help to provide repairs to their firearms. The importance of firearms and the tone of the Iroquois response indicate their agency in affairs with Europeans. Moreover, it indicates trust between the Iroquois and British with expectation of continued trustworthy behavior from the British.

The firearms trade despite irreparable changes made to Iroquois society allowed the Iroquois a degree of success and self-governance many other Native American and Amerindian groups lacked. The inclusion of various Iroquois ritual and symbolic methods in the exchange of firearms and treaties, in general, indicates the power the Iroquois had over certain negotiations despite the British dominance over the material supply of firearms. The ability of the Iroquois to dictate the manner of negotiations represents a small indication of their cultural resilience and agency in the geo-political sphere of early eighteenth-century imperial politics. Despite numerous setbacks and influxes of new ideas and technology, the Iroquois managed to negotiate effectively with Europeans to their benefit on numerous occasions. These small victories and indirectly forced British adherence to Iroquois ritual allowed the Five Nations to obtain a degree of leverage over negotiations with the British.

The Iroquois utilization of symbolic language and ritual to maintain a degree of control over firearms exchanges allowed them to maintain their cultural tradition of the

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<sup>109</sup> Cadwallader Colden, *History of the Iroquois Treaty of 1744*, 102.

<sup>110</sup> Cadwallader Colden, *History of the Iroquois Treaty of 1744*, 101.

mourning war and it allowed them to defend themselves more effectively against encroachment from neighboring tribes. Firearms were necessary to complete the objective of the mourning war in Iroquois society. Furthermore, the increased number of firearms allowed the Iroquois to maintain political and cultural autonomy to a higher degree than neighboring tribes in the region. Firearms mixed with unique Iroquois the mourning war and their central strategic position to allow the Iroquois to maintain their niche in eighteenth century North America.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Conclusion**

The Five Nations carved a niche out of the grueling North American Colonial landscape through adapting and assimilating new meanings and actors into their existing cultural framework. The resilience of Iroquois cultural forms exhibits a clear degree of agency in economic and diplomatic interactions with the British surrounding firearms. The prevalence of Iroquois symbolic language in treaties allowed the Iroquois to control parts of the negotiations. The symbolic language included gift-giving practices from the Five Nations' gift-based economy entering British official negotiations. Furthermore, the use of Iroquois kinship terms indicates another degree of power over exchange with the British. British officials found utilizing Iroquois methods of exchange led to more favorable results in negotiating toward British goals with the Five Nations. Officials who did not recognize the importance of utilizing Iroquois conceptions of exchange and symbolism found their efforts to sway the Five Nations into an Anglophilic position stymied. The British Crown's removal of Lord Cornbury due to the frayed relationship with the Five Nations during his reign, and the eventual creation of an Indian Affairs administration indicated the importance of Iroquois relations to British goals in North America.

The Iroquois position in North America astride the river trading routes in the Colonial Northeast and the Great Lakes granted them a position to act as middlemen and impact trade between multiple Native American groups and Europeans. The Iroquois ability to impact river trade and somewhat regulate the access to European traders for

other Amerindian groups solidified their importance in the machinations of British and French imperial actors. After decades of conflict resulting from the Colonial competitions between Europeans, the Iroquois found themselves in a precarious position necessitating the adaptation of societal conceptions like the Great League of Peace Power to address existential threats at the start of the eighteenth century.

The flexibility of Iroquois concepts and practices in the eighteenth century including the mourning war, Great League of Peace and Power, and the Condolence Council rituals illustrated a dynamic people responding rationally to a set of new threats and challenges. The mourning war constructs adopted firearms into its structure and the Iroquois captive taking raids turned to the south to avoid antagonizing their immediate Amerindian neighbors or their European allies. The Great League of Peace and Power folded Europeans into an existing system of dealing with external parties and worked to alleviate internal divisions that decimated the Iroquois in the late seventeenth century. The inherent exchange of material goods including firearms in the Condolence Council ritual associated with negotiations began to expect participation from European parties involved in the ritual. Furthermore, British officials and agents drawn into relations with the Five Nations found themselves consciously or unconsciously utilizing Iroquois concepts of reciprocal exchange and symbolic language to pursue negotiations with the tribes.

The permeable boundary between the mundane and spiritual world in Iroquois culture and the symbolic language resulting from that belief system became a fixture in negotiations between the Iroquois and British officials. Europeans utilized Iroquois kinship terms, idioms, and metaphors to receive more favorable responses from the Five

Nations. English officials using Iroquois phrases like “bury the ax” and exchanging wampum and gifts before meaningful discourse took place illustrates a degree of Iroquois structural power to encourage the British to engage in the Iroquois world. The adoption of the terms by the British illustrates a clear understanding that the Five Nations responded more favorably to familiar cultural concepts. Furthermore, the decentralized power structures of the Iroquois allowed them to shift blame onto individual member tribes of the League in disputes with Europeans, avoiding negative military or economic repercussions on the Five Nations as a whole. The resiliency and adaptability of Iroquois culture to adopt new participants and inject Iroquois concepts into Anglo-Iroquois negotiations over firearms indicate a bilateral platform for negotiations rather than a completely European dominated set of exchanges.

British officials in the archetype of Sir William Johnson found negotiating with the Iroquois in Iroquois terms to be more effective than domineering approaches attempted by other British officials. The Iroquois did not see themselves as unequal partners in their relationship with the British. The Five Nations viewed themselves and the British as equals in negotiations surrounding firearms and viewed entreaties couched in their own cultural terms to be more persuasive than “in the bush” negotiations that lacked the traditional Iroquois ritual and decorum surrounding official interactions between two parties. The British officials did not understand the importance of the psychological connection established between two parties in reciprocal exchange in Iroquois culture.<sup>111</sup> While officials like Johnson may not have understood the Iroquois worldview or their motivations they did understand the effectiveness of adhering to

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<sup>111</sup> Richter, *Ordeal of the Longhouse*, 23.

certain Iroquois customs like gift-giving and symbolic metaphor that helped them achieve their own ends.

Furthermore, successful officials and traders found ways to tie themselves closer to the Iroquois through the material exchange surrounding firearms. The ties formed between traders through symbolic language and adherence to Iroquois custom during official interactions allowed British officials to be more successful in achieving their own goals. These ties could also be filial through marriage or honorary adoption into the Iroquois kinship system. The marriage of William Johnson and Molly Brant a prominent Iroquois woman and the adoption of Johnson as a sachem and his subsequent success indicated the value the Iroquois ascribed to an individual willing to step into their world of metaphor and interconnectedness. The adoption of Conrad Weiser into the Iroquois for a few years of his childhood and his later work as an interpreter during many treaty negotiations indicates the importance of traditionally valued Iroquois ties. “Clearing the path” toward amicable relationships resulted from the willingness of certain officials to engage with Iroquois on their own terms. Whether the British were conscious of the true meaning these rituals and language had to the Iroquois is irrelevant. The fact colonial officials adopted any Iroquois conceptions to encourage more beneficial interactions with the Five Nations indicates a measure of Native American agency in the negotiations. The British did not unilaterally control exchange and negotiation with the Iroquois the pervasive use of Iroquois metaphor in treaty arrangements illustrates the resilience of their culture and they continued to view their interactions with the British through an Iroquois cultural lens.

The exchange of firearms and munitions between the Iroquois and British often followed the Iroquois blueprint for diplomatic and economic exchanges. The Iroquois adopted and assimilated firearms into their culture. Despite losing their traditional skills with the bow and arrow they adopted the firearm into their hunting practices and altered the ritualized violence of the mourning wars to fit the reality of conflicts involving firearms, changing their tactics to reduce casualties while achieving their captive taking objectives. In doing so the Five Nations maintained an important cultural practice to provide an outlet for grief and aggression and to replenish the spiritual and physical population of the tribes after their decimation by disease and conflict at the start of the eighteenth century. The ascription of meaning and adoption of the firearm indicates the strength of Iroquois traditions to withstand and react to external pressures.

The acquisition of firearms provided a very real benefit to the physical security of the Iroquois. In order to avoid a renewal of the devastation, the Five Nations experienced in the late seventeenth century, firearms became a necessary tool to increase their ability to participate in the fur trade and to defend themselves from hostile Amerindian groups and the imperial ambitions of colonizers. The martial ability of the Iroquois garnered respect to the Iroquois in the eyes of Europeans. The Iroquois excelled at marksmanship and as scouts providing an advantage to Europeans who could encourage them into participation in colonial conflicts. The firearm increased their capability to participate in colonial conflicts. Furthermore, the firearms provided an indirect way to defend Iroquois culture. The protection of Iroquois political autonomy allowed Iroquois culture to persist and avoid wholesale change during the influx of European goods and settlers. Firearms exemplify a materially and culturally important commodity that assisted in the retention

of traditional Iroquois cultural practices despite the massive internal and external pressures brought about by European colonization. The exchange of firearms offered an arena for the Five Nations to exhibit their agency despite the dire circumstances they often faced.

The Iroquois did not create a North American empire, and they were not passive objects of European colonialism. Francis Jennings and James Merrell argue “By making virtue of necessity, the Iroquois may not have won themselves an empire, but they did win the respect, even fear, of native and European peoples near and far.”<sup>112</sup> The respect gained by the Five Nations and their perceived importance in colonial politics allowed the Iroquois to inject their culture into official negotiations involving firearms empowering them to obtain greater concessions from European colonial administrations. Furthermore, their cultural resilience and the perseverance of traditional cultural practices despite internal divisions and external challenges illustrates their ability to impact their historical circumstances.

The phrase “bury the hatchet” is a popular metaphor referring to restoring peaceful relations between two groups. The fact this phrase of Iroquois origin still exists with the original meaning intact in the modern American lexicon indicates the impact the Iroquois had on the history of Colonial North America. The Iroquois managed to avoid the destruction of their traditional culture during colonization, avoiding the fate many Amerindian groups suffered during colonization. The Five Nations did not come out of their trials during the early to mid-eighteenth century unscathed but their symbolic language and flexible cultural institutions allowed the Iroquois to negotiate on more

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<sup>112</sup> Jennings and Merrell, *Beyond the Covenant Chain*, 8.



equitable terms with the British while maintaining their cultural and political autonomy to a greater degree than most Native American groups in the Colonial Northeast. The Iroquois found themselves in the British orbit after the French and Indian War, but the British never sought outright dominance over the Iroquois. The British and Iroquois relationships existed until the American Revolution changed Iroquois fortunes for the worst.

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