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The Struggle against British Colonialism

Chapter Outline

This chapter highlights the shift in approach and policy as the British became the main European influence in North America with the defeat of France. The success of the British resulted in Indigenous Peoples losing their bargaining position between two rival powers. The new position of the British resulted in the establishment of proclamations and acts that would have lasting impacts to the present day.

With Britain as the sole European influence, First Nations had to adapt and change their political strategies. The British quickly moved to introduce greater measures of economy and they struggled to control the greatly increasing numbers of colonists. Indigenous Peoples thus grew more anxious over the loss of their lands and began to hold regular councils to strategize options. One of the most influential chiefs to challenge the British would be Obwandiyag (known as Pontiac to the Europeans), the Odaawa war chief who had fought with the French when Montreal fell. Obwandiyag appears to have supported the spiritual vision of Neolin, who urged his people to abstain completely from contact with whites. The British General Amherst underestimated the strategic abilities of Obwandiyag and his followers and soon found the majority of the British forts under siege. In an attempt to deal with the unsuitable relations that had been created, a number of proclamations were passed by the British; these took place in 1761, 1762, and 1763. It would be the 1763 Royal Proclamation that would come to have the greatest influence on British, and eventually Canadian, 'Indian policy'. Most importantly, the 1763 Proclamation provided that all surrender of 'Indian lands' had to go to the British Crown, who would grant some form of recognition of Aboriginal title to land, tied to the fact that the land had to be surrendered.

The early British treaties were also considered Peace and Friendship Treaties and were more concerned with rights to hunt, fish, and trade, as well as establishing friendly relationships, as their title indicates; although, the British began to insist on European-style written agreements. However, it is not clear what the legal status of these early written treaties was as they were not passed through British Parliament, which was usually the case with international agreements. Land cession treaties did follow, especially after the 1763 Proclamation. Further, although Aboriginal title was a right being admitted to, it was not clear what this meant. One of the most prominent treaties at this time was a surrender of three million acres of land to the Crown for the purpose of providing land to Haudenosaunee loyalists. The largest portion of this land went to Joseph Brant and his followers.

Learning Objectives

- To understand the outcomes and impact for Indigenous Peoples after the fall of New France
- To understand the concept of pan-Indigenism and the rationale behind it
- To understand Obwandiyag's strategy and reasons for fighting the British and what the impacts of this war were for Indigenous Peoples
- To recognize the significance of the Royal Proclamation of 1763
- To understand how the early treaties signed by the British were negotiated, what they contained and the different perspectives toward them from the British and First Peoples

Key Terms, Figures or Sites

Federation of Seven Fires A mid-eighteenth-century alliance network linking French mission Indigenous Peoples, led by Obwandiyag with intent to resist European settlement that did not survive the dislocations caused by the US War of Independence or colonial distrust of pan-Indigenism. It consisted of the Iroquois mission villages on the St Lawrence (Kahnawake, Kanesatake, Oswegatchie, and St Regis), Wabanaki (called the Abenaki at St Francois and Bécancour), and the Wendat (called the Huron of Lorette) (p. 122).

fee simple title The most complete form of ownership. A fee simple buyer acquires ownership of both land and buildings and has the right to possess, use, and dispose of the land as he or she wishes (p. 134).

Haldimand Grant Land on the Grand River in Upper Canada (Ontario) granted in 1784 to loyalist Haudenosaunee people by Frederick Haldimand, governor of Quebec. The Haudenosaunee had ceded 3 million acres (1,214,100 ha) (p. 134).

Indian title Seventeenth-century concept involving rights of occupancy and use, but not ownership. *See usufructuary right* (p. 131).

Johnson, Sir William (1715–74) Military commander who was colonial Superintendent of Indian Affairs from 1755 until his death. He was married “after the custom of the country” to Koñwatsi'tsiaiéñni (p. 121).

Koñwatsi'tsiaiéñni (Mary Brant, *c.* 1736–96) Highly influential Kanienkehaka leader, wife of Sir William Johnson, and sister of Thayendanegea, who together were responsible for leading the majority of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy into alliance with the British against the American revolutionaries (p. 127).

nativistic movements Organized and conscious efforts by members of a community to build a more satisfying culture, often by revitalizing traditional beliefs and customs (p. 124).

Neolin (“One That Is Four,” *f.l.* 1760s) Mid-seventeenth-century Lenni Lenape prophet who urged Indigenous people to avoid contact with newcomers and to return to their traditional values. His

teachings influenced Obwandiyag. Neolin was one of two men known as the “Delaware Prophet” (pp. 124-125).

Obwandiyag (1712/1725-69) Odaawa war chief, in English known as Pontiac, who attempted to unite First Nations to resist European settlement in the Great Lakes area. Some later turned against him, and he was assassinated by an Irenweewa at Cahokia (p. 123).

Proclamation of 1763 Proclamation by England declaring a British system of government for North American land surrendered by France but also declaring land not under European settlement as land reserved for Indigenous Peoples (p. 122).

Quebec Act of 1774 British legislation that defined the boundaries of Quebec as extending south to the Ohio Valley, recognized the Roman Catholic Church, and established French civil law as the basis for business and other day-to-day transactions (p. 127).

Thayendanegea (Joseph Brant, 1743–1807) Kanienkehaka chief, spokesman for his people, Anglican missionary, and British military officer during the US War of Independence. Brantford, Ontario, is named after him (p. 127).

Treaty of Paris (1763) Peace treaty between Britain and France following the latter’s military defeat that effectively ended the French colonial presence in North America (p. 130).

Study Questions

1. Who was Jeffrey Amherst; why did he cut the ceremonial trade goods used to cement alliances, and why was this seen as a significant concern to Indigenous Peoples?
2. Who was Obwandiyag and what action did he attempt to achieve?
3. What did the concept of *nativistic movements* have to do with Obwandiyag’s goal?
4. Who was Neolin and how what was his connection to Obwandiyag’s goal?
5. What was Amherst’s brutal reaction to the Indigenous resistance at this time, and what was the recommendation of those who were better acquainted with Indigenous Peoples?
6. In Sir William Johnson’s attempt to negotiate peace at Fort Niagara, what was a key stipulation set forth by Obwandiyag in a separate agreement?
7. What impact did the Quebec Act of 1774 have on the fur trade AND impeding colonial war?
8. What roles did Koñwatsi’tsiaiéñni (Mary Brant) and her brother Thayendanegea (Joseph Brant), play in the conflict that ensued after the American invasion of 1775?

9. The 1763 Royal Proclamation typically receives the most attention by historians; however, there were also proclamations in 1761 and 1762. What did these proclamations address?
10. How did the British define Indian title in the 1760s?
11. What were the immediate results of the Royal Proclamation of 1763?
12. What were some of the terms of early British treaties with Indigenous Peoples?
13. What is meant by fee simple title?

Essay Questions

1. Describe the female Indigenous leader featured in this chapter and her accomplishments.

Koñwatsi'tsiaiéñni (Mary Brant) was the sister of Joseph Brant (Thayendanega). As a matron of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, she had a great deal of influence in the community and had great diplomatic abilities. She used these abilities to lead the majority of the Haudenosaunee into an alliance with the British against the American Revolution. She was married to Sir William Johnson, which also gave her considerable influence with European colonizers. Her capacity to move between the two worlds also impacted the Treaty of Paris in 1783 (pp. 127-128).

2. Briefly discuss the nature of early treaties with the British and some of the challenges encountered in negotiating them.

Similar to prior treaties with the French, early treaties were referred to as “peace and friendship” treaties. However, the British insisted on written versions; another new component was that they would not interfere within these Indigenous territories. These treaties were aimed at living more harmoniously and guaranteeing the hunting, fishing, and lifestyle rights of First Peoples at the time. However, the British also attempted to garner Indigenous acknowledgment of British jurisdiction over Nova Scotia and Acadia. This was difficult to do because Indigenous people did not presume to speak for other groups. Additionally, differences in communication traditions such as written traditions versus oral traditions often impeded the treaty process. By the same token, language issues emerged in translating what was intended by the treaties. Interpreters were not considered to be the authorities to speak for all, especially within different groups. As such, there was suspicion and distrust that developed on both sides (pp. 131-132).

3. Discuss the significant difference between early treaties and treaties negotiated after the Proclamation of 1763.

Early treaties did not deal with land transfers. After the Proclamation of 1763, its provisions took away the focus on peace and shifted it to land issues. The Crown's purpose was to acquire land and to encourage First Peoples to sign land cessions. Through this cession process, Canada acquired approximately half of its land. Annuities also began to replace one time payments. There are still debates as to whether the Proclamation simply recognized existing rights to land for First Peoples, or if it created it (pp. 133-134).

Additional Resources

Further Readings

- Allen, Robert S. *His Majesty's Indian Allies: British Indian Policy in the Defence of Canada, 1774–1815*. Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1992.
- Calloway, Colin G. *The Scratch of the Pen: 1763 and the Transformation of North America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.
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- Dowd, Gregory Evans. *War under Heaven: Pontiac, the Indian Nations, and British Empire*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004.
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- Kelsay, Isabel Thompson. *Joseph Brant, 1743–1807: Man of Two Worlds*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1984.
- Middleton, Richard. *Pontiac's War: Its Causes, Course, and Consequences*. New York: Routledge, 2007.
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- Wallace, Anthony F.C. *Death and Rebirth of the Seneca*. New York: Vintage Books, 1969.
- Washburn, Wilcomb. *Handbook of North American Indians, vol. 4: History of Indian-White Relations*. Washington: Smithsonian Institutions, 1988.

Websites

Daniel Paul, danielpaul.com - Obwandiyag (Pontiac)

- www.danielpaul.com/ChiefPontiac-Ottawa.html

First Nations and Indigenous Studies, University of British Columbia – Royal Proclamation of 1793

- http://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/royal_proclamation_1763

Dictionary of Canadian Biography - Thayendanegea (Joseph Brant)

- http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/thayendanegea_5E.html

Mi'gmawei Mawiomi Secretariat - Gespe'gewa'gi: Our District Territory - Mi'gma'gi

- <https://www.migmawei.ca/an/gespegewagi-district-territory/>