

“Our fathers fought for the British”: Racial Discourses and Indigenous Allies in Upper Canada

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This paper analyses the founding of two distinct narratives in Canada about the significance of Indigenous military alliances with Britain in the War of 1812. Examining the half-century following the war's end, it shows the similarities and divergences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous tellings of the alliance and the shared war effort. Indigenous narratives made appeals to Euro-Canadians on the basis of shared combat and suffering, a common enemy, and the reciprocal relationship forged by these shared experiences, which for them entailed a set of ongoing obligations. By contrast, non-Indigenous authors glorified one warrior, Tecumseh, and at the same time expressed a powerful sense of defensiveness about “employing” Indigenous allies, depicting Indigenous warriors in general as necessary but undesirable military “auxiliaries.”

Le présent article analyse les fondements, au Canada, de deux façons distinctes de décrire les alliances militaires entre les Britanniques et les Autochtones lors de la Guerre de 1812. Se penchant sur le demi-siècle qui a suivi la fin de la guerre, il montre les similitudes et les divergences dans la façon dont les Autochtones et les non-Autochtones racontent les alliances et l'effort de guerre commun. Les récits des Autochtones laissent apparaître que ces derniers firent appel aux Euro-Canadiens en raison d'une communauté de combats et de souffrances, d'un ennemi commun et de relations de réciprocité nées de ces expériences partagées qui, pour eux, impliquaient la perpétuation d'un ensemble d'obligations. De leur côté, les auteurs non-Autochtones portaient au nues un unique guerrier, Tecumseh, en même temps qu'ils laissaient transparaître une forte répugnance envers « l'emploi » d'alliés autochtones, dépeignant en règle générale les guerriers amérindiens sous les traits « d'auxiliaires » nécessaires, mais indésirables.

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TWO CENTURIES AFTER the War of 1812, public discourses about Indigenous peoples' role in the conflict are revealing. In late 2012, in the opening months of the Idle No More movement for Indigenous rights and sovereignty, a narrative appeared at public actions and on websites that asserted the continuing relevance of Indigenous support in past Euro-Canadian wars. Signs at Winnipeg rallies and round dances in December 2012, for instance, cited Indigenous military aid in the War of 1812 as a reason for non-Indigenous Canadians to support Indigenous aspirations today. One sign, for instance, read, "1812: We fought for your rights, now fight for ours."¹ Similarly, a website that promotes Anishinabemowin, the Ojibway language, dedicated a page to the Idle No More movement and offered these sentences in English and Ojibway:

No longer are we waiting (Idle no more)! They are messing with aboriginal culture. They are trying to make them Canadian only. They don't know how much the Anishinaabe have stood by them. They are not respecting tradition. They forget what happened long ago. Canadians, they carried your flag in WWI and WWII and many Anishinaabe soldiers were lost. It's your turn today Canadians to stand with all aboriginal people.²

Together, the phrases suggest that Aboriginal participation in a series of Canadian wars helped create a debt of gratitude and a relationship of reciprocal obligations that other Canadians are not fulfilling.

The numerous Canadian internet sites commemorating the War of 1812 offered a different set of discourses.³ They showed clearly the elevation of one Indigenous warrior, the Shawnee chief Tecumseh, to iconic Canadian hero. He appeared on the federal government's official commemoration website as one of the conflict's four "Major Figures": the site states that he "joined the British against the Americans" in the war, and "[h]is support for Major-General Sir Isaac Brock at the capture of Detroit was decisive."⁴ The names of other Indigenous warriors mentioned on the commemorative websites may be less familiar to the public.⁵ Although these websites—all of them more or less Canadian nationalist in tone and evoking nation-building rhetoric—generally acknowledged that Tecumseh's goals were not the same as Britain's, they claimed him as a significant part of the Canadian story. These websites say nothing about Indigenous assistance generating any reciprocal obligation.

These divergent discourses reflect two distinct narratives about war, history, and nation that have been nurtured over the past two centuries. This article

1 Personal observation at Idle No More demonstration at the Forks, Winnipeg, Dec. 2012.

2 "Noongwa e-Anishinaabemjig. People Who Speak Anishinaabemowin Today," at <http://www.umich.edu/~ojibwe/community/idle-no-more.html>.

3 See, for example, the Government of Canada website "The War of 1812," at <http://www.1812.gc.ca/eng/1317828221939/1317828660198#a4>, accessed April 18, 2013; "1812.ca" at <http://www.eighteenthcentury.ca/?q=eng/Topic/6>, April 18, 2013; "The War of 1812 Website" at <http://www.warof1812.ca/biographies.htm>, April 18, 2013.

4 Government of Canada website "The War of 1812."

5 The site also names, for example, John Norton and John Brant (Joseph's son) as Indigenous "Heroes of the War of 1812." See <http://www.1812.gc.ca/eng/1317828221939/1317828660198#a4>, April 18, 2013.

analyses their roots, as they emerged up to the 1860s. It examines Indigenous and non-Indigenous texts of that era, focusing on how writings and speeches narrate and explain Indigenous participation in the war.

We look first at two mid-century books by Ojibway Methodists Peter Jones and George Copway, along with several addresses by Indigenous spokespersons to government officials in the 1830s and 1840-1.⁶ These texts appealed to Euro-Canadians on the basis of shared combat and suffering, a common foe, and the resulting reciprocal relationships forged by these experiences. Second, we consider three non-Indigenous histories of the conflict—by John Richardson, Gilbert Auchinleck, and William Coffin—that appeared between 1826 and 1864 and offer remarkably consistent narratives about Indigenous participation.⁷ They all glorify Tecumseh, are defensive about the concept of “employing” Indigenous allies, and depict Indigenous warriors in general as necessary but undesirable military “auxiliaries.”

Of course, these two sets of texts are far from symmetrical, and neither expresses the full range of sentiments on either side of this alliance system. The non-Indigenous books targeted British imperial and emerging Anglo-Canadian markets whose readers were accustomed to stock images of “Indians” and expected tales of combat, heroism, atrocity, and “savagery.”⁸ The Indigenous books and speeches reflected mid-century’s Indigenous reality of overwhelming numerical inferiority and economic devastation. They sought to win public sympathy, especially among government officials, who had the power to help or harm Indigenous speakers and peoples. The discourses about colonial relations in both sets of texts endure today.

The Historical Context

The period from the 1820s to the 1860s was an eventful era in relations between Indigenous and immigrant peoples. With massive waves of immigration arriving from the British Isles, the Crown took increasingly large areas of Indigenous territory via treaties, leaving most of the southern nations with only small reserves. Missionaries carried the Christian message to many Indigenous groups in Upper Canada, and government policies began to pressure them to convert. In 1830 the Crown transferred responsibility for “Indian Affairs” from military

6 George Copway, *The Traditional History and Characteristic Sketches of The Ojibway Nation* (1850; Toronto: Prospero Canadian Collection, 2001); Peter Jones, *History of the Ojibway Indians; with especial reference to their Conversion to Christianity* (London: A.W. Bennett, 1861); “Address of the Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte,” Archives of Ontario (AO), MU 296, F1151, folder VI, Indian Papers, pp. 21-6; “Address of the Indians of Walpole Island,” AO, MU 296, F1151, folder VI, Indian Papers, pp. 21-6; several speakers at a conference at Colborne-on-Thames, January 27, 1841, with the Superintendent of Indian Affairs, several church ministers, and the chiefs of the Delawares, Oneidas, and Chippewas; addresses from the Walpole Island, Saugeen, Chippewa, Mississauga, Six Nations, and other speakers, AO, MU 296, F-1151, folder VI, Indian Papers, Brock Monument Papers 1840–1857.

7 John Richardson, ed. David R. Beasley, *Major John Richardson’s A Canadian Campaign, with his Recollections of the West Indies* (Simcoe, Ont: Davus Publishing, 2011); G. [Gilbert] Auchinleck, *A History of the War between Great Britain and the United States of America During the Years 1812, 1813 & 1814* (1855; London: Arms and Armour Press, 1972); William Coffin, *1812: The War, and Its Moral* (Montreal: John Lovell, 1864).

8 See, for instance, Richardson, *John Richardson’s A Canadian Campaign*, p. 9.

to civilian authorities, and then in 1860 from British to Upper Canadian control, leaving the settlers in charge of decisions over land and resources. Upper Canada/Canada West began to create legal distinctions for Indigenous people and to define who qualified as an “Indian”. This process culminated in the Gradual Civilization Act of 1857, which deprived Indigenous women of “Indian status” when they married white men and established a system to eliminate “Indians” and reserves via assimilation.⁹

As Indigenous people in Upper Canada came to be vastly outnumbered by the newcomers, their military importance evaporated.¹⁰ At the same time, the pioneers’ competition for fish and game, and their simultaneous destruction of its habitat, devastated the Indigenous hunting and fishing economy.¹¹ Having agreed in a series of treaties to share land with the newcomers, the Mississauga Anishinabek around Lake Ontario discovered that, contrary to government officials’ assurances, the newcomers did not treat them with respect and gratitude but, instead, fenced off lands and constantly helped themselves to the dwindling supply of Indigenous foods.¹² Moreover, the British were clearly intent on taking over the entire territory of the Mississauga and neighbouring nations. The resulting new economic order led to widespread poverty and despair among Indigenous peoples, especially those living close to settlers.¹³

Many Indigenous people considered that they had given the newcomers a great deal. The Mississauga around Lake Ontario had helped the early Loyalists significantly in their first years. The people of Wahbanosay’s band around Burlington Bay, for instance, had not only shared large portions of their territory with them, but had also “hunted and fished for the white newcomers and furnished them with venison, salmon, ducks, maple sugar, and wild rice.”¹⁴

In addition, they had helped the British significantly in wartime. Warriors from the Mississauga, along with other Anishinabek and the Algonquin, Odawa, Delaware, and Haudenosaunee in what became Upper Canada, had all aided the British during the American Revolution.¹⁵ In return, the British had promised “that the Indians . . . should never want for money or goods.”¹⁶ Their military aid was even more important at the beginning of the War of 1812, when Indigenous warriors were crucial in preventing Upper Canada from falling to the United States. And, as the chiefs stated in their 1840-41 speeches to Crown officials,

9 See, for example, John L. Tobias, “Protection, Civilization, Assimilation: An Outline History of Canada’s Indian Policy,” in J. R. Miller, ed., *Sweet Promises: A Reader on Indian—White Relations in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), pp. 128-130; O. P. Dickason with D. T. McNab, *Canada’s First Nations. A History of Founding Peoples from Earliest Times*, 4th ed. (Don Mills, Ont.: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 200-204, 215-220.

10 Peter A. Baskerville, *Ontario: Image, Identity, and Power* (Don Mills, Ont.: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 57.

11 See, e.g., Baskerville, pp. 54-55.

12 Donald B. Smith, *Sacred Feathers. The Reverend Peter Jones (Kahkewaquonaby) and the Mississauga Indians* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), pp. 2, 39.

13 Baskerville, *Ontario*, 57-67; Smith, *Sacred Feathers*, pp. 38-40; J. R. Miller, *Compact, Contract, Covenant. Aboriginal Treaty-Making in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), pp. 99-104.

14 Smith, *Sacred Feathers*, p. 2.

15 See Baskerville, *Ontario*, p. 43; Smith, *Sacred Fathers*, pp. 23-23.

16 Smith, *Sacred Feathers*, p. 23.

they remained ready, as allies, to defend the Crown again if need be. When the Rebellion of 1837 broke out, some Indigenous groups again offered the Crown their military aid.¹⁷

In settling Upper Canada, then, the British were appropriating lands from long-term allies who had helped secure the colony for them. How then to justify colonization in light of this debt? It is in this sense that the significance of racial discourses becomes clear. Only some deep-seated difference from British people could legitimize the logic of dispossession. In newspapers, books, and other media the settlers constructed the ideas about “Indians” that would validate their takeover of the land while also explaining the supposed benevolence and humanitarianism of the colonial project.¹⁸ Racial discourses also helped shape Upper Canadian policies towards the displaced First Nations.

During the decades from the 1820s to the 1860s British authorities in Upper Canada/Canada West were refashioning Canadian Aboriginal policy into the instrument of paternalism and assimilation we still see today. This was the colony that developed the practical devices of land surrenders, reserves, and annuities (annual payments) and the conceptual devices of “protection” and “civilization.”¹⁹ Ideas about Aboriginal people were vitally important determinants of the new Indian policy. The colony’s racialized images of Indigenous people significantly influenced the racial order of the young country, carrying over into the larger Canada formed in 1867. As Upper Canada underwent the process of state formation, ‘Whiteness’ and ‘Indianness’ were constructions that underpinned the colony’s emergent political culture.

Indigenous Discourses

Indigenous writings and recorded oral addresses from the 1830s to 1861 show a remarkable consistency concerning the role of Indigenous peoples and status as British allies. All emphasized loyalty to Britain, defence of one’s country, and the masculine role of self-defence common to both groups. Like the non-Indigenous writers, many also expressed resentment against the United States, both for its invasion in 1812 and for its many wrongs against Indigenous nations.

Six Nations speakers in 1840 recalled how the United States had driven them out of their homeland. George Copway (1818-1869), the mid-century Ojibway speaker and writer, referred to a number of American injustices against his people, including the endless warfare and ongoing forced dispossession. The Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte condemned the United States for driving them from their lands fifty years earlier and for doing the same to Indigenous nations further west: “Our fathers told us how they used them and we see every year how they are abusing and murdering our red brethren in the west.”²⁰

17 Dickason with McNab, *Canada’s First Nations*, p. 206.

18 See R. J. Brownlie, “Others or Brothers? Competing Settler and Anishinabe Discourses about Race in Upper Canada,” in R.J. Brownlie and V.J. Korinek, eds., *Finding a Way to the Heart: Feminist Writings on Aboriginal and Women’s History in Canada* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2012), pp. 170-194.

19 See, for example, Tobias, “Protection, Civilization, Assimilation,” pp. 127-130.

20 “Address of the Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte,” 1840, Archives of Ontario, MU 296, F1151, folder VI, Indian Papers, pp. 21-26.

While references to Indigenous war practices such as the “war-whoop” appear at times, many writers/speakers also stressed their adoption of “civilized” ways, including European ways of warfare. The Chippewa Chiefs of Lakes Huron and Simcoe, for instance, made a speech to Lieutenant-Governor Sir Francis Bond Head at his departure from Upper Canada in 1838 and pledged their willingness to fight the Americans: “We have heard that the Big Knives, by their late bad behaviour, are likely to displease our Great Mother the Queen—if this be the case, and the redcoats raise the warcy, our warclubs shall be unburied, our faces painted, and the palefaced Big Knives shall again feel that the hearts of the red men of the forest are English.” The chiefs spoke also of receiving instruction from “the Great Spirit’s good book,” which had taught them “not to cut the hair from off our enemies’ heads, as our heathen ancestors did, and that when we fight we shall act as the civilized do.”²¹

Speeches (1840-41)

In late 1840 and early 1841, a number of Indigenous groups in Upper Canada contributed to a general subscription to rebuild the Brock Monument, explaining their motivations in speeches and written addresses. These addresses demonstrate an effort to build bridges with the newcomers, principally through common conventions of military masculinity and the male role of defence.²² The speeches outlined Indigenous suffering and losses sustained in the War of 1812, describing their loss of men in battle and the symbolic mixing of their blood with that of British and Canadian soldiers. They also spoke of their admiration for Brock and continuing willingness to defend their country and Queen.

While loyalty was thus a key theme, it was to be a two-way street. Chief Canoting, speaking in 1841 for the Delawares, Oneidas, and Chippewas, quoted Brock as having told his people: “[R]ise, follow me, that your children may partake of all the privileges which you have ever enjoyed under the protection of your great Father.” He confirmed “our firm determination to retain the same zeal, loyalty, and devotion, that glowed in the bosoms of our forefathers, who bravely defended the Royal Standard, under which we have the happiness to live, and to claim the proud distinction of British subjects.” He also mentioned Tecumseh, who “fell in defence of his sovereign,” as had Brock.²³

Most of the other speakers also highlighted their willingness to fight again if necessary. The Bay of Quinte Mohawks expressed thanks for lands in their new homeland, which they would always defend, appealing probably to United Empire Loyalists, whose experiences were so similar to their own (the Six Nations are often termed “Loyalist”):

21 “Address to Sir Francis Head &c &c from the Chippewa Chiefs of Lakes Huron and Simcoe,” 1838, Archives of Ontario, MU 296, F1151, Folder VI, Indian Papers, 27-29, pp. 27-29.

22 See Brownlie, “Others or Brothers?” pp. 170-194.

23 Chief Canoting, speaking at a conference at Colborne-on-Thames, Canada West, on January 27, 1841, with the superintendent of Indian Affairs, several church ministers, and the chiefs of the Delawares, Oneidas, and Chippewas; quoted in Peter Jones, *History of the Ojebway Indians; with especial reference to their Conversion to Christianity* (London: A. W. Bennett, 1861), pp. 272-273.

Brother: Since we were driven from our country we shake you and every Englishman by the hand, and call him brother, for we have the same Great Mother, the Queen, who makes no difference between her Red and White Children, except that she treats us like her younger Children.

Brother: Our people are grateful for these things. We have our Great Mother and our new country; and will defend both with the last drop of our blood, as our fathers, the Iroquois, did before us.²⁴

The various spokespersons displayed some differences in emphasis. One Ojibway address for instance, delivered on behalf of the Credit River group and probably authored by its leader Peter Jones (1802-1856), departed conspicuously from the rest in its tone of dependence and supplication. Incongruously (and inaccurately), it depicted the Ojibway as passive non-combatants whom Brock saved from certain death: “Whilst your red children were sitting together, like a family of helpless children, in danger of being tomahawked, the brave hero flew with only a few brave warriors to our rescue. His wisdom, skill, and bravery, saved us from the destroying enemy.”²⁵ The other speeches, however, were emphatic about fighting side by side with Brock, stressing their own contribution to Canada’s deliverance. The Six Nations speaker, for example, declared, “We and our fathers endured the fatigues and privations of war, fighting by the side of the illustrious dead.”²⁶ The speeches also invoked the injuries warriors sustained and the symbolic mixing of blood: “Father, that chief led us as well as you to victory; on that Hill which we conquered, his blood was mingled with ours.”²⁷

Books: Jones and Copway

Two mid-century Ojibway authors offer further Indigenous portrayals of military alliance. Writers Peter Jones (1802-1856) and George Copway (1816-1869) were Ojibway men who converted to Methodism and became preachers to their own people.

Jones, son of a Welsh surveyor and a Mississauga mother, was truly bicultural and spent his adult life trying to protect his people from the worst effects of colonization. His main emphases were Christianity, education, and the securing of full rights in the new order, including the vote and title deeds to reserve lands.²⁸ After his early death in 1856, his English wife, Eliza, assembled and edited his *Life and Journals* (1860) and his *History of the Ojebway Indians* (1861).²⁹

24 “Address of the Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte,” ca. 1840, AO, MU 296, F1151, folder VI, Indian Papers, pp. 21-26.

25 Jones, *History*, p. 274.

26 Jones, *History*, p. 274.

27 “Address of the Indians of Walpole Island,” ca. 1840, AO, MU 296, F1151, folder VI, Indian Papers, pp. 21-26.

28 See Smith, *Sacred Feathers*, for an excellent account of Peter Jones’s life, and chap. 11, especially pp. 183-184, on his ideas about how to secure a future for Indigenous peoples within Canada.

29 Smith, *Sacred Feathers*, p. 246. The main editor of the *Life and Journals* was Methodist superintendent Rev. Enoch Wood.

George Copway enjoyed a traditional Ojibway boyhood around Rice Lake and remained proud of his Ojibway heritage throughout his life. He converted to Methodism at 12 and worked with missions to First Nations in Upper Canada until he was accused of mismanaging funds.³⁰ He then moved to the United States, where he became a well-known writer and popular public speaker who criticized American Indian policy and argued, like Jones, for education and Christianization for Indigenous peoples.³¹ Observing the atrocities of mid-century U.S. Indian policy, the forced relocations and genocidal wars, Copway also advocated for a self-governing “Indian territory” that would eventually become a state. Copway wrote partly to earn money, but also sought to publicize colonial wrongs and popularize his ideas for improvement.

Naturally, both authors cover a great many topics. Neither concentrated on Indigenous military aid to British Canadians but they offered similar perspectives about its meaning for the newcomer society. Moreover, these thinkers had travelled widely among their own people and spent much time with missionaries and government officials, so they could propose arguments that might gain traction with the newcomer society. Because these books are similar to the speeches discussed above, they probably also revealed a more general Indigenous view about military alliances and their contributions to European wars in Turtle Island.

In 1850, Copway’s second book was published: *The Traditional History and Characteristic Sketches of The Ojibway Nation*.³² Framed as a history of the Ojibway people, the book devoted several chapters to war, focusing on those among Indigenous peoples. It emphasized Ojibway strength and military prowess, especially of the men, in an apparent play for English-speaking sympathy and respect. Powerful Ojibway warriors defeated the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) and extended their territory, highlighting their martial glory and military might. Yet peace too benefited Indigenous nations, who had learned to “peacefully [follow] the plough” and “now live in amity and peace, and hail the dawning of a better day.” Nevertheless, Copway criticized both the British and the U.S. governments for abandoning their Indigenous allies after the War of 1812, alluding to the proliferating, negative images of Indigenous warriors: “It is more provoking now with us, since we have suffered in name from the acts of the last war, with the British and Americans. Our fathers fought for the British during these struggles. Now, since these are past, we have been left to ourselves,—and until the government require our services, shall remain uncared for.” Copway also took on the colonial notion of savagery, criticizing the British for their hypocrisy in drawing the

30 Donald B. Smith has researched these charges and found that these were not cases of embezzlement. In the first incident, Copway had spent considerable funds organizing a camp meeting to spread the gospel and a council meeting to discuss common Indigenous concerns. He acted without prior authorization in spending this money. In the second incident, he had accessed 25 pounds from the Rice Lake Band without prior authorization. See Smith, “Literary Celebrity: George Copway, or Kahgegagahbowh (1818-1869),” in *Mississauga Portraits. Ojibwe Voices from Nineteenth-Century Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), pp. 181-183.

31 See Smith, “Literary Celebrity,” pp. 164-211.

32 George Copway, *The Traditional History and Characteristic Sketches of The Ojibway Nation* (1850; Toronto: Prospero Canadian Collection, 2001). His first book, *Life, History, and Travels* (1847), was a bestseller, reprinted seven times within two years. See Smith, “Literary Celebrity,” p. 166.

warriors into their quarrels and then condemning them for their warfare: “During these wars the Indian has been called from the woods to show his fearless nature, and for obeying, and showing himself fearless, it is said of him that he is ‘a man without a tear.’ He has been stigmatized with the name—‘a savage,’—by the very people who called for his aid, and he gave it. In the midst of these mighty contests, the Indian has been put in the front ranks, in the most dangerous positions, and has consequently been the greatest loser.”³³ These comments as a whole reproach the colonists for their hypocrisy and also for ignoring Indigenous peoples’ interests except when the colonists needed their military aid. He implicitly called for gratitude and reciprocity in return.

Peter Jones’s *History of the Ojebway Indians* also referred to Indigenous military support to the British. About the War of 1812, he noted, “During the last American war the Ojebways, as well as other Indian tribes, rendered the British great assistance in fighting the Americans. In that war many of our fathers fell, sealing their attachment to the British Government with their blood.”³⁴ This passage contains many of the key elements seen in the speeches above: Indigenous assistance to the British, Indigenous losses, and the symbolic role of the blood Indigenous warriors shed, “sealing their attachment” to the British. Under the heading “Their Loyalty,” he argued,

In the American Revolution, the greater portion of the famous Six Nations of Indians, with other tribes, took up the tomahawk in behalf of Great Britain; and by doing so lost their beautiful and rich country on the Mohawk River. During the War of 1812 between England and America, all the Indians in Canada, and many of the western tribes, rallied round the British standard; and it is generally believed, that had it not been for their efficient and timely aid, Canada would have been wrested from the crown of Great Britain. It is also well known that during the late rebellion in Canada, the Indians were not slow in assisting to suppress the insurrection. In these wars many of our fathers fell and mingled their blood with the brave sons of Britain, whose bones now lie side by side.

I mention these facts to shew the devotion of the Indian tribes to the Sovereign of Great Britain.³⁵

In a speech Jones gave at Joseph Brant’s interment in 1807, which he quoted here, he noted vital Indigenous assistance in the War of 1812:

The loyalty of Brant’s people, the same spirit of devotion to the Crown of England, has been deeply infused into the veins of the Six Nations, who, during the last war, flew, with other Indian nations, to the help of the British; and I have heard it stated by good judges, that had it not been for the help of the Indians, Canada would have been wrested from Great Britain.³⁶

³³ Copway, *Traditional History*, pp. 94, 201-202, 263-264.

³⁴ Jones, *History*, p. 129.

³⁵ Jones, *History*, p. 209.

³⁶ Jones, *History*, p. 212.

Jones also wrote about a General Council of January 1840 that the Ojibway, Muncey, and Six Nations chiefs of the Grand River held to renew an old peace treaty. The gathering sent an address to the Queen, making a number of requests and noting that they were “perfectly satisfied and contented to live under the good and powerful protection of the British Government” and would “ever hold ourselves in readiness to obey the calls of our Great Mother the Queen to defend this country.”³⁷ Jones also mentioned an observation by Six Nations chiefs at a council at the River Credit (Jones’s own band), to inform “their Chippeway brethren that they had always been strongly attached to the British Government, and that if that attachment was ever lessened it would not be their fault, but that of the Government in not keeping faith with them.”³⁸ The alliance’s obligations clearly continued.

As well, Jones protested the way that settlers and local officials had transformed an alliance of equals into a relationship of dominance and subordination: “The treaty then made with the Indians placed them as allies with the British nation, and not subjects; and they were so considered until the influx of emigration completely outnumbered the aborigines. From that time the Colonial Government assumed a parental authority over them, treating them in every respect as children.”³⁹ By recalling the military alliance and nation-to-nation treaties, Jones argued for his people’s political rights such as the vote, legal title to their lands, and an equal place in the new order.

It should be noted that, as in the address he probably authored in 1840, overall Peter Jones took a different tack in his writings from the other speakers discussed here. The 1840 address portrayed the Ojibway as non-combatants whom the British army rescued—possibly alluding to his own experience as a child during the War of 1812.⁴⁰ In his later writings, Jones played down the military strength of Indigenous nations, subtly reproaching colonial aggression and countering colonial images of the violent “savage.”

Jones’s vision for the future was one of assimilation, with Indigenous people becoming Christian farmers living as their white counterparts did and enjoying the same rights and privileges. He wrote in mostly negative terms about the traditional Indigenous ways and compared them unfavourably with “civilized” life.⁴¹ He had witnessed the outcomes of a series of U.S.-Indigenous wars, which invariably crushed the Indigenous parties. In listing harms the newcomers caused, he cited “[t]he loss of their country and game, for a trifling remuneration,” and explained,

37 Jones, *History*, p. 124.

38 Jones, *History*, pp. 123-124, 209, 212.

39 Jones, *History*, p. 217.

40 Although Peter Jones had an uncle who fought in the War of 1812, he himself was only ten years old when the war began. His disabled grandmother had to be left behind in York during the American attack and was never seen again. Thus, his portrayal of passive helplessness may indeed have been an expression of his own experience and that of other young and old Ojibway. See Smith, *Sacred Feathers*, pp. 34-35.

41 He wrote, for instance, “From experience of my early life, I can truly say, that their imaginary bliss is so mixed up with everything that is abominable and cruel, that it would be vain to look for real happiness among savage tribes.” Jones, *History*, p. 28.

This the poor Indian feels keenly, and often has he thirsted for revenge on his encroaching neighbour. This has been seen lately in the south, in the case of the Seminoles struggling in vain against the power of the United States. The warrior may raise the war whoop, whirl the tomahawk, and brandish his scalping knife; but how can a handful of braves compete with a well conducted army? They may annoy and slaughter their intruders for a time, but ruin and degradation will be the result of these unequal struggles, and the poor Indians will be obliged to lay down the tomahawk with shame and disgrace.⁴²

Jones's reasoning here was, of course, all too accurate, and no doubt this painful recognition shaped his choice to avoid the topic of military alliance and its obligations.

Non-Indigenous Discourses

The War of 1812 was an obvious source of events and images for an incipient national literary tradition stressing Canada's British character and heritage, its superiority to the United States, and its distinctive history of manly and honourable self-defence.

Non-Indigenous accounts of the conflict and the Indigenous allies show some similarities to the Indigenous accounts, but also add negative images. The three examined here appear to be the only full-length, researched Canadian accounts to appear up to the mid-1860s. The earliest was soldier and writer John Richardson's war memoir *A Canadian Campaign*, which London's *New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal* published serially from December 1826 to June 1827 as "A Canadian Campaign by a British Officer."⁴³ This text derived primarily from Richardson's own experiences as a gentleman volunteer in the British 41st Regiment in the War of 1812.

Next came Gilbert Auchinleck's *A History of the War between Great Britain and the United States of America During the Years 1812, 1813 & 1814* (1855). According to its later editor, H.C. Campbell, the author intended to pen a documentary history of the war with popular appeal.⁴⁴ He used eyewitness accounts, archival research, and existing American, British, and Upper Canadian writings (that is, Richardson's work) to counter American portrayals of the conflict.

Finally, there was William Coffin's *1812: The War, and Its Moral* (1864). Coffin, too, had conducted archival research and made extensive use of previous works on the subject, including Auchinleck's. Coffin was explicit about his intention to produce a reliable but popular, Canada-focused history of the war, since the British and American accounts by "general historians" were "voluminous and inaccessible to the masses, and the part yielded to Canada [was] unavoidably small." Moreover, he aimed to counter the "flood of American publications,

⁴² Jones, *History*, p. 169.

⁴³ Richardson later published a similar book, *War of 1812, first series; containing a full and detailed narrative of the operations of the right division, of the Canadian army* ([Brockville, C. W.], 1842). I focus on his earlier text, since it was apparently the first full-length account of the war to appear in Upper Canada.

⁴⁴ Auchinleck, *History of the War*, Introduction (unpaginated), by H. C. Campbell, Chief Librarian, Toronto Public Libraries.

sensational as they are termed, written for show, designed for sale, and, to this end, pandering to the worst passions of a morbid nationality.”⁴⁵

For colonists in Upper Canada, defining a Canadian nation was an important political and social goal. Writers of the period understood this as a project to create national heroes acting in a distinctive national landscape. As the Toronto *Globe* remarked in 1856, “No people has made a figure in the life of nations, without its heroes.”⁴⁶ In *Literature and Society in the Canadas, 1817-1850*, Mary Lu MacDonald has shown how literary works can help construct a nation: “Just as the French identified the French nation with French literature, so residents of the Canadas accepted the idea that there must be a Canadian literature if there was to be a Canadian nation.”⁴⁷

Both individual writers and the ruling elite understood the need for such a literature and pantheon of heroes. In 1841, for instance, the Legislative Assembly of the United Province of Canada gave John Richardson a grant of £250 to help him finish his account of the War of 1812, which it intended to use as a school text.⁴⁸ Richardson, who attempted at times to support himself by writing, frequently suggested that Canadians ought to buy his books “because they were about Canada and written by a Canadian.”⁴⁹ This notion certainly had some support among the editors of newspapers and literary periodicals, who responded by giving him “a great deal of favourable publicity.”⁵⁰ Richardson himself wrote that, in offering for sale copies of his historical novels *Wacousta* (1832) and *The Canadian Brothers* (1840) in 1842, he hoped “to infuse a spirit of National Literature into his native land.”⁵¹

Indigenous Warriors

During the War of 1812 and in the years that followed, Indigenous warriors were important not only in actual combat, but also in discourses about the war. Both during and after the conflict, both sides used ideas about “Indians” in their war rhetoric and propaganda. For the United States, a simple and unambiguous narrative sufficed: Indigenous people were “savages” whose war practices were alien, unacceptable, and inhuman.⁵² Accordingly, Britain was dishonourable and

45 Coffin, *1812*, pp. 18-19.

46 Norman Knowles, “An Ancestry of which any people might be proud: Official History, the Vernacular Past, and the Shaping of the Loyalist Tradition at mid-century,” in *Inventing the Loyalists: The Ontario Loyalist Tradition and the Creation of Useable Pasts* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), p. 26.

47 Mary Lu MacDonald, *Literature and Society in the Canadas, 1817-1850* (Lewiston, Ont.: Edward Mellen Press, 1992), p. 5.

48 MacDonald, *Literature and Society*, p. 32. Among other things, the legislators wanted to ensure that Canadian views of the war prevailed in the face of U.S. accounts that presented both Britain and Upper Canada very negatively.

49 MacDonald, *Literature and Society*, p. 32.

50 MacDonald, *Literature and Society*, p. 32.

51 See Douglas Daymond and Leslie Monkman’s introduction to Richardson’s poem *Tecumseh, or the Warrior of the West. A poem in four cantos* (London: R. Glynn, 1828) on the “Canadian Poetry” website at http://canadianpoetry.org/longPoems/Richardson_John/Tecumseh/introduction.html, accessed May 24, 2012.

52 See Gordon M. Sayre, *The Indian Chief as Tragic Hero: Native Resistance and the Literatures of America, from Moctezuma to Tecumseh* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), pp. 9-10; Alan Taylor, *The Civil War of 1812: American Citizens, British Subjects, Irish Rebels, and Indian Allies* (New

despicable for involving them in the conflict. Moreover, Indigenous peoples' involvement resulted solely from British inducements, not from any anti-American motives of their own. For Upper Canada, by contrast, the discursive management of the alliance with Indigenous nations was considerably more complex. Upper Canadians recognized that the colony would almost certainly have fallen to the United States without Indigenous military support, especially in the first year or so of the war. Many of them argued that the American invasions had forced them to engage Indigenous warriors on their side. The colonists also seem to have felt some gratitude toward the Indigenous saviours, a sentiment that was most apparent in their treatment of Tecumseh.

At the same time, they were sensitive to the attacks by American politicians and writers, both during and after the conflict, condemning them for employing Indigenous warriors and claiming that British soldiers had been complicit in killings of American prisoners of war and other alleged Indigenous wrongs. These circumstances produced a set of discourses that was consonant with the general development of Upper Canada's self-image as a colony founded on British codes of military honour, loyalty, manly self-defence, and humanity toward colonized peoples.⁵³

In brief, Upper Canadians offered the following four justifications for the military alliance with Indigenous nations in the War of 1812. First, there was the argument of expediency: Indigenous assistance was necessary to defend the thinly populated colony from a much more populous aggressor. Thus, if the Americans were horrified to be facing Indigenous warriors, they had only themselves to thank, having initiated the war and invaded Upper Canada. A related argument claimed that the Americans were hypocrites for accusing Upper Canada in this matter, since the United States had tried to make such alliances itself, but was rebuffed because of its past cruelties against Indigenous peoples. Second, there was the argument of Indigenous power and difference, the latter largely meaning moral inferiority: Indigenous warriors could not be controlled, especially when they were in the majority, and their war practices were uncivilized. The British could not be held responsible for the few incidents of torture or killing of prisoners by Indigenous warriors, having done everything they could to prevent these outrages to civilized warfare.

Third, Indigenous warriors were willing to fight the United States because they had experienced only brutality and duplicity at its hands and were aware that the republic intended to dispossess and exterminate them. Again, in this view, Americans had only themselves to blame for creating their own enemy. Fourth, American soldiers, particularly the volunteers from Kentucky, were said to be just as "savage" as Indigenous warriors and to follow the same war practices,

York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), pp. 136-137, 203-205. Within weeks of his death in battle, many Americans began to lionize Tecumseh himself. Scholar Gordon Sayre explains this in terms of his book's theme, namely that "Indian leaders of wars of resistance against European invaders were the tragic heroes of America." (*Indian Chief*, p. 2). Casting these Indigenous leaders as tragic heroes, according to Sayre, assuaged Americans' sense of responsibility for the deaths of millions of Indigenous people (p. 4).

⁵³ Cecilia Morgan, *Public Men and Virtuous Women. The Gendered languages of Religion and Politics in Upper Canada, 1791-1850* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), pp. 23-24.

such as scalping and other mutilations of corpses. Hence, they were not in a position to point fingers at others. The multiple mutilations of Tecumseh's body by Americans on the battlefield provided an emotionally potent underpinning for this perspective.⁵⁴

A number of corollaries flowed from these basic defences. Each of them further supported Upper Canadian self-definitions as more honourable, humane, and civilized than the Americans both in war and in relations with Indigenous nations. Some writers said that Britain had treated Indigenous nations honourably and thus gained their allegiance. A somewhat less common argument noted the long British alliance with Indigenous nations and the "fact" (actually counterfactual) that Britain had supposedly never broken faith with its Indigenous allies. Richardson was the main proponent of this view, writing in *The Canadian Campaign*:

The bounties of England had been heaped on them with no sparing hand—the faith of the Government had never been violated—no spirit of interest or dominion had chased them from the homes of their forefathers—the calumet of peace had never once been dashed from the lips of those they were called on to abandon; and they remained true to the faith they had pledged, staunch to the cause in which they had embarked.⁵⁵

The existence of this alliance thus implicitly confirmed the justice and wisdom of the British Empire. In contrast, the United States appeared in most of the arguments as an unjust, cruel power that had abused Indigenous peoples and now turned its aggression against Upper Canada. It criticized Britain's alliance practices because it was unable to obtain its own Indigenous allies due to its many betrayals and injustices against their nations. Richardson, for instance, claimed that "every possible exertion was used, by the agents of their Government, to detach the Indians from our cause ... The wary chieftains, however, were not to be tempted by professions of friendship from those whose perfidy had long been proverbial with the Indian race."⁵⁶

In portrayals of Indigenous people, the discursive field was effectively split. At times, they were brave and powerful warriors whose aid had saved the colony. Tecumseh earned the lion's share of the praise, but, in accounts of specific battles, commanders at the time and later historians also related stories of heroism by other Indigenous warriors and gave partial credit for British military victories to the skill and courage of the Indigenous allies. Nevertheless, involving these warriors in the conflict was a regrettable necessity, since they would not always adhere

54 In the final stanzas of another major work, his long poem "Tecumseh, The Warrior of the West," John Richardson offered a gory description of these mutilations, including these lines: "Forth from the cope a hundred foemen spring, / And pounce like vultures on the bleeding clay; / Like famish'd blood-hounds to the corse they cling, / And bear the fallen hero's spoils away: / The very covering from his nerves they wring, / And gash his form, and glut them o'er their prey." He ended the poem with a curse on those who desecrated the body of his fallen hero. See Richardson, "Tecumseh, or the Warrior of the West. A poem in four cantos" (London: R. Glynn, 1828), stanza LII. See also Guy St-Denis, *Tecumseh's Bones* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005).

55 Richardson, *Canadian Campaign*, p. 13.

56 Richardson, *Canadian Campaign*, p. 13.

to European military codes of behaviour, were not controllable, and ultimately were savages. Certainly, when responding to the accusations of U.S. writers and politicians, later historians tended to depict the alliance as a regrettable necessity and to stress the impossibility of preventing Indigenous war atrocities. As William Coffin wrote in 1864, "The British had, upon an emergency, accepted the services of an ally whose ferocity they could not restrain, and of whose acts they were ashamed."⁵⁷

The role of Indigenous "savagery" as a war instrument was prominent in both the actual conflict and the written histories. Gilbert Auchinleck, writing in 1855, made a point of analysing the competing ideas about Indigenous people that were apparent in key moments of the conflict; for him, these contrasts illustrated the superior humanity and morality of the British. One notable moment was the first American invasion in July 1812, when Brigadier-General William Hull occupied the town of Sandwich and attempted to convince Upper Canadians to join his standard or at least refrain from defending the colony. This endeavour led to competing proclamations to the colony by Hull and Upper Canada's Major-General Isaac Brock, both vying for the inhabitants' military aid and offering them threats and inducements. The proclamations displayed radically different attitudes toward Indigenous people, Hull evoking absolute savagery, Brock staunchly declaring their right to defend themselves and their property. While Hull pointedly threatened anyone who fought by the side of Indigenous warriors, Brock threatened Hull himself with those same warriors.

Hull's proclamation on July 13, 1812, constructed his invasion as liberation for the non-Indigenous inhabitants: "I come to protect, not to injure you." He promised "peace, liberty, and security" to those who did not resist and threatened "the horrors and calamities of war" for those who did. This proclamation featured Indigenous people prominently, as "savages" whom the British might "let loose to murder our citizens, and butcher our women and children." In this case the conflict would become "a war of extermination." By defining Indigenous people as inhuman, "a force which respects no rights, and knows no wrong," Hull sought to drive a wedge between Indigenous people and others. He promised "a severe and relentless system of retaliation" against Indigenous people and anyone who made common cause with them. He announced that any collaboration with Indigenous warriors would lead to immediate execution: "No white man found fighting by the Side of an Indian will be taken prisoner; instant destruction will be his lot." At the same time, he attempted to define white Upper Canadians as brothers, would-be Americans, who only awaited the boon of liberation and incorporation by the United States: "Being children, therefore, of the same family with us, and heirs to the same heritage, the arrival of an army of friends must be hailed by you with a cordial welcome. You will be emancipated from tyranny and oppression, and restored to the dignified station of freemen."⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Coffin, *1812*, p. 44.

⁵⁸ "Proclamation of Brig.-General Hull," Ernest A. Cruikshank, ed., *Documents Relating to the Invasion of Canada and the Surrender of Detroit, 1812* (Ottawa: Government Printing Bureau, 1912), p. 58.

Brock's proclamation responded, not surprisingly, by condemning Hull's invasion and his insults against the British government, and he also attacked the notion that Indigenous people should not be allowed to defend themselves. Brock particularly took exception to his opponent's negative characterization of Indigenous people and threat to execute all who sided with them. He began by undoing Hull's racial binary, instead equating Indigenous people with Upper Canadians: "The brave bands of Aborigines which inhabit this Colony were, like his Majesty's other subjects, punished for their zeal and fidelity, by the loss of their possessions in the late Colonies, and rewarded by his Majesty with lands of superior value in this Province." He criticized Hull for denying Indigenous people a right to self-defence: "By what new principle are they to be prevented from defending their property? ... they are men, and have equal rights with all other men to defend themselves and their property when invaded, more especially when they find in the enemy's camp a ferocious and mortal foe, using the same warfare which the American commander affects to reprobate." He concluded with further threats paralleling those of Hull, stating that Britain's "national character" was "not less distinguished for humanity than strict retributive justice" and that it would view the threat of refusing quarter as "deliberate murder," to be expiated by all United States "subjects."⁵⁹

In analysing this exchange of proclamations, William Coffin's 1864 work condemned Hull's approach and observed that Brock had "nobly replied, that the crown of England would defend and avenge all its subjects, whether red or white, and that Canada knew its duty to itself and to its sovereign and was neither to be bullied nor cajoled into a departure from it."⁶⁰

The opening war of words soon gave way to actual combat. Here, too, Indigenous people played a central role. As British planners knew long before the war, Indigenous warriors were essential to Britain's defence of the exposed, thinly populated colony. Once convinced to join the contest, the warriors did not disappoint their allies. Throughout the first two years of the war, especially in the Great Lakes theatre, the British repeatedly reaped dramatic benefits from the presence of Indigenous warriors alongside their troops and militia. The first two major engagements—Fort Michilimackinac and Detroit—garnered victories for the British that resulted primarily from the display of Indigenous warriors and the threat of their being let loose on enemy forces. In the British attack on Fort Michilimackinac, Captain Charles Roberts occupied high ground overlooking the fort and let the Indigenous warriors display their highly effective intimidation tactics. After their war cries and gunshots had sufficiently spooked the enemy, Roberts warned the opposing commander, Lieutenant Porter Hanks, "that if a single Indian should be killed before the Fort, it would be impossible to protect them [U.S. forces] from their fury & thirst for blood."⁶¹ Hanks promptly surrendered.

General Isaac Brock used similar tactics not long afterwards. After marching on Detroit, where the United States had a well-supplied fort, Brock threatened

59 "Proclamation of Major-General Brock," in Cruikshank, ed., *Documents*, p. 83.

60 Coffin, *1812*, pp. 40-41.

61 Quoted in Taylor, *Civil War of 1812*, p. 153.

General William Hull with the implied horror of Indigenous warfare: “It is far from my intention to join in a war of extermination, but you must be aware, that the numerous body of Indians who have attached themselves to my troops, will be beyond controul [*sic*] the moment the contest commences.”⁶² Hull, too, surrendered without firing a shot—despite having far more troops, supplies, and weaponry.

In the major Battle of Queenston Heights, the participation of Indigenous warriors was also effective. When the American troops heard the warriors’ battle cries, they broke ranks and ran away, despite outnumbering their opponents considerably. The American historian Alan Taylor, repeating a nineteenth-century claim by U.S. authors, has gone so far as to state that the British won few battles without Indigenous warriors.⁶³ Taylor noted that American culture nursed a pervasive terror of Indigenous warriors, based partly on the warriors’ real military prowess and terrifying intimidation tactics and partly on the circulation of frightening tales about them: “Conditioned by childhood stories, soldiers expected the worst whenever they heard, saw, or imagined Indians ... While hatred for Indians mobilized Americans to fight the war, that hatred became a paralyzing dread when they went into combat in the northern forest.”⁶⁴ The British exploited this panic to the utmost.

Necessity

Each of the three Anglo-Canadian authors considered here explicitly defended Britain and Upper Canada for having Indigenous warriors join them in combat. The argument of necessity took pride of place. As Richardson put it, “The Americans have invariably been loud in their condemnation of a measure which alone secured to us the possession of Upper Canada ...”⁶⁵ Auchinleck echoed Richardson: “[T]he Americans in particular have been loud in their condemnation of a measure to the adoption of which the safety of the Western Provinces was in a great measure to be attributed.”⁶⁶ Coffin’s approach was similar: “It was well known how much the defence of the Western frontier depended on the Indians.”⁶⁷

It was a matter not only of numbers, but also of forest fighting skills. Richardson pointed out the great need for Indigenous warriors who had these skills, since the American soldiers had grown up with rifles, woodcraft, and the art of dressing for camouflage, unlike the red-coated British, who knew little of forest warfare. The Americans, he wrote, especially those from the frontier regions of Ohio and Kentucky, were “scarcely inferior as riflemen to the Indians.” As a result, it was clear that “without the assistance of the Indian Warriors, the defence of so great a portion of Western Canada, as was entrusted to the charge of the few regulars and militia, would have proved a duty of great difficulty and doubt.”⁶⁸

62 Quoted in Taylor, *Civil War of 1812*, p. 164.

63 Taylor, *Civil War of 1812*, p. 164.

64 Taylor, *Civil War of 1812*, p. 205.

65 Richardson, *Canadian Campaign*, p. 12-13.

66 Auchinleck, *History of the War*, p. 55. He also quoted Richardson’s reasons at some length.

67 Coffin, *1812*, p. 44.

68 Richardson, *Canadian Campaign*, p. 20. Auchinleck also quoted this passage at length in *1812*, p. 54.

Not only did Upper Canada need every available fighter, but it had to reckon with the existence of Indigenous warriors who were bound to participate in some way. All the authors agreed that the United States had attempted to gain its own Indigenous allies. In Richardson's words, "The natives must have been our friends or our foes: had we not employed them the Americans would."⁶⁹ Auchinleck agreed that "every possible exertion was employed by the agents of the United States Government to detach the Indians from us and to effect an alliance with them on the part of the States."⁷⁰ Similarly, Coffin argued that "Great efforts had been made both by the British and Americans to secure the services of these uncertain and suspicious auxiliaries."⁷¹

As it happens, this argument was not exactly correct. American negotiators did approach Indigenous nations in the borderlands with gifts and inducements to obtain their neutrality or, put another way, to end their alliances with Britain. But the U.S. government initially scorned any alliance of its own with "savages," while its war propaganda loudly condemned Britain's use of Indigenous warriors. By about 1813, however, the American army's increasing desperation led to a change of policy and the appearance of small numbers of Indigenous warriors on the U.S. side in some battles.⁷²

The Upper Canadian authors were all clear that the necessary alliance with Indigenous nations was regrettable. Richardson noted that "although humanity may deplore the necessity imposed by the very invader himself, of counting them among our allies, and combatting at their side,—the law of self-preservation was our guide ..."⁷³ Auchinleck named the main difficulty with Indigenous military practices: "Great stress has been laid on the cruel policy of the English for acting in concert with allies so little disposed to deal mercifully with the captives placed by the chances of war in their hands."⁷⁴ William Coffin was perhaps most blunt: "The British had, upon an emergency, accepted the services of an ally whose ferocity they could not restrain, and of whose acts they were ashamed."⁷⁵

There were two main sets of reasons for disparaging Indigenous warriors. First, they were fiercely independent, fought of their own free will, and chose individually whether or not to participate in any particular battle. This meant that British officers could not command them or rely on them as certain and predictable combatants at any given moment. In May 1813, for instance, the British commander General Proctor had to abandon his siege of Fort Meigs after both the Indigenous warriors and the militia departed.⁷⁶ Second, and more seriously, their war practices differed from European military codes in many ways. Most troubling for Europeans was the treatment of prisoners of war, whom they might abuse, torture, or summarily execute under Indigenous codes of war. Richardson

69 Richardson, *Canadian Campaign*, p. 13.

70 Auchinleck, *History of the War*, p. 55.

71 Coffin, *1812*, p. 44.

72 See Taylor, *The Civil War of 1812*, pp. 206-208, 228-229.

73 Richardson, *Canadian Campaign*, p. 13.

74 Auchinleck, *History of the War*, p. 55.

75 Coffin, *1812*, p. 44.

76 John Sugden, *Tecumseh: A Life* (New York: Henry Holt, 1997), p. 338.

claimed in his account to have witnessed several killings of individual American prisoners of war in vengeance for a fallen Indigenous warrior.

In addition to such small-scale incidents, there were two occasions on which British efforts could not protect their American prisoners, and substantial numbers were killed. The first was at the River Raisin in January 1813, when, after a major British victory, Indigenous warriors killed dozens of wounded American prisoners. The second was after a battle at Fort Meigs on the Miami River in May 1813, when Indigenous warriors attacked another group of American prisoners of war guarded by only a small group of British soldiers. On this occasion, Tecumseh learned of the slaughter and rode to the scene, where he was able to stop the attack after a number of deaths (Richardson gives the number as 40, probably an exaggeration).⁷⁷ Both incidents upset the British and Upper Canadians, as well as the Americans, who never tired of repeating tales of these disasters.

British Attempts to Prevent Atrocities

All three Upper Canadian authors insisted that army officers in charge had tried strenuously to prevent any Indigenous killing or torture of prisoners, but that at times the warriors' wrath and numerical superiority overwhelmed them. Some authorities instituted specific measures, like paying for live prisoners, but not always with success. The issue remained contentious throughout the period, since Americans repeatedly insisted that British officers had condoned the attacks on prisoners at River Raisin and Fort Meigs. Richardson asserted: "Yet though it is admitted that the Indians, while our allies, were in some instances guilty of those atrocities peculiar to every savage people; let it not be supposed ... that these atrocities were sanctioned either by the Government or by individuals. On the contrary, every possible means was tried by the officer commanding at Amherstburg, and Colonel Elliott, superintendent of Indian affairs for that post, to soften down the warlike habits of the natives."⁷⁸ The offering of payment for prisoners was, Richardson felt, the most promising means of protecting them, but in most cases it "was found to be ineffectual; for the character and disposition of the savage were not to be tamed by rewards, nor the impression of ages to be removed by such temptations ..."⁷⁹ Coffin, too, noted the institution of payments for prisoners, describing how a committee of officers early in 1813 had "resolved to pay ten dollars for every prisoner brought in alive by his Indian captor. The Prince Regent [later George IV] subsequently approved and confirmed the proceeding."⁸⁰

Yet the three authors also agreed that the British had little ability to impose their will on the Indigenous allies. Richardson remarked that the "various cruelties committed during our struggle in Canada [were] cruelties we had not power to prevent, since perpetrated by an ally over whom we had no control." Indeed, any effort to intervene directly at such moments would only have brought attacks

⁷⁷ Richardson, *Canadian Campaign*, p. 37. For an account of the incident and the numbers slain, see Sugden, *Tecumseh*, pp. 336-337.

⁷⁸ Richardson, *Canadian Campaign*, pp. 13-14.

⁷⁹ Richardson, *Canadian Campaign*, p. 14.

⁸⁰ Coffin, *1812*, p. 165.

against the would-be protectors: “To have employed force, would have been to have turned their weapons against ourselves; and a body of eight hundred troops, composing the utmost strength of the garrison, could have effected little against three thousand fiery warriors, unused to restraint, and acknowledging no power but their own lawless and unbridled will.”⁸¹

Auchinleck tended to blame the Americans themselves, arguing the excesses were the result of their nation’s prior cruelties toward Indigenous peoples. In discussing River Raisin, he noted that the first action there “seems to have been directed against the Indians, and Mr. Thompson’s (American) history shows a sickening detail of numerous Indian villages destroyed, and atrocities committed against the ‘wretched people whose civilization the United States Government was so anxious to promote.’”⁸² He similarly placed the killings at Fort Meigs in the context of the United States’ setting a brutal and immoderate example, and he used the incident to suggest, in effect, that the Americans had received a dose of their own medicine:

Every one must deplore this transaction, and regret that proper measures had not been adopted to insure protection to the captives ... We do not pretend to palliate this inhuman massacre; but still, it must be borne in mind that the Indians far outnumbered their allies, and that they were smarting under the sense of a long series of injuries inflicted on them by the Americans. They had never experienced mercy at the hand of their enemies, the lesson of moderation and mercy had never been taught them, and at this precise time, a reward had been offered by American officials for every Indian scalp. In place of so unjustly condemning the British as participators and instigators in such cruel scenes, Americans should have asked, have we not had meted to us the cup of tribulation and misery so unsparingly measured out by ourselves to our red brethren.⁸³

Coffin, too, blamed the Americans for Indigenous attacks on American prisoners of war, again because of their “inhuman reprisals” against “Indian severities.” He placed his fullest account of the two incidents in the mouth of a Squire Reynolds, an eyewitness to both, who condemned the killings as murder. Nevertheless, he also quoted the squire’s summary of the situation: “There is no doubt those Indians were shocking implements of war, though perhaps not much worse than bomb shells or Greek fire, and why could not the Yankees leave the devils alone? Who scalped the red skin at the Ta-ron-tee? The Indians were fighting for their lands, and avenging their own wrongs. If you want the skin of a wild cat, you must take the scratching.” In the end, Coffin denounced the whole debate over employing Indians, saying the Indigenous allies were no worse than war in general. “The savage, as an instrument of warfare, is not more repugnant to humanity than is war itself in any shape,—not more repulsive than mines and torpedoes, and the thousand hideous forms which war assumes at the hands of refined man. The

81 Richardson, *Canadian Campaign*, pp. 12, 14.

82 Auchinleck, *History of the War*, p. 125. The quotation is from a speech of President James Madison that Auchinleck had cited earlier to show the hypocrisy and racist hatred of American discourse.

83 Auchinleck, *History of the War*, p. 144.

savage may be inspired, may be taught, may be bribed, to pity and to spare. Bombshells and spherical case discriminate less, spare less, and are less placable.”⁸⁴

American Savagery

The charge that (white) Americans were savage themselves ran through all the authors’ accounts and played a central role in many of their arguments, especially those of Auchinleck and Coffin. The Americans’ own practice of taking scalps was a particularly prominent feature of such arguments, which the writers frequently juxtaposed with their propaganda denouncing Indigenous warriors for the same practice. “In justice, too, to the Indians, . . . ,” Auchinleck remarked, “acts of barbarous cruelty were not confined to them. The American backwoodsmen were in the habit of scalping also, and, indeed, it is singular enough that . . . the very first scalp should have been taken by an [American] officer.” Auchinleck also quoted a subscription in a Pittsburgh newspaper offering a hundred dollars for “every hostile Indian scalp, with both ears.”⁸⁵ Coffin similarly highlighted the American lust for these war trophies: “The National Intelligencer, the American Government organ of the day, boastfully asserted that when the militia returned to Detroit from the battle of Brownstown they bore triumphantly on the points of their bayonets between 30 and 40 fresh scalps, which they had taken on the field . . . no mercy was shown to the redskins by the trappers and borderers who constituted the militia, and . . . scalps were much prized spoils.”⁸⁶

Coffin also made a point of comparing Europe’s hideous torture instruments with the “ferocity” Americans attributed to Indigenous warriors (in this case Tecumseh’s people, the Shawnee):

They were designated the “fierce Shawanese,” and have been denounced for their ferocity; but men and the descendants of men familiar with the Inquisition, the auto-da-fé, the fires of Smithfield and of the Grenelle,—with the rack, the wheel, the red-hot pincers, and the boiling pitch,—with Luke’s iron crown, and Damien’s bed of steel—have no pretence for fastidiousness on this score ; nor should they use hard words towards their fellow-men, frenzied by acts of cruel and often wanton wrong.⁸⁷

The last phrase, while avoiding the term “savage,” uses strong language for the brutalities of American frontier settlers and soldiers. This argument was consistent with British North America’s constant refrain about the inhumanity of U.S. treatment of Indigenous peoples, and its self-image as a kinder, gentler colonizer who took land by treaty and recognized Indigenous rights.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Coffin, *1812*, pp. 87, 209-210, 164.

⁸⁵ Auchinleck, *History of the War*, pp. 55, 125.

⁸⁶ Coffin, *1812*, p. 43.

⁸⁷ Coffin, *1812*, pp. 232-233.

⁸⁸ See Brownlie, “Others or Brothers?” p. 175.

Allies and Warriors

These three accounts' picture of the Indigenous allies is contradictory, but overall less negative than their portrayal of the American soldiers as a group. The status of the Indigenous allies as "savage" fighters who practised atrocities was clear. When they abstained from attacks on prisoners, the British received the credit, or sometimes Tecumseh did. All three writers used the term "savage" at times to refer to them, and Coffin called them "mercenaries" at least as often as "allies"—a term with a very different meaning. Indeed, the word "mercenary," with its implication of fighting strictly for pay, did not fit Coffin's portrayal, which saw Indigenous peoples as seeking principally revenge both in their participation in the war and in their attacks on prisoners. Yet the accounts presented them also as valuable, at times indispensable, to the British war effort and at times mentioned their bravery.

Richardson offered the most negative portrayal overall, since he tantalized his readers with the notion that he had known the wildest and "most savage" warriors, and he spiced his account with many sensational stories of Indigenous wrongdoing. At the outset of his account, he claimed that "the more savage of the Indian race" were attached to his division alone, the 41st. He announced his intention to "give a faithful account of the various cruelties committed during our struggle in Canada" and he certainly delivered on this promise, including in his book several gory stories of the execution of prisoners as well as a detailed tale of cannibalism supposedly practised by the "Minoumini" tribe.⁸⁹ Richardson filled his book with lively descriptions of battles, individual acts of heroism, woundings and deaths, scalplings and executions of the helpless. He definitely meant his narrative to be exciting, to give a vicarious taste of war, and to offer shocking scenes of horror to his audience. And of course the "Indians" were there mostly for colour, so their "savage" ways and practices were bound to take centre stage. The other two authors both largely abstained from detailed descriptions of woundings and deaths, having set themselves a more strictly historical task.

Richardson's work also stands out for its descriptions of the dress and appearance as well as the actions of Indigenous warriors. Indeed, he was at his most eloquent in this task. Consider this passage, describing the army on the march, with British regulars, the Upper Canadian militia, and the warriors:

the scene [was] rendered more imposing by the wild appearance of the warriors, whose bodies, stained and painted in the most frightful manner for the occasion, glided by us with almost noiseless velocity, without order, and without a chief ... armed to the teeth with rifles, tomahawks, war-clubs, spears, bows, arrows and scalping-knives. Uttering no sound, and intent only on reaching the enemy unperceived, they might have passed for the spectres of those wilds [,] the ruthless demons which War had unchained for the punishment and oppression of man.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Richardson, *Canadian Campaign*, pp. 16-18, 39.

⁹⁰ Richardson, *Canadian Campaign*, p. 19. Auchinleck quoted this passage in full, along with a number of paragraphs on either side of it; *History of the War*, p. 56.

This vivid description portrayed the Indigenous men as both inhuman (demons) and as supernatural or hardly real (almost noiseless spectres). Clearly, however, its overall effect is to remind the reader of the warriors' savage otherness.

Tecumseh, the famed Shawnee leader, received distinct treatment in all the works. All the authors singled him out for praise and devoted significant passages to him—in Coffin's case, a whole chapter.⁹¹ Auchinleck and Coffin saw the Shawnee chief effectively as a British patriot. Coffin was particularly laudatory, penning this tribute to his sacrifice in war:

He had, under severe trial, adhered with stern fidelity to the British arms. ... in prosperity and in adversity, ... to the last hour he was true as steel. True to King George, true to British men, true to his faith in a cause and in a people of whom he had but an indistinct idea, he died fearlessly in that faith, true to the last. His death sheds a halo on the story of a much abused and fast departing race. May the people of England and their descendants in Canada never forget this noble sacrifice, or the sacred obligation it imposes. It should be held as the seal of a great covenant. "And Jonathan said to David, the Lord be between thee and me, and between my seed and thy seed for ever."⁹²

Coffin also accorded Tecumseh a very high honour, placing him in the company of the three other prominent military heroes of British North America: "He completes the tale of the Immortal four, who, to the end of time, will hold up in the face of all nations, the young escutcheon of Canada. Four more chivalrous supporters of a national trophy have never before adorned the pages of History or the triumphs of Sculpture, than Wolfe and Montcalm — Brock and Tecumseh."⁹³

Both Coffin and Auchinleck praised Indigenous bravery in battle and spent some energy excusing their scalping and killing of prisoners, primarily by emphasizing relentless American wrongs against them. Both cited specific instances of Indigenous warriors' bravery, sometimes quoting officers' dispatches that mentioned their courage. Auchinleck, for example, pointed to conspicuous Indigenous valour early in the war: "Amongst the records of gallant deeds we must not omit to mention the bravery of twenty-two warriors of the Minoumini tribe of Indians, who repelled the attack of a body of Americans ten times their number ..."⁹⁴ He also mentioned several other occasions on which officers recorded Indigenous courage, such as the report of Major-General R.H. Sheaffe after the battle of Queenston Heights, which noted that "Norton ... and the Indians particularly distinguished themselves."⁹⁵

Overall, the depiction of Indigenous warriors is perhaps the one area in which a change is visible between the first and last of these three historical works. While Richardson certainly attributed bravery and physical prowess to the warriors, he

91 Richardson offered his main portrayal of Tecumseh in his long poem of 1828, although he made a few remarks about him in his relatively short account, *A Canadian Campaign*. These remarks were laudatory but at the same time made the Shawnee appear frightening.

92 Coffin, *1812*, pp. 235-236.

93 Coffin, *1812*, p. 237.

94 Auchinleck, *History of the War*, p. 52.

95 Auchinleck, *History of the War*, p. 111.

spent far too much time on graphic descriptions of Indigenous killings of prisoners to convey a positive overall impression of them. Auchinleck and Coffin, by contrast, writing several decades after the war, conveyed a more positive image of the warriors. Even in alluding to such incidents as attacks on war prisoners, they justified the warriors' conduct on the grounds of the years of American atrocities and injustices.

Conclusion: Unequal Alliance

In the nineteenth century, there were noteworthy similarities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous discourses about the War of 1812 and the history of military alliances. Both underscored the cruelty, aggression, and hypocrisy of the United States, condemning its attack on British North America and its treatment of Indigenous peoples. Non-Indigenous authors were no less critical than their Indigenous counterparts of the brutality and ruthlessness they perceived in U.S. expansion into Indigenous territories. Indeed, antagonism toward the American republic clearly still united the two groups in a common enmity. It was natural for Indigenous spokespersons, especially in their situation of growing numerical inferiority and marginalization, to deploy this commonality as a bridge to understanding.

Nevertheless, writers from the two groups were working toward different goals. The non-Indigenous authors were helping to build a nation, creating a common history of struggle and valour for Upper Canadians that they directed principally at those of British heritage (and, to some extent, French Canadians). They were also, of course, attempting to sell books and probably saw stories about scalping and other Indigenous atrocities as saleable commodities. George Copway shared this commercial goal himself, and perhaps his focus on the wars of the Ojibway was due in part to a desire to increase sales. But he, like the other Indigenous speakers examined here, had more overtly political and social goals as well. Like the Brock Monument addresses, he hoped here to awaken sympathy in an English-speaking public in order to improve the circumstances of Indigenous peoples. Copway sought to garner support for Indigenous education and other programs to ameliorate difficult living conditions. He presented his own people as a sovereign nation, and sought at the same time to have them included in the colonial nations that now surrounded them. Peter Jones, too, wanted education above all, and also more extensive efforts to Christianize his people and convert them to farmers.

The War of 1812 and the British-Indigenous military alliance served as tools and symbols for all the writers and speakers investigated here. While the authors on both sides had some sympathy and gratitude toward the Indigenous combatants, the emphases were notably different. The Indigenous texts focused on the warriors' contributions to Canada and/or their ally the Queen, and on the common military effort that bound together Indigenous and non-Indigenous inhabitants of Upper Canada. They portrayed the sacrifices by Indigenous warriors and their families to generate a sense of reciprocal obligation on the part of the Queen and her subjects.

Here the connection to the discourses of the Idle No More movement becomes clear.

The Anglo-Canadian works present the Indigenous allies as valuable to Upper Canada's defence, but also as ferocious warriors driven primarily by blood lust and revenge, with perhaps a side motivation of plunder. Since these qualities were central to colonial images of the "savage," such portrayals powerfully reinforced negative ideas about Indigenous people.

Ironically, the real motivation of Tecumseh's participation, and of many of his fellow warriors, found no place in these discourses, Indigenous or non-Indigenous. Tecumseh sought not revenge but a halt to U.S. expansion and the relentless dispossession of Indigenous nations. He felt no "loyalty" to Britain, which had only disappointed him up to that point. At least some British officers were aware of this at the time of the war, and recognized that their Indigenous allies sought different aims. Brock, for instance, understood clearly that Britain's previous betrayals of its Indigenous allies had left the people wary and suspicious.⁹⁶ He and other officers were well aware that Indigenous military support would expand or contract depending on Britain's war fortunes and the ardour with which it prosecuted the contest.⁹⁷ Although they resented this fact, they seemed to recognize the desperate dangers the borderland nations faced in standing up to the American behemoth.

Yet the Anglo-Canadian writers discussed above made no reference to the Indigenous nations' union in a loose confederacy—principally Tecumseh's work—and their pursuit of their own geopolitical and territorial goals. Instead, they presented Indigenous warriors as innately fierce and violent, caught in the cycle of revenge and reprisals that constituted a major feature of "savagery" in colonial discourse. The exception, once again, was Tecumseh, whom they presented in simplistic terms, and inaccurately, as a British patriot—in Coffin's words, "True to King George, true to British men, . . . true to the last."⁹⁸

For more than two centuries, Britain's Indigenous allies in Turtle Island have taken pride in the vital military support they provided in a series of European wars. Their aid was particularly crucial in the War of 1812, when they saved Upper Canada from falling to the U.S. invaders, a fact that the colonists widely recognized. One might expect, therefore, that Upper Canada's attitudes toward its

96 See George F. G. Stanley, "The Indians in the War of 1812," in J. R. Miller, ed., *Sweet Promises: A Reader on Indian-White Relations in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), pp. 107-109. Brock wrote in September 1812, for instance, "The Indians, since the Miami affair, in 1793, have been extremely suspicious of our conduct; but the violent wrongs committed by the Americans on their territory, have rendered it an act of policy with them to disguise their sentiments." (Dispatch from Maj.-Gen. Isaac Brock to Sir George Prevost, Sept. 20, 1812, cited in Auchinleck, *History of the War*, p. 96.) Brock was referring to a notorious incident in 1794, when the British abandoned their Indigenous allies. A number of warriors, including Tecumseh, were in retreat after a severe defeat by the U.S. army at the Battle of Fallen Timbers. They called at Britain's Fort Miami, expecting to be admitted and protected from the Americans. The fort's commander, however, refused to allow them entrance.

97 See, for instance, Maj.-Gen. Isaac Brock to Sir George Prevost, Feb. 6, 1812; Brock to Prevost, May 15, 1812, in Ernest A. Cruikshank, ed., *Documents Relating to the Invasion of Canada and the Surrender of Detroit, 1812* (Ottawa: Govt Printing Bureau, 1912; Reprint 1971, Arno Press and The New York Times), pp. 16, 27.

98 Coffin, *1812*, pp. 235-236.

Indigenous allies would be positive, in proportion to the colonists' resentment of Americans for invading their land.

An examination of Upper Canadian literature, however, shows otherwise. Although Upper Canadians acknowledged the role of their Indigenous allies and the courageous leadership of Tecumseh, they were nonetheless distinctly ambivalent about the warriors who had contributed so much to the colony's survival. In the crucial formative years that followed the War of 1812, Upper Canadian writers constructed a discourse about Indigenous warriors that highlighted their unacceptable cultural distance from British norms. Thus, as the alliances themselves faded into practical insignificance, Britain's former allies increasingly became discursively fit subjects for dispossession, subjugation, and marginalization.