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in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Joseph T. Glatthaar, James Kirby Martin. *Forgotten Allies: The Oneida Indians and the American Revolution*. New York: Hill & Wang, 2006. 434 pp. \$30.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8090-4601-0; \$19.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8090-4600-3.

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The Oneida Patriots

Elegantly written and well researched, *Forgotten Allies* makes the Oneida Indian Nation's contribution to the Revolutionary War more accessible to the public. The story is an important one. Residing near the front line of New York colonial settlement, the Oneidas broke ranks with the larger Iroquois confederacy to support the United States during the Revolutionary War. Of all Native nations, their contributions to the Patriot cause were arguably the most significant. They scouted, gathered intelligence, participated in diplomatic negotiations, and aided the colonials' war effort, but paid dearly for their wartime contributions. In addition to losing many Oneida warriors, the wartime violence often spread into their communities, leaving a trail of destruction and displacement which cut the Oneida population by roughly one quarter.

Forgotten Allies will have particular appeal for undergraduate students and non-specialists. Glatthaar and Martin include vivid descriptions of challenging journeys, fierce combat, and rich ceremonies. Most chapters begin with a brief descriptive sketch of a historical figure, be it a German settler, an Oneida warrior, or a British officer. The book builds upon the foundation laid by Barbara Graymont's 1972 study, *The Iroquois in the American Revolution*. Military historians, Glatthaar and Martin provide effective descriptions of the battles in which the Oneidas were involved. Their treatment of the Battle of Oriskany is particularly welcome, given historical anthropologist Thomas Abler's assertion that only racism

can explain how such a significant and bloody battle has received so little attention.[1]

Although the narrative is fast-paced, Glatthaar and Martin recount the Oneidas' story in great detail. The authors examine the troubled relations between the Oneidas and other Iroquois nations as the Revolutionary War intensified. Unlike some more recent analyses (this reviewer's included), Glatthaar and Martin downplay the importance of Native solidarity in imperial wars. They see the American Revolution as an Iroquois civil war. Following in Jack Campisi's footsteps, Glatthaar and Martin demonstrate an appreciation for factional politics within tribes as well as between them. They also carefully reconstruct the actions of individual Oneidas, and deserve credit for tracking individual Oneidas across the multiple names by which they were identified in the documentary record. In many cases, the variations simply reflect idiosyncratic transliterations by different scribes, few of whom spoke Oneida. *Forgotten Allies* demonstrates how historians can recover rich personal and political narratives when they surmount these modest linguistic hurdles.

Less satisfactory is the book's decidedly whiggish tone. The anti-British bias is pervasive. Pro-British Indians' statements, we are told, reflected "hypocrisy" (p. 233), while in the next breath those of Oneidas are "powerful and courageous" (p. 234). Glatthaar and Martin routinely describe American officers in sympathetic terms,

contrasting sharply with their British counterparts, who are equally tarred with everything from arrogance to plagiarism. (Yes, even plagiarism!) Not surprisingly, this bias carries over to the book's analysis; on the whole, the authors seem less critical of Patriot testimony. For example, they accept Presbyterian missionary Samuel Kirkland's dubious assertion that "he did not attempt to proselytize the Oneidas about joining the Patriot cause" at face value (p. 84), while Loyalist John Butler's attempts to sway the Indians are analyzed closely to expose him as a "skilled master at beguiling argumentation" (p. 110).

Although both Glatthaar and Martin are eminent, seasoned historians, their previous works have not forced them to confront the particular problems of recovering the histories of Native Americans through documentary sources. They do not always treat missionary texts and transcripts of diplomatic encounters problematically, and they tend to downplay cultural differences. As a result, they are sometimes rather cavalier about presenting inferences about Indians' thoughts as conclusions. The authors fawn (no other word seems appropriate) over Kirkland, and explain his apparent success by observing that "similarities between the Oneida and Christian deities and Creation Narratives enabled the Oneidas to grasp the Christian vision comfortably" (p. 59). If that was the case, one wonders why missionary success was so long in coming. The authors likewise note the increasing presence of private property among eighteenth-century Oneidas, and jump to the conclusion that the Oneidas became ideologically committed to the rebellion because "the shift toward ownership had sensitized [them] to the injustice of forfeiting possessions without a voice in the process" (p. 106).

Given the whiggish tone of the book, the events described by the final chapter come as something of a surprise. Despite the important services the Oneidas rendered to the United States, they were dispossessed of the great bulk of their lands within a mere five years of the Patriot victory. Oneida assistance during the war was forgotten—or simply ignored—in the face of a hunger for their land. Glatthaar and Martin conclude that New York State "employed all means honest and dishonest" to obtain these lands (p. 306). They are careful to point out that the expropriation was carried out by the state rather than the national government—yet another example of how Indians found their greatest threat among their nearest neighbors. Of course, the Oneidas' fate looks less ironic if we interpret the Revolution (on the frontier, at least) primarily as a war of territorial expansion rather than as one fought against the "injustice of forfeiting possessions."

Historians need to extend *Forgotten Allies* by comparing and contrasting the Oneida experience with those of other Natives during the Revolutionary Era—particularly in the South, where the need for fresh assessments is particularly acute. Scholars of Native America will puzzle over the Edward S. Curtis photo of a Kootenai duck hunter on the cover, yet find inside a generally reliable, detailed narrative.

Note

[1]. Thomas S. Abler, ed., *Chainbreaker: The Revolutionary War Memoirs of Governor Blacksnake as told to Benjamin Williams* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005 [1989]), 90-91.

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