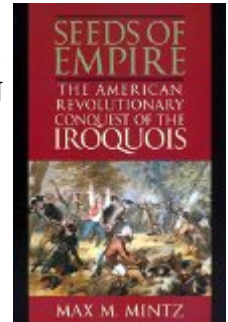


Max M. Mintz. *Seeds of Empire: The American Revolutionary Conquest of the Iroquois.* New York and London: New York University Press, 1999. xi + 232 pp. \$28.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8147-5622-5.



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>From Six Nations to Conquered Provinces:
The American Revolution and the Iroquois

This book focuses upon the American military campaigns against the Loyalist Iroquois and their Tory allies during the years 1777 through 1779. The title for my review paraphrases General George Washington who considered the lands of the Six Nations to be "conquered provinces" (7 September 1783). The title for the book derives from a letter from one of General Sullivan's young Continental army lieutenants who wrote that "I really feel guilty as I applied the torch to huts that were Homes of Content until we ravagers came spreading desolation everywhere.... Our mission here is ostensibly to destroy but may it not transpire that we pillagers are carelessly sowing the seeds of Empire?" (p. 186).

Mintz, professor emeritus of history at Southern Connecticut State University, is the author of two other books on the American Revolution. He writes that the revolution was "not only a struggle for independence, but also for the lands of the Indians, and the jewel was the upstate New York domain of the Iroquois' Six Nations. The fertile Mo-

hawk, Susquehanna, and Allegheny broad river valleys were a magnet for farmers weary of contending with New England's stubborn soil. The route westward along the southern shore of Lake Erie offered a pass through the Appalachian mountain chain and beyond to the Mississippi" (p. 1).

Structurally, *Seeds of Empire* includes acknowledgments, a prologue, thirteen chapters, an epilogue, and list of abbreviations, notes, and an index. 23 black-and-white illustrations and six maps supplement the narrative. The illustrations are, in the main, reproductions of portraits of some of the important personages who figure prominently in the narrative. There are no separate bibliographies or references cited, but a total of 320 endnotes (6 to 34 per chapter) are included, and depend upon a list of 36 abbreviations, mostly acronyms. A nine-page double column index is confined to proper nouns and does not incorporate topics.

I shall review Mintz's presentation, then proceed to a critique and comparison of *Seeds of Empire* with Barbara Graymont's classic work, *The*

Iroquois in the American Revolution (1972) [1], the best account of the Iroquois side of the campaigns, and military historian Joseph R. Fischer's *A Well-Executed Failure: The Sullivan Campaign against the Iroquois, July-September 1779* (1997) [2], which provides an analysis of the Continental army's first expedition against Indians. *Seeds of Empire* is a synthesis of the military actions between the Loyalists and Indian allies on one side and the rebel American colonials and their Indian allies on the other. It is a comprehensive retelling of the story of the struggle in New York and Pennsylvania between the American colonists and the American Indians, both native and recent migrants to that region. Likewise, it documents the initial attempt in 1779 by the Continental army in its first Indian campaign and assesses its successes and failures. The conflict was not simply between the British and the Colonists. Indeed, Euro-Americans, black Loyalist and colonist freemen and slaves, and American Indians were included among the diverse groups drawn into the war. The Indians included even more heterogeneous peoples, in the main among these the Iroquois-speaking tribes of the northeastern United States. The Iroquois homeland in upstate New York controlled important trade routes from the Great Lakes through the Finger Lakes Region and Mohawk Valley to Albany.

Mintz begins ca. 1773, documenting the schism that developed among the six Iroquois nations, with the Oneida and Tuscarora espousing the rebel "American" cause, while Loyalist Iroquois, led by the Mohawk Joseph Brant, and the other three tribes allied with the British. Brant (1742-1807) learned English, was an Anglican missionary, and fought for the British during the French and Indian War. He was presented to the court of King George III in 1775 and received a commission as a captain in 1776, serving as a British officer until 1783. The infamous ambush and decimation of General Nicholas Herkimer's troops by St Leger's forces and Brandt's Iroquois at the Battle of Oriskany on 6 August 1777 is re-

counted. In spite of the defeat of the Americans and their retreat at Oriskany, the Loyalists were unable to capture Fort Stanwix and they retreated. With this important action, the war took a new turn, for as Mintz notes, "the Indians would no longer serve as auxiliaries in a British force of professional soldiers fighting an American force of professional soldiers. They were to direct their main offensive against civilian centers, destroy private residences, and take the lives of noncombatants of both sexes and all ages" (p. 45). Mintz next documents the backcountry raids by the Iroquois in late 1777 and early 1778 in upstate New York and northern Pennsylvania. Notable among the Indian attacks was the Wyoming Valley Massacre of 3 July 1778. That rampage led the American Congress, the Board of War, and General Washington to formulate a major retaliatory offensive and defensive plan of action. The planning and execution of the Sullivan, Clinton, and Brodhead Campaign of 1779 occupies the subsequent eight chapters of Mintz's book (pp. 75-172). Graymont [1] covers briefly the same period (pp. 192-241), while Fischer [2] provides 265 pages on the same topic from a professional military perspective.

New Hampshire lawyer Major-General John Sullivan had military experience at Boston, Quebec, and Trenton from 1774-1776, and was selected as commander of the punitive expedition, although known for his "contentiousness" (p. 100). Brigadier General James Clinton's forces joined with Sullivan near Tioga. At the Battle of Newtown on 29 August 1779, 700 Indians and Loyalist rangers under John Butler and Brant faced a combined force of nearly 5,000 under Clinton and Brigadier General Enoch Poor. Although the Americans failed to close a planned pincer-like trap and Butler and Brant escaped with some of their men, the battle was an overwhelming victory for Sullivan's army. Iroquois houses and cornfields were burned and the army continued up the Chemung River into the Iroquois heartland. Displaced Iroquois warriors and civilians, and

their allies streamed toward Niagara, compounding housing and supply problems at that base. Villages and croplands on the Seneca River, others at the north ends of Seneca and Cayuga lakes, and Chenussio ("grand capital of the Indian country") were destroyed. On the return trip, Sullivan targeted the Cayuga villages, croplands, and orchards on the east and west sides of Lake Cayuga, before the army returned to Tioga and then to Easton. Mintz summarizes that "a draconian tide of desolation" swept through Iroquoia.

The third component of Washington's Sullivan-Clinton-Brodhead strategy involved a successful diversion. Colonel Daniel Brodhead, Commander of the Western Department and Fourth Pennsylvania Continental Regiment at Fort Pitt led 605 men up the Allegheny River Valley on 11 August. There were minor skirmishes with Seneca and Muncy Delaware, and the force proceeded unopposed to Bucktooth (Salamanca, New York). The force returned to Fort Pitt on 14 September, having destroyed more than 500 acres of crops and 130 houses in three Seneca villages in the Kinzua area (Warren, Pennsylvania). None of Brodhead's men were killed or taken prisoner. Graymont (pp. 214-215) and Starkey (pp. 123-127) write briefly on this expedition.

Sullivan leveled 32 Indian villages and destroyed 160,000 bushels of corn, but his overly cautious nature, demands for overwhelming numbers of troops and extraordinary amounts of supplies, lack of field reports, and his braggadocio did not sit well with Washington, who sent Sullivan a one sentence congratulatory letter. Mintz contends that "if Sullivan's assignment was to eradicate the villages and sustenance of the Iroquois, he had succeeded. But if his mission was to eliminate the Iroquois threat to the European occupation of the Six Nations heartland, he had achieved only a momentary respite" (p. 154). Surprised by the government's "cool" reception, Sullivan retired from military service on 9 November 1779. Washington thought that Sullivan had al-

lowed the enemy to escape at Newtown and failed to attack Fort Niagara. In the autumn of 1779, Niagara had only a garrison of 400 and was overwhelmed by 5,000 refugees from Iroquoia by January 1780. The winter of 1779-1780 proved to be one of the harshest on record, but from February to September 1780 Butler sent out 59 war parties to attack American settlements in the Mohawk, Delaware, Susquehanna, and Juniata River valleys. New York's Governor Clinton estimated 200 dwellings were burned and 150,000 bushels of grain were destroyed (p. 168), but other Tory attacks were ineffective. With the surrender of British General Cornwallis at Yorktown in November 1781, the reconquest of the Iroquois homeland was not possible, and the Indians were caught between British retrenchment and American annihilation. These Iroquois felt betrayed by the British and were a subdued people dependent upon Canada. A reaffirmation of the 1768 Treaty of Fort Stanwix occurred in October 1784. In the book's "Epilogue," Mintz writes "the Iroquois found themselves powerless to resist the post-Revolutionary takeover and peopling of their heartland by the new American nation" (p. 183). He then catalogues the attempts by New York State to systematically dispossess the Loyalist Indians of their lands by threat, deception, and guile. The Six Nations Reserve near Brantford, Ontario and Seneca land retention and sales are touched upon as Mintz brings the reader quickly up to February 1999 in a few paragraphs.

Mintz uses the standard British and Canadian primary sources and a selection of original documents (letters, papers, diaries, journals, order books, and minute books). He "mines" these sources for useful information and presents his detailed, exceedingly well-referenced narrative. There are fascinating connections revealed -- men who were brothers-in-laws; Loyalist Indians who were, like some rebel opponents, Freemasons - and he comments on the backgrounds of staff and rank-and-file officers, some of whom were lawyers or physicians while others were un-

schooled, skilled frontiersmen. Black Loyalist and rebel soldiers, slaves, free blacks among the Iroquois, and a black physician also served during the struggle. The military strategies, tactics, and logistics are also documented briefly and the personnel strengths of military units and atrocities on both sides are recounted. Curiously, there is a redundant story about American compassion for an old Cayuga woman with slight variations (pp. 128-129, 134-135). In some instances the reader must be careful to discern correctly the person about whom Mintz refers because there are multiple Butlers (John, Richard, Walter, William, and Zebulon), Clintons (George, Sir Henry, and James), and Johnsons (Francis, Guy, Sir John, Sir William, and William). Some fought on opposite sides and even against one another in the same battle, so that the reader must pay careful attention. Mintz often includes present-day community names and highway routes where Indian trails or expedition roads once existed, helping to orient the reader to the current cultural geography. He writes (p. 4) that more soldiers' diaries survive for this campaign than for any other in the American Revolution, and he made extensive use of these primary documents.

Graymont's *Iroquois in the American Revolution* (published in 1972 and still in print), is the most comprehensive assessment of the topic of Indians and the War for Independence.[1] She begins ca. 1710 by providing information on the six tribes and the context for the conflict, and contains a more detailed background on Iroquois attempt to maintain neutrality. Likewise, there is important material on the immediate results and long-term effects of the American Revolution on the native populations. Graymont discusses the Sullivan-Clinton-Brodhead expeditions in some detail (pp. 192-241) in her more broadly conceived volume, while Starkey [3] provides only an overview (pp.118-125). Fischer's *A Well-Executed Failure* (1997) is a brilliant military analysis of the Continental Army's first expedition against Indians.[2] He focuses upon army field operations;

therefore, his book is different from Mintz's volume. Fischer writes (p. 190) that "in a broad sense Sullivan's expedition turned up problems in the relationship among the government, its people, and the military that would plague the nation for decades." Government assumptions about the virtue and altruism of its citizens had been proven false, while the citizens expected more help than they received from the Continental Army. However, the neonate federal government lacked the ability of coercion in the face of strong political systems in New York and Pennsylvania. Fischer contends that the "well-executed failure" was the responsibility of Washington rather than Sullivan. While the former hoped that Niagara would be taken, he did not provide the means for Sullivan to accomplish this goal. Sullivan's scorched-earth offensive in Iroquoia served as a catalyst to rally the Iroquois to the British cause, particularly because the British were able to maintain their Indian allies during the harsh winter. An advantage of Fischer's book is that there are plans of military formations and a separate selected bibliography with individual sections on manuscript sources, printed primary sources, and secondary sources.

Fischer's evaluation of Washington's offensive and defensive strategy concludes that the Continental Army grew in sophistication with respect to operational planning. The firm decision was made that the initial priority was to destroy the Seneca because they were the most populous of the Iroquois and provided almost half of the native warriors. Washington's intelligence-gathering network formed the foundation for the operational scheme, while the British suffered intelligence failures and failed to recognize the veracity of the Iroquois about American strength (p. 42, 60). Tactically, Sullivan's force was a "typical European-style army in its configuration for battle in the wilderness" (p. 61 [2]). Fischer contends that "the Iroquois focused their attention on fighting in 1778, and their farming had suffered as a result" (p. 84). I find this an invalid assumption for sever-

al reasons. Traditionally, Iroquois women were responsible for the horticulture while men hunted and conducted warfare. During 1778, the Americans did not molest Indian villages or crops, but the rich harvest of 1779 destroyed by the American expeditions indicates that much land was under cultivation and substantial quantities of corn were harvested. Logistically, seven of ten British supply ships arrived in Quebec in August 1779, so that sufficient supplies were available in Montreal, Niagara, and Detroit. Sullivan and Clinton's forces were obliged to forage for food in Seneca and Cayuga country because of spoiled and inadequate food and transportation problems, but Clinton had less of a problem because supplies had been stockpiled at Lake Otsego during the previous year in preparation for the attack on Canada that had been called off (p. 186 [2]). Washington, Fischer contends, never understood the scope of the food supply problem and the failure to inform the Commissary Department of Sullivan's needs; "from the standpoint of logistics, it failed at the strategic level" wrote Fischer (pp. 115-119, 125 [2]). Therefore, he concludes that Sullivan was not to blame and stresses that the failure to take Niagara was the fault of the ultimate commander, George Washington.

Your reviewer was particularly struck by parallels to British and American political and military strategies elsewhere in the world. For example, "The Great Game," the politico-economic power struggle between Russia and Britain for control of Afghanistan. In this conflict Britain sought to prevent a Russian presence in the Gulf of Arabia, the Indian Ocean, and the Indian Subcontinent by enlisting local allies. The Iroquois found that their faith in the British was misplaced and that they, too, were pawns to be manipulated for the benefit of the Crown (Fischer, p. 88). The British "Great Game" strategy of divide and conquer was applied in the Colonial wars in North America, India, and South and East Africa.

Seeds of Empire is an engaging synthesis and assessment of a component of one of the most significant episodes in American cultural and military history. It is compelling history and comprehensive in outlook, considering the struggle in New York and Pennsylvania between American colonists and American Indians native to that region - the Iroquois. This is excellent scholarship, superior in some ways to other accounts in that it details the conflict of the Tories and their Indian allies against the American settlers, the Continental Army, and their native allies. No other volume treats all of the major battles and expeditions for the decade 1773-1783. Fischer's meticulous evaluation of the Sullivan-Clinton campaign is essential reading in order to understand the strategy, tactics, logistics, leadership, and civilian-military interactions. Therefore, Mintz's book may be read alone or in conjunction with other syntheses and is useful for scholars and students of the Colonial era, the American Revolution, and military history.

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