The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts and the Creation of Race in the Atlantic World

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November 29, 2004

Chapter 3

Native American Autonomy and Atlantic Responses to SPG Missionary Efforts

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As the foremost Anglican missionary organization in the eighteenth century, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (the "SPG" or "the Society") worked to spread Episcopal Protestant Christianity throughout the Atlantic world. From its inception, the SPG aimed at both the provision of spiritual care for the colonies' burgeoning settler population and at spreading the Gospel among the non-Christian peoples of North America. At the heart of the SPG's conversion project for Native Americans was its push to proselytize among the Mohawks and other nations of the Iroquois.

In this chapter, the Mohawks' interaction with the SPG is analyzed within a context that examines the relationship between developing concepts of race and human difference and European efforts to spread Christianity to North America. A striking feature of the SPG's involvement with the Mohawks was its comparability to the Society's effort to spread Anglicanism to the Atlantic world's exploding African-American slave population in the first decades of the eighteenth century. Yet, despite these similarities a significant number of Mohawks adopted Anglicanism as their own, while a majority of African-American slaves rejected the SPG's message. After briefly comparing these two contemporaneous SPG efforts, this chapter will examine how differing Mohawk and African-American responses to Christianity were interpreted by the SPG and others in Britain and colonial America. In a period crucial in the

development of ideas about human difference, British perceptions of the Mohawks' were largely positive, and much of this positive reaction can be attributed to Mohawk attitudes about Christianity.

In September 1701 the Society considered a request from the Board of Trade to send missionaries among the "praying Indians of Canada" and in 1703, in response to another request from the Government, the Society dispatched Thoroughgood Moore as its first missionary to the "Indians in New York." The Mohawks' response to this first missionary established a pattern for Iroquois-SPG relations that was to last until the American Revolution: Anglican missionary efforts took place largely on Mohawk terms. Mohawk leaders diplomatically welcomed Moore, but refused to allow his residence among them until they had consulted with the other nations of the Iroquois Confederacy. By 1705, after a year of idling in Albany, Moore had abandoned his mission to the Mohawks and was proposing that he serve as an itinerant missionary to the settler population of New Jersey.[1]

As Daniel Richter has shown, internal Iroquois politics in the eighteenth century were shaped by the interactions of groups of Pro-French, Pro-English, and neutralist leaders among the Five Nations. As "the paradigmatic modern Indians" of the eighteenth century, the Iroquois employed a diffuse, localist political system to maintain relations with more than one imperial power and thereby preserve their cultural and political autonomy.[2] An element of this successful policy was the acceptance or rejection of

[1] SPG, *Journal*, vol. 1, p. 117. SPG, *Letters*, A2-75, A2-122.

[2] Daniel K. Richter, *The Ordeal of the Longhouse: The Peoples of the Iroquois League in the Era of European Colonization*. Williamsburg: Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1992. p. 219, 221-222. Daniel K. Richter, *Facing East from Indian Country: A Native History of Early America*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001. p. 166.

missionaries, Catholic and Protestant, by various villages, and it was against this backdrop of careful Iroquoian diplomacy that the SPG undertook its missionary work.

Yet, this intertwining of religion and politics does not mean that Native American acceptance of Christianity is reducible to political expediency. Native peoples responded to Christianity in many ways.[3] Indeed, the many connections between sacred and secular among the Iroquois closely resemble the contemporaneous religious and political rivalry of their Catholic French and Protestant English suitors. In neither the European nor the Native American case did the political implications of religion eliminate the space for heartfelt religious belief. By the time the SPG was formed in 1701, the Iroquois had a long experience with Christianity, which dated at least from the Jesuit Isaac Jogues' capture and execution by the Mohawks in the 1640s.[4] Through the presence of Dutch ministers on the fringes of the New Amsterdam colony, and contact with the New England Puritans, Protestantism was a sporadic presence among the Five Nations from the 1650s. In the 1690s, Godfrey Dellius, a pro-English Dutch minister, claimed to have two hundred Mohawk proselytes.[5]

These Protestant Mohawks, who formed the core of those to whom the SPG later ministered, established a settlement at Tiononderoge. In 1710, after the visit of the celebrated "four Indian Kings" to London, the SPG's mission to the Mohawks was

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[3] John Webster Grant, *Moon of Wintertime: Missionaries and the Indians of Canada in Encounter since 1534*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984. pp. 239 – 258.

[4] José António Brandão, *"Your fyre shall burn no more": Iroquois Policy toward New France and Its Native Allies to 1701*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997. pp. 96 – 103.

[5] Daniel Richter, "Iroquois vs. Iroquois: Jesuit Missions and Christianity in Village Politics, 1642 – 1686," *Ethnohistory*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (Winter, 1985), pp. 1 – 16. Richter, *Ordeal of the Longhouse*, p. 178.

reinvigorated as part of a wider effort to secure an Anglo-Iroquoian alliance. With the backing of the British government and colonial officials, Fort Hunter was built near Tiononderoge, a chapel was built to house a Protestant Mohawk congregation, and the SPG sent another missionary, William Andrews. The highlight of Andrews' mission was the 1713 publication of a translation of the Book of Common Prayer into Mohawk, but he too became disheartened and gave up his mission in 1719, and for eight years the mission was vacant. In 1727 the SPG appointed a new missionary to the Mohawks, John Miln, who was succeeded in 1735 by Thomas Barclay, an American-born graduate of Yale. By 1740, Barclay reported that all of the Mohawks but two or three had been baptized.[6] Typically, SPG ministers were resident most of the year in Albany and spent only part of each year in the Mohawks' villages, meaning that individual Mohawks had considerable latitude to selectively accept or reject different elements of the religion offered to them by Anglican ministers.

As Barclay's experience indicates, baptism appears to have become a widely accepted rite among these Mohawks, but SPG ministers throughout the eighteenth century continued to lament the Mohawks' immorality and unorthodoxy. There are signs that the Mohawks, as individuals and in communities, adapted Anglicanism to meet their own needs over the course of the eighteenth century, and that in this form Christianity became an essential part of life for many.[7] The missionary William Andrews noted in 1718 that, "They are indeed pretty carefull of their Childrens Baptism, and so are some of them that live more loosely. The reason is most of the Indians that pretend to be

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[6] SPG, *Letters*, B10/112, B11/155.

[7] Richter, *The Ordeal of the Longhouse*, pp. 222 – 223.

Christians, conceive that alone is sufficient to make them fit for Heaven, and there there is but little need of doing any thing more excepting a few, who think they are also obliged to receive the sacrament of the Lords Supper once."[8] In 1772, SPG missionary John Stuart captured both the importance religious participation had assumed for the Mohawks living in the village of Canajohare, and their maintenance of a particular moral code at variance with his own. He reported:

> I find it extremely difficult to act a conscientious Part among them, for, let their common Behaviour be what it will, they are desirous, in general, to partake of the Holy Communion. Now, to admit those who are notorious Drunkards & vicious in their Behaviour brings a Scandal on Religion, and offends the sober Part of their Brethren. And, to refuse them, reduces them to a kind of Dispair and often urges them to commit worse Crimes than before: for they then are pointed at as bad Persons unfit for Society.[9]

In adopting elements of Christianity including baptism and participation in public worship, but in continuing to live in ways that their SPG ministers found immoral, this Mohawk community was fashioning its own version of Anglicanism.

However, even as Protestant Christianity became part of life for a group of Mohawks, some in the SPG hierarchy in London questioned whether or not the conversion of Native Americans was possible without a dramatic change in their modes of life. As Henry Stebbing, a royal chaplain and Chancellor of Salisbury, preached before the SPG in 1742:

> Of a general Conversion of the native Indians I see no great likelihood at present. If this is to be done by human Means, there must be the necessary Preparations for human Means to operate. They must be polished into good Manners; there must be some common intercourse between us; we must bring them to some good liking of our Laws, and Customs. All this is necessary, where the Power of

[8] SPG, Letters, A13/332-337

[9] SPG, *Letters*, B2/199.

> Miracles is wanting; and when, or whether ever it will be done, God only knows.[10]

Stebbing was not alone in this view, and others in the SPG made similar observations and urged the Society to focus its efforts on British America's European colonists. Yet, because of the strategic importance of the Iroquois, and because the SPG as a whole remained committed to the idea of Native American conversion, the Society continued to send missionaries among the Mohawks.

In a wider landscape in which most Native American leaders, and the Iroquois confederacy as a whole, sought to balance French and British influences, a portion of the Mohawks were unique in their continuing close alliance with the British. SPG missionaries continued to be accepted by these Mohawks through the 1750s and 1760s, while the Mohawks fought as English allies against their own Native American enemies and the French. By the early 1770s, SPG leaders such as Charles Moss, the Bishop of St. David's, were invoking the Mohawks as ancient and faithful allies of Britain.[11] As the crises of the American Revolution intensified in the 1770s, both the British and nascent American governments lobbied the Iroquois for their support or at least for their neutrality, with missionaries attempting to sway members of the Five Nations in both directions.

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[10] Henry Stebbing, *A Sermon Preached before the Incorporated Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts; At Their Anniversary Meeting In The Parish-Church of St. Mary-le-Bow; On Friday, February 19, 1741-42. By Henry Stebbing, D.D Chaplain in Ordinary to His Majesty, and Chancellor of Sarum.* London: Printed by E. Owen, and Sold by J. Roberts in Warwick-Lane, 1742. pp. 19 – 20.

[11] Charles Moss, *A Sermon Preached before the Incorporated Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts; At Their Anniversary Meeting In The Parish Church of St. Mary-le-Bow; On Friday, February 21, 1772. By the Right Reverend Charles Lord Bishop of St. David's.* London: Printed by T. Harrison and S. Brooke, in Warwick-Lane, 1772. p. xxiv.

In the colonies, SPG ministers continued to play roles as emissaries of both crown and church, but even from within the most intense political negotiations, Native American religious interests could emerge. Among the concerns expressed by Mohawk leader Little Abraham at a 1775 meeting with representatives from the second Continental Congress was that, "The Mohawks are frequently alarmed with reports that their minister is to be torn away from them. It would occasion great disturbance were he to be taken away. The King sent him to them, and they would look upon it as taking away one of their body."[12] Similarly, at a 1775 meeting, an Oneida delegation spoke on both a number of their political interests and on their concern that their pro-colonial, Presbyterian minister Samuel Kirkland was unwilling to baptize all of their children, he insisting instead that only those whose parents lived rightly could be baptized.[13]

After several years of precarious neutrality, the Iroquois league was split by the American revolution, with a pro-English grouping under the leadership of the Mohawk Joseph Brant and a pro-American grouping of mainly Oneidas and Tuscaroras. In the vicious fighting that ensued, pro-English Mohawks fled their homes in what is now New York for greater safety in Canada and the Anglican chapel at the abandoned Fort Hunter was desecrated by American troops.[14] SPG missionary to the Mohawks, John Stuart, who himself migrated to Canada, reported in 1784 that a community of Mohawk refugees at Niagara "assembled in a decent and commodious Church, erected principally by

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[12] John Wolfe Lydekker, *The Faithful Mohawks*. New York: Macmillan, 1938. p. 143.

[13] Barbara Graymont, *The Iroquois in the American Revolution*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1972. p. 56.

[14] Richter, *Facing East from Indian Country*, p. 220. Graymont, *Iroquois in the American Revolution*, pp. 148 – 149.

themselves, with the greatest seeming devotion and becoming gravity."[15] When the British lost the war, those dispossessed Mohawks most attached to the British established two refugee communities in Canada - on the Bay of Quinté and on the Grand River – where Anglican worship remained the community norm.[16] A 1793 depiction of the Mohawk Village at Grand River features two buildings prominently, the Council House and the Mohawk Church.[17]

With this general history of the SPG's involvement with the Mohawks in mind, a wider perspective is also useful. In some ways, the Mohawks' acceptance of Anglicanism defies easy understanding. While the Mohawks were so important to the English, the SPG's knowledge of Native American culture was surprisingly shallow. As an institution, the SPG did not develop a tool for assembling knowledge about the cultures of Native American peoples comparable to the *Relations* of their Jesuit rivals. As Protestants, SPG missionaries could be less culturally flexible than Catholic priests, whose emphasis on the sacraments more easily co-existed with Native American religious practices that emphasized ritual over doctrine.[18] Yet, those Mohawks who adopted Anglicanism in the early eighteenth century remained considerably devoted to

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[15] Lydekker, *Faithful Mohawks*, p. 175.

[16] Graymont, *Iroquois in the American Revolution*, p. 264. Colin G. Calloway, *Crown and Calumet: British-Indian Relations, 1783 – 1815*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press. pp. 48 – 49.

[17] Robert S. Allen, *His Majesty's Indian Allies: British Indian Policy in The Defence of Canada, 1774 – 1815*. Toronto: Dundurn Pres, 1992. p. 102.

[18] James Axtell, "Agents of Change: Jesuits in the Post-Columbian World," in *Beyond 1492: Encounters in Colonial North America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992. pp. 152 – 170.

their religion and Anglicanism became a particular marker of community for a segment of the Mohawk nation.

The SPG's missionary work among the Mohawks is usually evaluated against the efforts of French Jesuits, or the seventeenth century efforts of New England missionaries like John Eliot.[19] Here a different comparative approach is employed by considering the SPG's Mohawk mission alongside that of the Society's outreach to African-American slaves. This comparative perspective is useful for three reasons. First, this comparison is revealing because of the very different responses of Mohawks and many African Americans to the SPG's message. While a community of Mohawks adopted Anglicanism in this period - and they were the only Native American group the SPG made a sustained effort to convert in the eighteenth century - Anglicanism did not come to occupy a similarly integral position in an African-American community.

Second, this comparative approach is useful because the SPG saw these two missions as connected. The Society's first mission to convert African-Americans, the first such effort in British North America, grew out of the Society's desire to convert the Mohawks. In 1703, Elias Neau, the Society's first catechist focused on African-Americans, declined the SPG's request that he take up a mission to the Mohawks, but instead began his mission to New York City's slave population.[20] The SPG would also rely on the same catechism for its efforts to convert both populations. Thomas Wilson's *The Knowledge and Practice of Christianity Made Easy*, which was first published in

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[19] James Axtell, *The Invasion Within: The Contests of Cultures in Colonial North America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985. pp. 242 – 267. James Axtell, "Some Thoughts on the Ethnohistory of Missions," in *After Columbus: Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial North America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988. pp. 47 – 57.

[20] SPG, *Journal*, vol. 1, p. 98; SPG, *Letters*, A1/106.

1740 as *An Essay Towards an Instruction for the Indians*, was billed as also suitable for use with African-American catechumens.[21] Throughout the eighteenth century, the SPG considered missionary work among both African-Americans and among Native Americans as of a kind – as part of a continuing outreach to the "heathen" (even long after some of these people had become Christians) and as distinct from their work among the European "Christian" population.

Third, this comparison is worthwhile because there are some noteworthy similarities between the cultures and religions of the African-American and Native American peoples with whom SPG ministers interacted in the eighteenth century. Here, over-simplification is an important concern, but there are some noteworthy general commonalties. West African religions, like those of the Indians of eastern North America, were characterized by a belief in a non-visible world - a belief they shared with Christians. West Africans and eastern Native Americans also shared a belief in a multiplicity of beings who inhabited that world. The inherent goodness or evil of these beings was more akin to the gradations found in humans than it was to the dichotomy that

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[21] Thomas Wilson, *An Essay Towards An Instruction For The Indians, Explaining the most Essential Doctrines of Christianity. Which may be of Use To such Christians, as have not well considered the Meaning of the Religion they profess; Or who profess to know God, but in Works do deny Him. In several short and plain dialogues. Together with Directions and Prayers For The Heathen World, Missionaries, Catechumens, Private Persons, Families, Of Parents, for their Children, For Sundays, &c. By the Right Reverend Father in God, Thomas, Lord Bishop of Sodor and Man*. London: J. Osborn, 1740. Thomas Wilson, *The Knowledge and Practice of Christianity Made Easy To the Meanest Capacities: Or, An Essay Towards an Instruction for the Indians; Which will be of Use to Such Christians, as have not well considered the Meaning of the Religion they profess; Or, who profess to know God, but in Works do deny Him. In several short and plain Dialogues. Together with Directions and Prayers for The Heathen World, Missionaries, Catechumens, Private Persons, Families, Of Parents for their Children, For Sundays, &c. The Second Edition, with Additions; and corrected throughout. By the Right Reverend Father in God, Thomas, Lord Bishop of Sodor and Man. Second ed*. London: Printed; and Sold by J. Osborn, at the Golden Bull in Pater-noster Row, 1741.

defined the Christian god and devil. Most tellingly, the indigenous religions of both West Africa and eastern North America both lacked traditions of dogmatism or religious exclusiveness.[22] The similarities also extend to these two groups' experience with Christianity. By the time of the SPG's arrival on the religious scene of the Atlantic basin in the eighteenth century, both Africans, as John Thornton has observed, and the Mohawks, as discussed above, had a long experience with Christianity.[23]

Moreover, both Mohawks and African-Americans received SPG missions during times of intense individual and community stress. For the Iroquois as a whole, the turn of the eighteenth century marked the climax of the ordeals of war, spiritual decay, and community fragmentation that had been stimulated by the Europeans arrival in America. Pro-English Mohawks faced a particularly traumatic situation, as they had suffered badly from wars with the French in the 1690s.[24] For African-Americans, the stresses caused by slavery led to what Jon Butler has called "an African Spiritual Holocaust" in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In the slave colonies of North America, African religions were not replicated as fully functioning systems, and enslaved people had to refashion new religious lives out of a mixture of African religious practices and Christianity.[25] In both cases, Native Americans and African-Americans struggled to

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[22] Richter, *Looking East from Indian Country*, pp. 83 – 87. John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World*. Second Edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. pp. 235 – 253.

[23] Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World*, pp. 253 – 262. By 1679, about 20% of the Iroquois were already Roman Catholics. Richter, *Ordeal of the Longhouse*, p. 116.

[24] Richter, *Ordeal of the Longhouse*, p. 170 – 191.

[25] Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990. p. 157.

make spiritual sense of deep challenges and to preserve and form community ties among people dislocated by Europeans actions.

What clearly *separates* the Mohawks' experience with the SPG from that of African-Americans was the wide gulf between Mohawk autonomy and black slavery as a background for their encounter with Anglicanism. The African-American experience with Anglicanism was different because from its inception the SPG held that slavery and Christianity were entirely compatible through Biblical sanction of the institution. Many of the SPG's ministers were slaveholders, and the Society as an institution owned hundreds of slaves and a Barbados sugar plantation. While many Native Americans were also enslaved by Europeans, Iroquois military power meant that the Mohawks were more likely to experience forms of slavery as masters than as servants.[26] As the eighteenth century progressed the SPG, like masters throughout the British Atlantic world, increasingly associated slavery with peoples of African descent. Because of Iroquois autonomy and European needs to win their support, the Mohawks were in a stronger position than most African-Americans to dictate the terms of their religious and cultural encounter with the Society's missionaries.

The centrality of Iroquois autonomy to their encounter with SPG missionaries is well illustrated by the language the SPG used in discussing Native American conversion as opposed to African-American slave conversion. As John Williams, the Bishop of Chichester, baldly put it when discussing the conversion of black slaves in a sermon

[26] Native American slavery had a considerable impact on proposed SPG missions to Native Americans in South Carolina. See Alan Gallay, *The Indian Slave Trade: The Rise of the English Empire in the American South, 1670 – 1717*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002. pp. 226 – 230. For differing views of Iroquoian slavery, see Richter, *Ordeal of the Longhouse*, pp. 69 – 74; and William A. Starna and Ralph Wilkins, "Northern Iroquoian Slavery," *Ethnohistory*, vol. 38, no. 1 (Winter, 1991), pp. 34 – 57.

before the SPG, "we may reasonably expect a greater Success in the Conversion of such, than of Natives; because they are wholly in the Power of their Masters, and are not in a Condition to refuse whatever they demand of them."[27] This difference in perception impacted SPG missionary efforts on the ground. For example, several SPG ministers worked to publish a translation of the Book of Common Prayer into Mohawk, but no ministers undertook any sort of similar effort to create either works in African languages or works aimed specifically at Africans.[28] More broadly, slavery meant that most SPG ministers considered Africans and African-Americans as an undifferentiated mass of "Negroes" and consequently paid little attention to cultural differences among the different African peoples enslaved in North America. No particular African nation was singled out for SPG missionary work in the way that the Mohawks were.

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[27] John Williams, *A Sermon Preached before the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts. At the Parish Church of St. Lawrence Jewry, February 15, 1705/6. By the Right Reverend John Lord Bishop of Chichester*. London: Printed by Joseph Downing, for Thomas Speed in Exchange Alley overagainst Jonathan's Coffee-House, 1706. pp. 20 – 21.

[28] This work was first published in 1713, and went through several subsequent editions in the eighteenth century. See *The Order for Morning and Evening Prayer, And Administration of the Sacraments, And Some Other Offices of the Church, Together with A Collection of Prayers, and some Sentences of the Holy Scriptures, necessary for Knowledge Practice. Ne Yagawagh Niyadewighniserage Yonderaenayendaghkwa orghoongene neoni Yogaraskha yoghseragwegough. Neoni Yagawagh Sakramenthogoon, neoni oya Addereanaiyent ne Onoghsadogeaghtige. Oni Ne Watkeanissaghtough Odd'yage Addereanaiyent, neoni Siniyoghthare ne Kaghyadoghseradogeaghti, ne Wahooni Ayagoderieandaragge neoni Ayondadderighhoenie. Collected, and translated into the Mohawk Language under the Direction of the late Rev. Mr. William Andrews, the late Rev. Dr. Henry Barclay, and the Rev. Mr. John Oglivie: Formerly Missionaries from the venerable Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, to the Mohawk Indians*. 1769. For a study of how missionaries use of printed materials influenced their conversion efforts, see James Axtell, "The Power of Print in the Eastern Woodlands," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Series, v. 44, no. 2 (April 1987), pp. 300 – 309. Axtell's study is limited to the seventeenth century, and he does not discuss the Mohawk Book of Common Prayer.

Differences in status also impacted the SPG's response to perceived immorality in their intended proselytes. SPG ministers saw sin almost everywhere in colonial North America, but their responses to it depended largely on the position of the sinner in colonial society. Because African-Americans were overwhelmingly enslaved, some SPG ministers who sought to convert them saw masters' control over their slaves' lives as a potential tool for enforcing Christian morality. These efforts were never entirely successful – slaves retained important measures of autonomy over such intimate details of their lives and masters were often uninterested in the conversion of their slaves – but the differences in the SPG's approaches are revealing. Francis Le Jau, SPG missionary in South Carolina in the 1710s, was among the Anglican ministers most interested in the conversion of both Native Americans and Africa-Americans. His failures in attempting to convince slaves to conform to Christian marriage practices led him to urge that no slave be allowed to marry without the consent of their masters to better prevent divorce.[29] Le Jau's contemporary as missionary to the Mohawks, William Andrews, was similarly frustrated by the prevalence of divorce among the Iroquois, but the Mohawks were free to accept or reject Christianity as they saw fit and there was little Andrews could do about it. They stopped asking Andrews to marry them, and he reported "they Say, they cannot so well put away their wives if they do [not] like them and take Others When they are Marryed after the Christian way."[30]

While the conversions of both Native Americans and African-Americans to Christianity can be seen as elements in a long-term process of accommodation with

[29] SPG, *Letters*, A5/120.

[30] SPG, *Letters*, A12/327 – 336.

European culture, paradoxes abound here. Those Mohawks who accepted Anglicanism did so in part because of its weakness and their strength, which enabled them to adapt it to meet their own needs. African-American slaves, who were in closer contact with both European culture and Anglican ministers, tended to reject Anglicanism because it was too bound up in the institution of slavery it sanctioned. For its part, the SPG at times grew disheartened with its mission to the Mohawks - even as Anglicanism began to take hold in an Indian community - because the Mohawks version of Anglicanism did not match missionaries' expectations of how a Christian community should behave. Yet, the SPG continued its effort to convert the Mohawks, in time regarding it is a bright spot in their history. Some SPG members advocated harnessing the social control inherent in the British Atlantic world's slave societies to further spread Christianity. In both cases, often to the consternation of the SPG, Native Americans and African-Americans responded to Christianity based on what it did for their lives.

What can this analysis of SPG missionary efforts tell us about the wider history of the development of race in the British Atlantic? The SPG's experience with the Mohawks illustrates a pervasive recognition by these missionaries of the freedom of Native Americans to accept or reject Christianity. We should consider how that reality was interpreted around the British Atlantic world. As a number of historians of early modern Britain have argued, Protestantism lay at the heart of both the British state and developing notions of British identity.[31] Similarly, religion and Christian scripture were vital tools for Europeans seeking to make sense of "others" and human difference. In the long period between Europe's first contact with America and the full articulation of race

[31] Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837*. New Haven: Yale Unversity Press, 1992.

as the division of humankind based on inheritable phenotype in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, religion remained essential to many peoples' worldviews.[32] In the same period when Britons were defining themselves through the language of religion, they were also defining Native Americans and African-Americans around the Atlantic world.

Against this backdrop, the interaction between the SPG and the Mohawks looms particularly large. The Iroquois were "the most well known Native Americans in Imperial circles" in the eighteenth century.[33] The Iroquois were the subjects of a two-volume history published in New York in the 1720s and London in the 1740s.[34] The pro-English Iroquois leader Joseph Brant was painted by George Romney in the 1770s, Gilbert Stuart in the 1780s, and Charles Wilson Peale in the 1790s.[35] In the crisis of the American Revolution, the Mohawks were used as symbols in complex ways when rebellious colonists both dressed themselves as Mohawks to dump tea into Boston harbor

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[32] Winthrop D. Jordan. *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968. pp. 17-20. Ivan Hannaford, *Race: The History of an Idea in the West*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996. David Brion Davis, "Constructing Race: A Reflection," *William and Mary Quarterly*, v. 54, n. 1 (January 1997). pp. 7-18. Benjamin Braude, "The Sons of Noah and the Construction of Ethnic and Geographical Identities in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods," *William and Mary Quarterly*, v. 54, n. 1 (January 1997), pp. 103-142. Colin Kidd, *British Identities before Nationalism: Ethnicity and Nationhood in the Atlantic World, 1600-1800*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

[33] Daniel K. Richter, "Native Peoples of North America," in P.J. Marshall, ed. *Oxford History of the British Empire*, v. 2 "The Eighteenth Century," p. 358.

[34] Cadwallader Colden, *The History of the Five Indian Nations Depending on the Province of New-York in America*. New York, 1727. Cadwallader Colden, *The History of the Five Indian Nations of Canada, Which Are Dependent on the Province of New-York in America, and Are the Barrier between the English and French in That Part of the World*. London, 1747.

[35] These, and other portraits of Brant are reproduced in Isabel Thompson Kelsay, *Joseph Brant, 1743 – 1807. Man of Two Worlds*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1984.

and burned an effigy of King George wearing feathers like "Johnson's savages" and wrapped in the Union Jack.[36] Some historians have seen Iroquois influence as so pervasive that they have engaged in a long-running debate on the influence of the Iroquois League on the Articles of Confederation and on the United States Constitution.[37] The Anglican Mohawks whom the SPG ministered to in the eighteenth century were one relatively small group in one Native American nation, but because of their autonomy and strategic power, their influence exceeded their numbers in the wider culture of the British Atlantic.

This prominence of the Iroquois and the Mohawks in the eighteenth century is important because in the history of the cultural construction of categories of human difference, perception shaped reality. The way that the Mohawks responded to Christianity did not just impact Iroquois politics or warfare, but also affected how Native Americans were conceptualized. This is well illustrated by looking at the widely known visit of the so-called Four Indian Kings to London in 1710. In fact, at least three of these kings were not authentic Iroquois leaders at all. Two of these men were largely uninfluential pro-Anglican Mohawks. The third was not even an Iroquois, but was actually a Mahican, a people allied with the Mohawks but not an integral part of the Iroquois league. The fourth, billed as the "emperor of the Mohawks" was the most

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[36] Richter, *Facing East from Indian Country*, pp. 218 – 219.

[37] Donald Grinde, *The Iroquois and the Founding of the American Nation*. San Francisco: Indian Historian Press, 1977. Bruce E. Johansen, *Forgotten Founders: Benjamin Franklin, the Iroquois, and the Rationale for the American Revolution*. Ipswich: Gambit, 1982. Refutations of this thesis include Elisabeth Tooker, "The United States Constitution and the Iroquois League," *Ethnohistory*, v. 35, no. 4 (Autumn 1988), pp. 305 – 336. See also debates on the issue in *Ethnohistory*, v. 37, no. 3 (Summer 1990) and *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Series, v. 53, no. 3 (July 1996).

legitimate Iroquois leader, but even he was still a young man whose influence did not extend beyond the Mohawk council. While their influence at home was still slight, in London they were the first Native American visitors "thought to posses the authority of rulers." With the backing of colonial officials including Peter Schuyler, the Mayor of Albany, and Francis Nicholson, a career colonial official who had served as Lieutenant Governor of New York and Governor of Virginia and Maryland, these pro-English Indians, who had their own interest in closer ties with Britain, traveled to London. There, "kings" and officials lobbied the British Government for a closer alliance with the Iroquois and more support for a planned invasion of Canada. The London visit created a sensation. The four Indian "kings" made a triumphal circuit of London, seeing and being seen by high officials and common people in settings as diverse as a royal audience and a cockfight. Their visit inspired an outpouring of works of popular and high culture including poems, ballads, paintings, and comments by authors including Addison, Steele, and Defoe.[38]

In this light, a closer look at one element in the "kings'" visit is worthwhile. Christianity was an integral component in the initial conception of the "kings" visit to London. Francis Nicholson, one of the chief European promoters of the visit, was not just a colonial official and soldier, he was also a long-time, influential, and extremely active member of the SPG. Indeed, Nicholson, whose life blended support for the

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[38] Eric Hinderaker, "The 'Four Indian Kings' and the Imaginative Construction of the First British Empire," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Series, v. 53, no. 3 (July 1996), pp. 487 – 526; quote, p. 488. John G. Garratt, *The Four Indian Kings*. Ottawa: Public Archives of Canada, 1985. For a catalog of works related to the visit, see pp. 21 – 135. Richmond P. Bond, *Queen Anne's American Kings*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952. Richter, *Ordeal of the Longhouse*, pp. 226 – 230, 367 – 368 n. 29.

established church with a commitment to royal government in the colonies, is a neat English counterpart to those Iroquois leaders who saw religion and politics as intertwined.[39] As Nicholson and other colonial backers of the visit realized, the four "kings" could only portray their assigned roles as reliable allies and noble representatives of a powerful people if they were Christian. Their Protestantism made saleable their desire for ministers, their suspicion of the French, and their connections with the British. This realization helps us understand why all four of the pro-English Indians who visited London were baptized by Protestant ministers before their arrival in England, some perhaps in preparation for the visit. Similarly, all four had Christian names in addition to their Indian ones.

Christianity was also important in the various activities the "kings" undertook during their visit. When the four "kings" were granted their audience with Queen Anne, they were reported to have requested two things – more British action in the war against French Canada and "some to instruct us" in religion. The "kings" also appeared at a meeting of the SPG, at which the Society consulted with them and with Schuyler and Nicholson about the specifics of a plan to dispatch missionaries to the Iroquois. Among their many appearances around the capital, they heard the Bishop of London preach a sermon at St. James's Chapel, and dined with both the Bishop of London and the Archbishop of Canterbury. Among the many gifts these men returned home with were

[39] For Nicholson's long involvement with the Society in many areas, see, for example, SPG, *Journal*, v. 1, pp. 34, 235, 243; v. 2, pp. 2, 163, 185; v. 3, pp. 173, 244; v. 4, pp. 111, 260, 268; v. 5, p. 158. SPG, *Letters*, A4/151, A4/152, A4/153, A4/155, A5/6, A7/76, A7/478-479. Bruce T. McCully, "Governor Francis Nicholson, Patron 'Par Excellence' of Religion and Learning in Colonial America," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Series, v. 39, no. 2 (April 1982), pp. 310 – 333. Stephen Saunders Webb, "The Strange Career of Francis Nicholson," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Series, v. 23, n. 4 (October 1966), pp. 513 – 548.

copies of the Bible in quarto and the Book of Common Prayer in "red Turkey leather" presented to each of them by the SPG.[40]

The "kings'" relationship to Christianity also infused many of the responses the visit generated. In the aftermath of the visit Elkanah Settle, City Poet of London, published his *Pindaric Poem, on the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts* which declared the kings "A Christian Splendour from an Ethnic Sky."[41] The centrality of Christian conversion to understanding the king's visit is shown further by the most widespread culture object created by the visit, the ballad "The Four Indian Kings." In this work, which exists in several versions and which continued to be republished long after the actual visit of the kings, one of the kings falls in a love with a beautiful lady who makes her acceptance of his suit conditional upon his becoming a Christian.[42] The ballad ignored the actual religious position of the kings – they were already baptized – to emphasize the importance of Christianity as a defining marker of who was and who was not worthy of incorporation into British society.

Finally, religion was also represented in the paintings that were produced during the Indians' visit. Of the several sets of paintings and engravings of the "kings" produced during the visit, the most symbolically rich were the full-length paintings made through royal commission by John Verelst. Verelst's portraits are interesting for a number of

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[40] Bond, *Queen Anne's Kings*, pp. 7 – 14, 94 – 95. Hideraker, pp. 491 n. 8, 494. For the many printed versions circulated of the kings' speech, see Garrat, pp. 77 – 86 and SPG, *Journal*, v. 1, pp. 474 – 482; Appendix B/138, B/139; SPG, *Letters*, A5/85, A5/86, A5/88, A5/91, A5/93, A5/94, A5/95.

[41] Elkanah Settle, *A pindaric poem, on the propagation of the gospel in foreign parts.: A work of piety so zealously recommended and promoted by the Her Most Gracious Majesty*. London: Printed for the Author, 1711.

[42] Garrat, *The Four Indian Kings*, pp. 36 – 58.

reasons. He painted these visitors not as ethnographic studies, but in a "virtually unprecedented" approach as "human individuals."[43] Three of the four portraits depict "kings" in theatrical "Indian" dress, holding weapons, and posed in the manner of European gentlemen against backgrounds depicting stylized scenes of America and symbols of their respective clans. The fourth portrait, of the "Emperor of the Six Nations," widely known by his Christian name Hendrick, depicts the most important of the delegation in European clothing and shoes. While he too is posed against a background representing America and his clan, instead of a weapon he holds a belt of wampum into which is worked a pattern of crosses. In his depiction of the most important of the "kings," Verlest stresses Hendrick's position both as an important Native American statesman and as a Christian.

While the four Indian "kings" could be interpreted as "exotic visitors from the imperial periphery" in a crucial respect they were not exotic, but part of a community that was defining itself in large measure through Protestantism. As Protestant Anglicans, the "kings" were within the limits of a select religious minority that defined itself both against heathenism and against Catholicism. The "kings" relationship to religion recurs in multiple forms continually in the records of their visit and British responses to it because it was central to defining who they were. While the "kings" were in fact not representative of even the Iroquois – indeed as pro-English Protestant Mohawks they represented just a small slice of the Five Nations - their visit took on a cultural importance in Britain out of all proportion to the "kings" influence at home. They

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[43] Bruce Robertson, "The Portraits: an iconographical study," in Garrat, *The Four Indian Kings*, pp. 139 – 152. Quotes, p. 142.

represented a Native American that was militarily powerful, a worthy ally, and a Protestant.

Eric Hinderaker has shown how the range of British responses to this visit contributed to what he has called "the Imaginative Construction of the First British Empire." These responses were certainly complex and included elements of mockery, the use of the kings as fictionalized mouthpieces for contemporary political comment, and an evident public curiosity on the part of the London public to see these people in the flesh. This range of responses has led Hinderaker to argue that the kings were "received in exuberant, naïve, and diffuse ways that suggest the formlessness of imperial culture in this period."[44] Yet, we should also be mindful that if the visit of the four "kings" took place during a formative period in the history of imperial culture, it also took place in a formative period in the construction of conceptions of human difference. The visit of the four "kings" reveals not only what the British thought about their own imperial identity, but what they thought about the other peoples that inhabited the Atlantic world.

As has been discussed above, pro-English Mohawks accepted and used Anglicanism for their own multi-faceted purposes. African-Americans, as we shall see in subsequent chapters, largely rejected Anglicanism largely because of its entanglement with slavery. In both cases, these people responded to Christianity as they saw fit, but it is also the case that these responses were subject to interpretation and, just as importantly, misinterpretation around the British Atlantic. In accepting Protestant baptism, the pro-English Mohawks made possible cultural interactions like that of visit to the "kings" to London, where Native Americans were portrayed to a wide public as Protestant, noble,

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[44] Hinderaker, "Four Indian Kings," pp. 518 – 519.

and powerful. When African-Americans, in their own circumstances, rejected Anglicanism, the SPG misinterpreted their rejection as evidence for the need for greater control over the lives of slaves by masters and ministers.

Of course, in the torturous history of the development of race, not every interaction between Native American and European would produce the same positive images that visit of the four "kings" did. Indeed, as their influence among the Iroquois waxed and waned according to the response of Native peoples to their efforts, some in the SPG in mid-century even questioned the practicability of their conversion. Yet in much of the SPG's interaction with the Mohawks and in the 1710 visit, we can see how complicated European attitudes toward Native Americans remained into the eighteenth century. Even as numerous negative stereotypes of Native Americans were being articulated, and a countertrend of Indians as "noble savages" was developing, another view of Indians as autonomous and powerful allies and fellow Protestants was possible.[45] The complexity of this picture is notable especially against the increasing identification of African-Americans as particularly fit for chattel slavery. The SPG's own history in 1710 shows this difference. In the same year the "kings" visited, the Society began what it regarded as its most important effort to convert the Atlantic world's black population. When Christopher Codrington, former Governor of the Leeward Islands, died in 1710 he

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[45] Joyce E. Chaplin, "Natural Philosophy and an Early Racial Idiom in North America: Comparing English and Indian Bodies," *William and Mary Quarterly,* 3rd Series, v. 54, no. 1 (January 1997), pp. 229 – 252; and "Race" in David Armitage and Michael J. Braddick, eds. *The British Atlantic World, 1500 – 1800.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002. pp. 154 – 172. David Brion Davis, "Constructing Race: A Reflection," *William and Mary Quarterly,* v. 54, no. 1 (January 1997), pp. 7 – 18. Karen Ordahl Kupperman, "Presentment of Civility: English Reading of American Self-Presentation in the Early Years of Colonization," *William and Mary Quarterly,* 3rd Series, v. 54, no. 1 (January 1997), pp. 193 – 228 Alden T. Vaughan, "From White

willed to the Society his prized Barbados sugar plantation and the SPG became the owners of nearly three hundred slaves. As the Society feted the four Indian "kings" in London, in Barbados it began efforts to demonstrate through its own mastership that the mechanisms of social control inherent in slavery could force the conversion of African-American slaves.

Man to Redskin: Changing Anglo-American Perceptions of the American Indian," *American Historical Review*, v. 87, no. 4 (October 1982), pp. 917 – 953.