Rejecting Eve: Reception of Christianity Among Cherokee and Iroquois Women

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Christianity and the values it espoused were antithetical to traditional Iroquoian and Cherokee values. Women experienced similar social, economic, political, and religious authority within their respective societies. Their experiences in regard to Christianity, however, differed, although acceptance of missionaries in both societies was more for political and economic reasons rather than a genuine interest in Christianity. Iroquois women were profoundly suspicious of missionaries and consistently rejected Christianity. Huron and Algonquian adoptees with prior experience in established missions warned their new brethren that the presence of missionaries served as a prelude to European expansion, disease, and war. Cherokee women perceived Christianity and the civilization mission it carried with it as a validation of the work in which they already engaged. They remained outwardly more receptive but maintained aspects of their traditional spirituality. Both societies combatted Christianity's attempt to subjugate women and struggled to maintain the gender balance so central to their cultures. These traditional powers held by women, and their resistance to a forced transition to patriarchy, are exemplified by two Native women: Degonwadonti, or Molly Brant (Mohawk), and Nanyehi, or Nancy Ward (Cherokee).

The feminine reception of Christianity hinges on an understanding of creation myths and the gendered expectations and subsequent distribution of power they set forth within these nations. At the center of the Iroquois creation story are two women and animals. Sky Woman, a powerful spiritual being, fell from the heavens and was saved by the animals living on the ocean world below. They forged a livable environment using a tortoises' shell and dirt retrieved from the ocean floor by a beaver. Pregnant when she fell, Sky Woman eventually gave birth to a daughter, the Lynx. They roamed the earth together creating new plants for sustenance: corn, beans, squash, and potatoes. The Lynx herself became pregnant with the North Wind's twins and died in childbirth. With her burial, she became Mother Earth. The two boys, Flint and Sapling, roamed the forest creating woodland creatures, trees, and thorny bushes. Their frequent childhood brawls caused mountains and rushing rivers to form. One of Flint's tantrums even caused the Little Ice Age. Sky Woman created the moon and stars to guide her

grandchildren and ensure that they would never become lost. When she passed away, Sapling reached into the sky and placed Grandmother's ashes on the moon. She became Grandmother Moon, eternally watching over all of her ancestors.[1]

Cherokee creation myths bear remarkable resemblance to these of the Iroquois, similarly identifying gender roles and communal aspects of society. In this mythos too, animals created the earth from a world of water. The water beetle brought mud from the bottom of the ocean to create the earth. The vulture flew for days in pursuit of the best land for all of the animals to settle and grew tired. He landed in what was later Cherokee country. Mankind was created not in the form of a man and wife, but as brother and sister. Some generations later, a hunter named Kanati and his wife Selu (corn) raised two mischievous boys who, curious of the way their father hunted, accidentally released all of the game their father reserved in a shed and used sparingly. Fearful of the way their mother secured grain and corn, seemingly by magic, they accused her of sorcery and beheaded her.[2]

These creation stories reflect the gender balance inherent to the very cores of both Iroquois and Cherokee society. It is indisputable that gender roles held a central aspect, however, no gender hierarchy existed to elevate one sex over the other. Both genders held important duties and responsibilities vital to the survival and continued well-being of society. The basis of Cherokee and Iroquois women's status stemmed from their tremendous contribution to society through agriculture. Estimates claim that sixty-five percent of the Iroquois diet came from agricultural products.[3] Through their connection with Mother Earth, they bore legal rights to the land and all of the production it yielded. Dominion over agricultural products was confirmed through creation stories rendering the distribution of the bounty at their discretion. Sky Woman and the Lynx were the creators and cultivators of vegetation essential to Iroquois subsistence: corn, beans, squash, and (later) potatoes. As 'Keepers of the Field,' they were responsible for planting, maintaining, and harvesting the crop. The twins, however, confined themselves and their creations to the forest where they hunted and fished. As 'Keepers of the Forest,' men only aided in the horticultural process when they were called upon to

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[1] Barbara Alice Mann, *Iroquoian Women: The Gantowisas* (New York: Peter Long, 2000), 32-44.

[2] Carolyn Ross Johnston, *Voices of Cherokee Women* (North Carolina: John F. Blair, 2013), 5-15.

[3] Mann, *Iroquoian Women,* 222.

clear forestry for new fields. Similarly, Cherokee women were responsible for planting fields, held title to the land and its produce, but received more help from men who aided in clearing trees, planting, and harvesting. Kanati and Selu were the founders of Cherokee male and female gender roles; Selu responsible for producing agricultural produce and Kanati for providing meat and furs.

Alongside their economic importance, women possessed considerable political powers. Jesuit missionary Joseph-Francios Lafitau lived among the Iroquois at the Sault Saint Louis Mission outside Montreal for five years in the 1720s. In his 1,000-page ethnographic study compiling his own observances and those documented by previous Jesuit missionaries, Lafitau describes an implicit matriarchy:

> Nothing is more real than this superiority of the women. It is of them that the nation really consists; and it is through them that the nobility of the blood, the genealogical tree and the families are perpetuated. All real authority is vested in them. The land, the fields and their harvest all belong to them. They are the souls of the Councils, the arbiters of peace and of war.[4]

G*antowisa*, the Iroquoian term for woman, held a profoundly positive connotation denoting high status, ability, goodness, and intelligence. *Gantowisas* ran local clan councils, held lineage wampum, nomination belts, titles, and hosted funerals. The office of Matron, attained through lineage or exemplary works, held exclusive rights over the naming and nominating of sachems and Clan Mothers. They held their own councils, and possessed the power to impeach officials. Molly Brant, the sister of Chief Thayandanegea (Joseph Brant), held this esteemed title. Women were allowed to speak at men's councils and vice versa but only through a male representative, further emphasizing the rigid gender system central to society.[5] Iroquoian women were valued for their mediating skills, evident in the creation story with Sky Woman's mediation between Flint and Sapling's frequent fights. This made them responsible for securing peace and settling disputes within the tribe and occasionally with outsiders. When captives were taken, the *gantowisas* determined who

[4] Jan V. Noel, "Revisiting Gender in Iroquoia," in *Gender and Sexuality in Indigenous North America, 1400-1850*, ed. Fay A. Yarbrough and Sandra Slater (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2011), 59.
[5] Mann, *Iroquoian Women,* 224.

would be adopted into society to replace the fallen and who would be tortured to death.

Cherokee women, *anigeya*, appear to have had marginally less political power than their Iroquoian counterparts. Both men and women participated in decision-making, but since foreign relations were the explicit sphere of men, women's primary participation was limited to local councils. The honor of 'War Woman' could be obtained through extraordinary and unexpected feats in battle or by caring for the camp, making food, providing medicine, and maintaining fires on the war path.[6] Aged war women gained the office of 'Beloved Woman.' This esteemed title entrusted them with securing and maintaining peace. They served on their own council, which had an influence in waging or ending warfare. Like the Iroquois, Cherokee women holding the title 'eloved oman' were responsible for determining the fate of prisoners of war and could override the death penalty.[7] Nancy Ward, perhaps the most recognizable Cherokee beloved woman, frequently practiced this right by saving captured colonials' lives. Both groups of women also held an unofficial veto to war through their economic power. Although women could formally petition war, historically, this jurisdiction was solely the realm of men and ultimately their decision. But by withholding supplies such as coats, moccasins, and food, women were making their disapproval of the raid or war explicitly clear. Without these essential supplies, the men may have had to discard their plans and compromise with the women.

Both cultures were matrilineal, meaning that clan lineage was passed down through the female line. Husbands relocated to the wives' family home. Households were dominated by the 'Clan Mother,' generally one of the oldest women in the clan lineage nominated by the women of the home.[8] Divorce was easy to obtain and generally a result of an unproductive partner, inability to produce children, disrespect to the mother-in-law, or frequent feuds. Infidelity was cause for divorce in Cherokee society but extramarital affairs were not frowned upon among the Iroquois. In the event of divorce, men left their children in the wives'

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[6] Michelene Pesantubee, "Nancy Ward: American Patriot or Cherokee Nationalist?" *American Indian Quarterly* 38, no. 2 (Spring 2014): 185.

[7] Richard A. Sattler, "Women's Status Among the Muskogee and Cherokee," in *Women and Power in Native North America*, ed. Laura F. Klein and Lillian A. Ackerman (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), 222.

[8] Theda Perdue, *Cherokee Women: Gender and Culture Change, 1700-1835* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 23.

household and returned to their mother's matrilocus. Seneca women often practiced polyandry and polygamy, the practice of taking multiple husbands or wives. Premarital sex was normal in both cultures and even encouraged as healthy for the body. Women, more often in the Iroquois nations, also held the power to determine how many children they wanted. Abortion and prevention were often utilized by drinking the juice of specific roots.[9]

Iroquoian women held tremendous religious authority as medicine women. They were responsible for cleaning and reburying the bones of ancestors, interpreting dreams, speaking to spirits through natural mediums, and serving as guides to daughters on vision quests. *Gantowisas* were deemed especially talented in shamanism and constituted two-thirds of the nation's Faithkeepers.[10] Among the Cherokees, both men and women could serve the community as shamans or conjurers of powerful spirits. Beloved women were responsible for blessing the corn during the Green Corn Ceremony, making the consumption of the newly harvested produce acceptable. As descendants of Selu, whose blood was spilt and created the first cornfields, only women could be involved in the process. Those talented in shamanism, such as members of the Wolf Clan, were responsible for preparing the 'black drink.' This life-protecting emetic elixir was central to the warriors' pre-battle purification ritual.[11]

Along with guns, horses, and disease, the Europeans brought with them a rigid patriarchal tradition stemming from their adherence to, and reverence for, Christianity. Their initial and long-lasting impressions of the Natives were stringently negative. Native men were perceived to be effeminate and idle due to their excessive hunting ventures. Among Europeans, hunting was a leisure activity restricted to all but the aristocracy. Native women's hard work in the fields, the realm of men in Europe, was misinterpreted as forced drudgery. A newspaper 'account' of the Mohawk Indians in the *New-York Packet* in 1787 captures this attitude well in stating, "The women must prepare the land, sow, reap and do every thing. The men do nothing but hunt, fish and war against their enemies."[12]

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[9] Mann, *Iroquoian Women,* 266.
[10] Ibid., 295.
[11] Norma Tucker, "Nancy Ward: Ghighau of the Cherokees," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 53, no. 2 (June 1969): 193.
[12] "A Short Account of the Mohawk Indians in New-Netherlands," *New-York Packet*, February 6, 1787.

The first missions among the Iroquois and Cherokees were of different denominations; the Iroquois were first exposed to the Jesuits and later the Quakers, while the Cherokees were exclusively exposed to Protestant denominations. Although remarkably similar in terms of their mythos and women's roles in society, it is here in their experiences and reactions to Christianity where they differ. Their interactions with missionaries will be studied separately and reconciled in the conclusion.

The colonial expansion of New France brought conflict between French settlers and Iroquois. To secure peace and in an attempt to convince the French to side with them against the Susquehannocks and Mohonks, Iroquoian leaders expressed interest in Christianity and allowed the construction of Jesuit missions in League member nations beginning in the mid-1600s. From the beginning, Iroquoian interest in Christianity was political, economic, and diplomatic, not theological. The French and Jesuits complied with gift giving traditions and the practice of 'hostage' giving. People of the nation were surrendered to the traditional enemy and vice versa to ensure that they would not later attack and risk the death of their kinsmen. Headmen in any given nations were likely to give up members of his own family while the French gladly sent Jesuit missionaries.[13] The Iroquois also enjoyed the material benefits of a relationship with the missionaries who brought clothing, food, medicine and tools.

Christian concepts such as original sin, redemption, faith, heaven, hell, and purgatory held no equivalent in the Iroquois language and were therefore difficult to interpret and unpleasant to contemplate. Jesuits were dedicated to the study of native languages however, facilitating their communication of challenging concepts. The biblical creation story was the most significant point of contention. One omniscient creator was already in stark contrast to the communal creation of the Iroquois world, which evoked harmony with animals, men and women. The biblical creation story was steeped in discord and immediately established a gender hierarchy, casting women in an inferior and unsavory role. Woman was made as a companion to Adam, whereas the Sky Woman came first. Eve resembled weakness, vanity, and a susceptibility to evil. These fatal flaws risked contaminating the superior purity of man. A woman damned mankind to be born in a state of original sin. This

[13] Daniel K. Richter, "Iroquois Versus Iroquois: Jesuit Missions and Christianity in Village Politics, 1642-1685," *Ethnohistory* 32, no. 1 (Winter 1985): 7.

concept of women being the source of men's woes was foreign and unwelcome among the Iroquois.

It cannot be said with absolute certainty how women reacted to the Christian religion. French officials and missionaries primarily documented their interactions with men perceiving them to be the dominant members of society similar to European standards. However, we do know that Iroquois society as a whole largely rejected Christianity and cast out those who converted in an unusually violent fashion. Multiple accounts of verbal and physical abuse such as beatings and stoning of converts exist. The Jesuits promoted the fracture of kinship ties by encouraging followers to leave their homes and move to missions. This posed a severe threat to the matrilineage.[14] The Jesuits forbade participation in traditional ceremonies that celebrated "pagan deities." Participation in these ceremonies was vital, and a refusal to attend reflected poorly on the entire clan. Jesuits also attempted to police sexuality and eliminate polyandry and polygamous marriages, assaulting some of women's social power and autonomy.

Fear and misunderstanding hampered the missionaries' efforts. The Beaver Wars during the 1640s were waged out of a desperate need to rebuild the dwindling population through the capture and adoption of war prisoners. Some captives, primarily Algonquians and Hurons, had adopted Christianity and already began spreading the gospel among their new brethren. Most, however, provided the Iroquois with a terrifying look at the 'black-coats.' They were believed to be sorcerers who brought disease, killed crops, and ran off wild game.[15] The practice of 'deathbed conversions' lent credence to the claim that the Jesuit baptism was a curse damning the recipient to death.

> Jesuit policy was to withhold baptism from a potential convert until that person was at the moment of death or the missionaries were sure that he or she would not apostatize. One sees savages fall back almost right after baptism-because they do not have enough courage to scourn public opinion that is the only law of these people there.[16]

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[14] Richter, "Iroquois Versus Iroquois," 9.

[15] Ibid., 5-10.

[16] K. I. Koppedrayer, "The Making of the First Iroquois Virgin: Early Jesuit Biographies of the Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha," *Ethnohistory* 40, no. 2 (Spring 1993): 286-88.

Jesuits also defied cultural norms with their insistence on privacy. They were rumored to practice dark magic in their private dwellings.

Accounts of conversion were detailed in the Jesuit *Relations*. Numbers were often inflated to incite more support and donations to their cause. According to Father Vincent Bigot, between 1668 and 1679, 3,000 Iroquois were baptized; 1,200 on their deathbeds and 1,800 healthy adults and children.[17] This claim would mean that twenty percent of the Iroquois population converted to Christianity. Success for the Jesuits typically relied on good relations with France and victory for the Iroquois against their foes. When epidemics struck and Iroquois warriors faced defeat, entire nations seemed to lose their faith. In 1649, Jean de Brebeuf was bound and baptized in scalding water by the Mohawks at the mission of St. Ignance.[18] Escalating episodes of violence encouraged Jesuit missionaries to withdraw and converts to escape with them. After a poorly planned French invasion into Iroquois territory, the remaining Jesuit missionaries removed and pious converts followed, abandoning the most vital link to their society; kinship. Mary Jemison, a white woman captured and adopted by the Seneca in 1755, described their aversion to Christianity:

> They say that Jesus Christ has nothing to do with them; and that the Christian religion was not designed for their benefit; but rather; should they embrace it; they are confident it would make them worse, and consequently give them injury. They say also that the Great Good Spirit gave them their religion; and that it is better adapted to their circumstances, situation, and habits, and to the promotion of their present comfort and ultimate happiness, than any system that ever has or can be devised.[19]

Episcopal churches were erected by Sir William Johnson, the British Superintendent of Indian Affairs, beginning in 1756. He secured an alliance with the Mohawk nation to ensure greater access to the fur trade, and later between Britain and the Six Nations during the Seven

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[17] Richter, "Iroquois Versus Iroquois," 8-12.
[18] Dominique Deslandres, "In God's Name," *Canada's History* 91, no. 2 (April 2011): 2-3.
[19] James E. Seaver, *Deh-he-wa-mis: or A Narrative of the Life of Mary Jemison* (Batavia, NY: William Seaver and Sons, 1844), 154.

Years' War. As a convert himself, originally an Irish Catholic, the importance of religion was steeped in its ability to allow him to advance politically. His relationship with Molly Brant (Degonwadonti), the daughter of a respected sachem, secured this alliance and ensured a decades-long friendship with the Mohawk. Historians question whether their marriage was legitimate or civil, but some accounts claim that the two shared a legal ceremony in an Episcopal church commissioned by Johnson:

> It's true that Sir William was married to Molly according to the rite of the Episcopal Church, but a few years before his death, the Baronet, feeling his life drawing to a close, and abhorring living longer in adultery, to quiet his conscience, privately married Molly to legitimize his children by her. [20]

If the two did indeed marry as the above account claims, Molly chose not to take Johnson's patronym. As a Matron, the loss of the matronymic Brant, which tied her to clan and lineage, may have destroyed her political authority among the Mohawk.[21] As a transitory figure between Mohawk traditionalism and Anglo-European values, she was a powerful and esteemed figure on both sides. As a Matron, she held immense powers in council and, through her access to Sir William Johnson's accounts, her gift-giving and charity elevated her ever higher. Her brother, Joseph Brant, was sponsored by Johnson to attend Wheelock's School and was later supported as Principal Chief of the Six Nations.

The success of this relationship hinged on the Mohawks' view that Johnson might protect them from further incursions by American colonials as Superintendent of Indian Affairs for the British Crown. The Mohawk gifted Johnson 66,000 acres, a transaction disapproved of by the crown and surveyors alike, who sought to make purchases. By gifting this extensive tract of land to a trusted ally, the Mohawks avoided pressure to sell it to Anglo-Americans who were already encroaching on Mohawk territory.[22] By this time, and perhaps with the influence of Sir William, the Six Nations were beginning to settle as farmers in European-style

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[20] Jeptha R. Simms, *History of Schoharie County and Border Wars of New York* (Albany: Munsell & Tanner, 1845), 112.
[21] Jean Johnson, "Molly Brant: Mohawk Matron," *Ontario History* 52, no. 2 (1964): 119.
[22] Ibid., 114.

wooden households. Molly herself adjusted well to life in Johnson Hall and was often left in control of the operation of the manor while Johnson was away.

Johnson frequently attempted to exclude women from politics, such as in 1762, when he asked Iroquois men to meet at Johnson Hall without bringing female delegates.[23] To him, Molly's prestige among the Six Nations did not justify her involvement in politics, but she undoubtedly used her husband's stature to enhance her own influence on both sides. After his death on the eve of the Revolution, she maintained tremendous power and encouraged British support through sheltering Loyalists and sending arms and ammunition to British soldiers.[24] She may have influenced Joseph's decision to ally with the British in the American Revolution. In a public debate, a dissident chief who argued for neutrality was harshly rebuked by Molly herself, who brought up her late husband's dedication as cause to ally with the British. American officials feared her influence. "For one word from her is more taken Notice of by the Five Nations than a thousand from any white man without exception."[25] After the war, Molly moved to Canada and received a land grant from the Crown in return for her service at Carleton Island base "keeping the Indians orderly."[26] Although she maintained traditional dress and mostly spoke Mohawk throughout her life, her daughters married into the Upper Canadian elite as acculturated ladies.

With the American Revolution came the fragmentation of the centuries old alliance between the six Iroquoian nations. The Mohawk, Seneca, Cayuga, and Onondaga sided with the British, but even the Oneida and Tuscarora, who aided the rebels, were labeled conquered peoples at the Peace of Paris in 1783. The Treaty of Fort Stanwix in 1784 formally secured peace between the belligerent Iroquois nations and the United States. The treaty recognized the allegiance of the Oneida and Tuscarora and established a reserve boundary for the Iroquois nations, making it the first Indian reservation in the US. The Six Nations were recognized as sovereign nations and were guaranteed protection of reservation lands, but the guarantee was later revoked. Two further treaties signed with New York divested the Oneidas of 5,250,000 acres of

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[23] Gretchen Green, "Molly Brant, Catharine Brant and Their Daughters: A Study in Colonial Acculturation," *Ontario History* 81, no. 3 (1989): 238.
[24] Ibid., 239.
[25] Johnson, "Molly Brant: Mohawk Matron," 118.
[26] Ibid., 120.

land, despite their valiant service in the war, leaving them with a mere 750,000 acres.[27]

Desperate to win allies that might protect their remaining lands, the Oneidas invited the Quakers to establish missions on the New York reservations. They hoped that they might legally and politically assist the Iroquois in limiting pressures to abandon their traditional gender roles and economic activities, and prevent further land fraud. Despite Quaker ambivalence toward politics, those were precisely the changes they sought to implement. Prior to the war, the Iroquois could adopt those aspects of Anglo-European society that suited them at their leisure. Conversion was not deemed critical for good relations. Afterwards, stripped of land and some measure of sovereignty, the pressure to convert and civilize intensified. In the Treaty of Canandaigue in 1789, technical assistance in agriculture was to be provided by the government and the Quakers were enlisted to instruct the Iroquois. The transition to agriculture at any cost would be their primary goal, along with teaching English, and lastly, religion. Rather than aid the Oneidas in managing their land affairs and protecting from fraud, as Sir William Johnson had done for the Mohawks, the Quakers passively watched as the Oneidas were conned out of their remaining hunting grounds.[28] The sale of land helped further their mission by forcing the nation to adopt European-style agriculture. Iroquois women were expected to give up agriculture, the source of their independence and economic power. Only men were approached when consulting important matters, which further eliminated women's political power.[29] By 1810, the Oneidas had largely conformed to federal expectations. Due to loss of land and natural resources, they made the adjustments necessary for survival. Men engaged in European-style plow agriculture and animal husbandry. Women performed domestic duties but refused to relinquish absolute power on agriculture. They continued horticultural activities, but on a smaller scale, and cared for small animals.

Outright conversion was still frowned upon but a hybrid religion, devised by the reformed Seneca drunkard Handsome Lake in the early 1800s, fused aspects of Christian ideology with traditional Iroquoian spirituality. The Longhouse Religion borrowed concepts such as monotheism, a battle between good and evil, heaven and hell, the

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[27] Karen Trio, "We Wish to Do You Good: The Quaker Mission to the Oneida Nation, 1790-1840," *Journal of the Early Republic* 26, no. 3 (Fall 2006): 357.
[28] Ibid., 356.
[29] Mann, *Iroquoian Women*, 153.

confession of sins, salvation, and visions of impending destruction.[30] They reshaped the Iroquoian creation story to suit their agenda, diminishing Sky Woman, the Lynx, and even the animals' roles as communal creators. Sapling, one of the male twins, was identified as the creator and Flint, the destroyer, therefore locking the brothers in an eternal battle between good and evil to represent God's eternal struggle with Satan.[31] The religion also advocated the disempowerment of women through the transition to nuclear families. The husband-wife relationship was supposed to take precedence over kinship ties working to destroy the matrilineal nature of the League.[32] Abortion was outlawed, stripping women's power to choose, and fenced farmsteads quickly replaced longhouses. They attempted to outlaw women's spirituality and put control of Faithkeeping exclusively into the hands of men. Although women did lose substantial economic and political power, they managed to cling to religious authority, holding an equal number of Faithkeeper positions.[33] Chief Cornplanter was the primary adversary to the Longhouse Religion, advocating instead for the maintenance of the traditional mythos of Sky Woman and the Lynx. The *gantowisas* ardently supported him, but eventually both Christianity and the Longhouse Religion won out over the traditions of the past. Women, like most male Iroquois, often chose the Longhouse Religion over Christianity.

Facing removal, Cherokee women welcomed missionaries and the civilizing mission they brought. Civilization was thought to bring improvement and efficiency rather than a profound change in gender relations. Hinged on agriculture and domestic manufacturing, women believed that the program validated the *anigeya's* traditional work while serving to protect the entire nation from removal.[34]

Nancy Ward (Nanye'hi) encouraged this acculturation prior to the spread of Christianity through her protection of war captives during the American Revolution. She used her authority as a beloved woman to halt the torture and execution of a colonial woman named Lydia Bean. Ward asked Bean to teach the Cherokees how to make milk and butter,

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[30] Matthew Dennis, *Seneca Possessed: Indians, Witchcraft, and Power in the Early American Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 16.
[31] Mann, *Iroquoian Women,* 23.
[32] Joy Bilharz, "First Among Equals?: The Changing Status of Seneca Women," in *Women and Power in Native North America*, ed. Laura F. Klein and Lillian A. Ackerman (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), 108.
[33] Mann, *Iroquoian Women,* 157.
[34] Perdue, *Cherokee Women, 1700-1835*, 115.

but made no mention of interest in Christianity. Her advocation of neutrality and acculturation were driven by her office as a beloved woman. Peacekeeping was their primary concern and only through peace and assimilation could they hope to avoid war and potential removal. Despite her attempts, the Chickamauga Cherokee militant Dragging Canoe waged war on surrounding settlements in 1781, fueling an unmerciful response by Colonel Arthur Campbell:

> In the mean time the famous Indian woman Nancy Ward came to camp. She gave us various intelligence, and made an overture in behalf of some of the chiefs for peace : to which I then evaded giving an explicit answer, as I wished first to visit the vindictive part of the nations, mostly settled at Hiwasse and Chistowee, and to distress the whole as much as possible by destroying their habitations and provisions.[35]

Ward provided intelligence to American officials on more than one occasion. Scholars have long debated her rationale for alerting the Americans of impending attacks by her own countrymen. Michelene Pesantubee argues that Ward's actions were a re-assertion of her traditional powers consistent with her office of Beloved Woman and membership in the Wolf Clan.[36] By warning white settlements of coming assaults, Ward hoped to provide protection for women and children, and by doing so protect her own warriors from spilling innocent blood. The Americans used this information to intercept war parties, attack Cherokee towns, and destroy fields while warriors were away. Colonials' respect for Ward secured her family's safety. "We brought in the family of Nancy Ward, whom for their good offices we do not consider as prisoners. The whole are in Major [Joseph] Martin's care at Great-Island."[37] Campbell's campaign devastated the Cherokees, who were already suffering from the decline of the deerskin trade.

> We have destroyed the towns of Chote, Seitego, Tuskeego, Chilhowe, Toque, Micliqua, Kai-a-tee, Sattoga,

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[35] "Colonel Campbell's Report of the Expedition Against the Cherokees," *New-Jersey Gazette*, March 21, 1781.
[36] Pesantubee, "Nancy Ward: American Patriot or Cherokee Nationalist?" 192.
[37] "Colonel Campbell's Report of the Expedition Against the Cherokees," *New-Jersey Gazette.*

> Telico, Hiwassee and Chistowee, all principal towns, besides some small ones, and several scattering settlements, in which were upward of 1000 houses, and not less than 50,000 bushels of corn, and large quantities of other kinds of provision…Never did a people so happily situated act more foolishly, in losing their livings and their country at a time an advantageous neutrality was held out to them ; but such are the consequences of British seduction.[38]

As a result of this decline, Cherokee women welcomed the spinning and weaving techniques and materials missionaries could supply as alternative clothing options. The Moravians were invited to settle among the Cherokee in 1799, and the Spring Place Mission was officially opened in 1801.[39] After one year in operation, the Cherokee Council sent an ultimatum to the mission requesting less Christianizing and more civilizing instruction. Clearly, Cherokee interest lay not in religious instruction, but in economic and industrial tutorials that might help their society adapt to the rapidly changing economic landscape. After nine years, they finally received their first convert, a widowed Cherokee woman named Margaret Anne Crutchfield.[40] A second convert, Charles Hicks, followed a year later.

The Presbyterians and Congregationalists, led by John Martin, followed in 1816. According to an advertisement in the *Boston Recorder* in June of 1816, the "leading qualifications" for becoming a missionary were "a well established moral and religious character; an ardent desire to be instrumental in imparting to the poor Indians the blessings of Christianity and civilization," and finally, "a good English education and a taste and genius for agriculture."[41] Perceiving Anglo-American ways to be superior in all forms, Protestant missionaries typically did not bother to learn the Cherokee language. This made communicating concepts such as original sin, damnation, heaven, and hell far more difficult to translate. Although intrigued by the Bible, which they believed to be the key to the whites' technological advancement, the Cherokee had no parallel to the

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[38] Ibid.

[39] Henry Thompson Malone, "The Early Nineteenth Century Missionaries in the Cherokee Country," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 10, no. 2 (June 1951): 127.

[40] Ibid., 128

[41] "Request for Missionaries," *Boston Reader*, June 12, 1816.

biblical creation story.[42] A woman contributing to the downfall of mankind was a foreign concept and this aspect was never fully adopted into the Cherokee version of Christianity. Some reinterpreted the story of the fall as the responsibility of the man who ate the fruit without any goading from his wife.[43] Martin's mission proved unsuccessful, as he stated, "They knew very well, that if they were good, they should go up; if bad, down; that they could tell no more; that he had long plagued them with what they no ways understood and they desired him to depart the country."[44]

The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, a joint Presbyterian-Congregationalist enterprise, discouraged the elevation of the civilizing mission above the Christianizing mission:

> However important the acquisition of this country by civilized people may be to the world, it cannot be denied that the event itself has been a prolific source of ruin and death to the Indians. Instead of receiving from our hands the Bible, and with it, the blessings of civilization and Christianity, most of them have been poisoned with our vices, and rendered ten-fold more the children of the devil than ever they were before.[45]

They instead espoused the introduction of a joint mission:

> Their great object will be to effect a revolution of character and habits in the rising generation, by instituting schools and agricultural and mechanical establishments, under the direction of pious teachers and Christian missionaries.[46]

Essentially, the civilizing mission had brought nothing but vice, destitution, and immorality to the Native population. Honest missions provided redemption and salvation to the "savage" while not rejecting

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[42] William G. McLoughlin, *The Cherokees and Christianity, 1794-1870: Essays on Acculturation and Cultural Persistence* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1994), 19.
[43] Perdue, *Cherokee Women,* 171.
[44] Malone, "The Early Nineteenth Century Missionaries in the Cherokee Country," 129.
[45] "Religious Intelligence from the Religious Intelligencer: The American Indians," *Norwich Courier*, May 28, 1817.
[46] Ibid.

the civilizing missions as a whole. For the ABCFM, Christianity and the study of the English language served as preconditions for civilization. Without converts, the civilization program could never succeed. This proposal was met with approval from the federal government:

> The government of the United States, to whom the object has been submitted, has given a gratifying and very encouraging assurance of its patronage. One does not have to ponder for long on why the federal government might be so encouraging of the extension of missions into Indian country. Missions might serve as the new head of the civilizing objective. Under the guise of religion, the federal government was able to shed responsibility for these hampered communities.[47]

The Chickamauga Creek Mission, later Brainerd (TN), was established in 1817 and immediately targeted the children of elites. Cherokees were more likely to send their sons because families often relied on their daughters' assistance with planting and harvesting.[48] The young girls that did attend boarding schools were taught to be pious, submissive, and how to perform domestic chores, while boys were taught manual labor, including farming. Newspaper updates often exaggerated the progress of ABCFM missions, but personal letters reveal frustration with slow and miniscule conversion rates. After one year, an official report stated that only three or four Cherokees were expressing genuine interest in conversion to Christianity.[49] Conversion numbers improved with Samuel Austin Worcester's translation of scripture and hymns using Sequoyah's newly invented syllabary. Worcester also had a part in establishing the *Cherokee Phoenix*, much to the ire of Georgian officials. He was imprisoned and put on trial for supposedly supporting a Cherokee constitution.

The chief proponents of the civilization program and of conversion to Christianity were wealthy *métis* men who had already converted. They formed the Cherokee Republic and ruled that inheritance would no longer have to descend matrilineally, leaving the opportunity open for the establishment of patriarchy. Laws prohibited

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[47] Ibid.
[48] Perdue, *Cherokee Women,* 180.
[49] Malone, "The Early Nineteenth Century Missionaries in the Cherokee Country," 132.

the construction of settlements within one-quarter mile from each other to further break down kinship ties and extended matrilineal households. They also shifted power from local councils to national councils. This development robbed women of their indirect participation in national policies through local councils.[50] The official constitution, fashioned after the US Constitution, barred women from voting and holding office. An important divergence was the refusal to separate church and state. "No person who denies the being of a God, or future state of reward and punishment, shall hold any office."[51] This development prohibited all adherents to traditional Cherokee spirituality from holding office. In 1825, the council extended Cherokee citizenship to the children of Cherokee men and white women, formally destroying the matrilineal nature of Cherokee society and a major source of their power and prestige.[52] Elias Boudinot and Major Ridge, both members of the infamous Treaty Party, had white wives accustomed to a patriarchal household and without ties to the land. This may have had an impact on their decision to facilitate the removal process. In an 1828 article written for the *Cherokee Phoenix*, Boudinot argued against the marriage of Cherokee women to white men:

> Far be it from me to cut asunder the ties of Love, or to part those who are now happily or unhappily united in destiny by marriage. But I entertain a wish to establish such laws as will be calculated to exclude the thief, the robber, the vagabond and the tippler, and adulterer, from the privilege of intermarrying with Cherokee women, and thereby rendering their existence wretched, and inflicting a deep rooted and corrupted ignorance among our people.[53]

Women were thus portrayed as more vulnerable to manipulation than men. He proposed enforcing a payment system and securing letters of recommendation as a precondition of marriage to a Cherokee woman, further chipping away at some measures of feminine independence.

Missionaries, especially from the ABCFM, served as willing deliverers of the US civilization program and aided Cherokee elites at

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[50] Perdue, *Cherokee Women,* 144.
[51] *Cherokee Constitution*, 1823, Article VI, section 1.
[52] Perdue, *Cherokee Women,* 146.
[53] "Intermarriages," *Cherokee Phoenix*, March 27, 1828.

every juncture, guiding policy in favor of the patriarchal standards the Bible set forth. At the behest of missionaries, the council also passed a law prohibiting infanticide and abortion. This was an effort to police sexuality, and placed authority over a woman's body in the hands of men.[54]

Despite these considerable alterations to women's status and power in society, they too rejected aspects of the Christianizing and civilizing mission. Most women persisted in practicing their traditional religion, which did not distinguish between the physical and spiritual worlds, emphasized harmony and balance, and placed dedication to the community above the needs of the individual.[55] Women continued to own considerable property separate from their husbands. The council passed laws protecting women's property, and Cherokee women continued to farm. Missionaries also faced the persistence of matrilineal kinship. Mothers remained the primary authority of children despite Church insistence on a household run by the husband. Many families rejected the farmstead and nuclear family structure and maintained extended matrilocal households.[56]

Print culture supported the illusion of mass conversion and acculturation. An article in the *Christian Messenger* in 1818 marveled that the "women almost universally dress after the manner of whites, in gowns manufactured by themselves from cotton."[57] Conversion numbers, however, rendered the 'Christianizing mission' a relative failure. Of 15,000 Cherokees, only 1,000 claimed membership in one of the fifteen denominations present in the Cherokee nation. One missionary stated that over half of the converts in one congregation had been suspended for illicit sex, drinking, fighting, or participating in traditional rituals such as dances and ball games.[58] Only three percent of the Cherokee population attended a mission school between 1816 and 1830.[59] Household Cherokee names were typically only those of the elite who had converted, furthering the belief that the missions were doing better than they in fact were. Pious figures, such as Catharine Brown, were in no way indicative of the greater population. Even Catharine Brown, as argued by Amanda Moulder, may have retained Cherokee

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[54] Perdue, *Cherokee Women,* 147.
[55] Ibid., 160-171.
[56] Ibid., 175.
[57] "Cherokee Mission," *Christian Messenger* (Middlebury, Vermont), June 10, 1818.
[58] Perdue, *Cherokee Women,* 172.
[59] Malone, "The Early Nineteenth Century Missionaries in the Cherokee Country," 132.

women's' oratory in her English writings. Her pleas against removal are coupled with an impassioned supplication to other Cherokees to adopt Christianity. For Catharine Brown, Christianity and English literacy served to protect her and her people from removal.[60]

Although well-acculturated, the transition from Jeffersonian to Jacksonian policies supported the ideal of Cherokee removal. Conversion rates remained low and even if the Cherokee farmed in the European-style, they persisted on valuable land. The discovery of gold on Cherokee lands hastened Georgian cries for removal. Incursions of gold miners into Cherokee territory heightened tensions and the wholesale robbing of the nations' valuable resource was not underreported. An article in the *New-York Morning Herald* on June 5, 1830, stated that, "about 4,000 hands are supposed to be employed (in gold mining), whose daily proceeds are estimated as $10,000."[61] The *Newburyport Herald* lambasted the shameful robbers:

> Of these men we do not speak indiscriminately- some no doubt are good men, for we are credibly informed that preachers of the Gospel may be found among them, led into error probably by prospects of immediate wealth. Some of these teachers of religion, after performing a good day's labor in pocketing the Indians' gold without leave, have preached to their associates from the Word of God, whose precepts, such as "thou shalt not steal," might well have deterred them from such a service.[62]

Congregation numbers further dwindled when denominations passively stood by as the Cherokees were forced west on the Trail of Tears. The Baptists, who had erected their own missions in Cherokee territory in the 1830s, remained the most faithful. Reverend Evan Jones sided with the Cherokees against President Jackson's removal policies and walked with them on the Trail of Tears. This dedication separated the Baptists from other denominations. They learned the Cherokee language and translated the Bible using Sequoyah's syllabary. Although the Cherokees in Indian Territory experienced a surge in traditionalism,

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[60] Amanda Moulder, "Cherokee Practice, Missionary Intentions: Literacy Learning among Early Nineteenth-Century Cherokee Women," *College Composition and Communication* 63, no. 1 (Sept. 2011): 85.
[61] "The Gold Region," *New-York Morning Herald*, June 5, 1830.
[62] "Intelligence," *Newburyport Herald*, April 20, 1830.

the Baptists' dedication won over many converts. Still, by 1860, only twelve percent of Cherokees identified with any given denomination.[63]

Missionaries initially believed women would be the gateway to converting Indian nations. Being the more "vulnerable" sex, women were the key to converting husbands and children. However, both Iroquois and Cherokee women rejected the Christianization mission by retaining aspects of their traditional roles in society. Christianity did however help implement federal civilizing programs seeking to rob women of their economic, political, social, and religious power. The Iroquois were distrustful from the start and remained that way for centuries. The Longhouse Religion's eventual integration of Christianity damaged the *gantowisa's* place in society by placing restrictions on abortion, abolishing matrilineal kinship ties, and advocating the transition to patriarchal nuclear households. Its fusion with traditional Iroquois customs did allow women to retain some of their traditional religious and social powers, making it a more viable option than traditional Christianity. The most damaging development for Iroquois women was the sale of land, which forced men to leave the forest and take up the plough. These robbed women of their traditional independence and economic power. Cherokee women tended to view missionaries and the civilization mission they espoused with more optimism, hoping it would help bring economic sustenance and efficiency. By accepting Christianity and civilization, they might avoid removal. The Cherokee then must have seen Christianity not as a religion to be accepted but a political tool that might establish stronger diplomatic relations, help them adjust to a drastically changing economy, and garner respect for the Cherokee nation. Nancy Ward encouraged acculturation but insisted on maintaining her economic, political, and religious powers as a woman, a beloved woman, and a member of the Wolf Clan. Similarly, the Iroquois' early acceptance of missionaries and Christianity was more out of a desire to establish strong diplomatic, military, and economic alliances; and prevent land fraud. Molly Brant's conversion to the Episcopal Church and marriage to Sir William Johnson were largely political, and allowed her to wield considerable influence among the Iroquois and Anglo-Americans alike. Christianity was then merely a by-product of the civilizing mission; a means to an end.

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[63] McLoughlin, *The Cherokees and Christianity, 1794-1870*, 19-31.