This book by Barbara Graymont, expert in the history of New York State and its Indians, is a valuable contribution to the history of the Six Nations of the Iroquois Confederacy. The Six Nations, although professing neutrality in the wars between England and France for domination of the continent, emerged allies of the king of England. So great had been their confidence in the king that twice during the colonial period they had conveyed by treaty their lands to him in return for his protection of their lands against the French, an idea that was to loom large in the last, fatal days.

As the great conflict between the American colonies and England began, England had ready a group of able and devoted partisans who recognized and exploited this loyalty to the king. They appear vividly in Professor Graymont’s pages. Sir William Johnson, born in Ireland, living among the Mohawks, with a white wife, several Mohawk concubines, and many children — white and red — was the trusted adviser of the Six Nations and the renowned Indian agent for the British. After his death in 1774, his son, Sir John Johnson, and his nephew, Colonel Guy Johnson, took his place. Acting with them was John Butler, chief of the Tories. More formidable were Mary Brant, the Mohawk wife of Sir William, and Joseph Brant, her brother — warrior, diplomat, farmer, scholar, High Anglican churchman, translator of the Gospels, and later scourge of the American frontier.

Our author in The Iroquois in the American Revolution demonstrates very clearly that initially neutrality for the Six Nations was desired and agreed upon by both whites and Indians. This was formally stipulated between the Continental Congress and the Six Nations in a council at Albany, and this decision was frequently reaffirmed by the Indians until the final tragic break during Col. Barry St. Leger’s campaign in 1777.

This special coterie of able British partisans and their adherents denounced neutrality and strove constantly to draw the Six Nations actively into the war on the side of the British. Against this array
were the relatively commonplace officers of New York and the Indian commissioners of the Continental Congress. Only one American leader appears prominently in the pages, Gen. Philip Schuyler of New York.

At this point, there emerged a champion of American liberty. It is one conspicuous merit of this book that it puts in focus this little-known leader and his contribution to the American cause. He was Samuel Kirkland, a minister from the Congregationalists in Boston, sent on a mission to the Oneidas, the Tuscaroras, and — to a lesser extent — the Onondagas. Being a Puritan, his theology differed from that taught the Iroquois by the Jesuits and by the Anglican missionaries. Differences on such subjects as the efficacy of baptism and the necessity of universal baptism of children were important.

But Kirkland taught not only the Christian gospel but the manual trades, the art of building, and agriculture. The Oneidas had been regarded as a backward tribe, but in a few years their villages and farms were the showplaces of the Iroquois Confederacy. Kirkland had won the hearts of his people, the assistance of Harvard College, and the approbation of Sir William Johnson.

The revolutionary ferment which was to change the course of history was astir in Boston. The British government and its king were roundly condemned. Samuel Kirkland was one of the patriots, as they were called. He communicated his sentiments to his Oneidas and Tuscaroras. Soon they were dubbed by their detractors, “The Bostonians,” a term of religious and political derision.

Before his death on July 11, 1774, Sir William Johnson had observed with apprehension the growth of radical, and to him disloyal, ideas among the Iroquois. About 1771, he changed front and endeavored in every way to block the program of the Oneida mission.

On April 19, 1775, the first clash of arms came at Lexington. In May, Sir William’s successor, Col. Guy Johnson, seized and detained Kirkland who was returning from Boston to the Oneidas. He forbade him to communicate further with the Indians and ordered the removal of all New England missionaries from the Six Nations. This highhanded procedure caused criticism of Colonel Johnson among the Indians, and it also won for Kirkland a hearing before the Continental Congress. Shortly, thereafter, Congress recommended that its Indian commissioners employ Samuel Kirkland to deal with the Indians.

Until 1777, the year of Burgoyne’s invasion, the Six Nations resisted the blandishments and pressures of the king’s party and refused to abandon their neutrality. In that year John Butler, preparatory to
St. Leger's thrust at the Mohawk Valley, summoned all the Six Nations to Oswego without disclosing his intent. Those who came were principally Senecas. Butler plied them with food, rum, and presents, and then offered them the hatchet. The Senecas refused again and again to go back on their pledged neutrality. Finally, the Indians agreed. Our author says they were “drugged and bribed.”

St. Leger led them to ignominious defeat. Burgoyne came, fought, and failed — as he said — because he had no help from the Indians. The pro-British Iroquois fought in force with St. Leger and not at all with Burgoyne. A much smaller number of Oneidas and Tuscaroras fought bravely and steadily with the Americans in both campaigns and won. Soon, thereafter, they formally took up the hatchet for the American cause. At this point, says Professor Graymont, “the fragmentation of the Iroquois Confederacy was complete.” Lacking the resolute efforts of Kirkland and his Oneidas and Tuscaroras, a much earlier and more complete entry of the Confederacy into the war might have been fatal to the cause of liberty.

The British agents, particularly Mary and Joseph Brant, went to work and soon had their Indians ready for the warpath once more. In a series of raids, apparently planned to drive the whites from the entire area and to withhold from the American armies soldiers and foodstuffs from New York State, Indians and Tories ravaged all of south and central New York and northern Pennsylvania. The Wyoming, Pennsylvania, and the Cherry Valley, New York, massacres are well known.

Next was the year of retribution when, in 1779, a three-pronged attack moved up the Susquehanna Valley under Gen. John Sullivan and Brig. Gen. James Clinton; up the Mohawk Valley under Col. Jacob Van Schaick; and up the Allegheny Valley under Col. Daniel Brodhead, Sullivan, and Clinton. All the beautiful villages of the hostile Iroquois in the Finger Lakes district and the upper Allegheny Valley were destroyed, the crops ruined, the orchards cut down, and thousands of bushels of corn and other foodstuffs burned, the avenging American soldiers marveling at how prosperous the Iroquois had been. The English made no move to protect their allies.

The pro-British Iroquois' means of sustenance seemed to have been destroyed. Nevertheless, in the following year the cruel and devastating raids by the Indians and Tories were on a larger scale than before. To the sum total of their ancient wrongs, they added the misery caused by Sullivan's expedition.

Professor Graymont deduces from the sources that an average of
more than four hundred Indians and Tories were ravaging the frontiers throughout 1780 and that in 1781 sixty-four war parties went out with 2,945 warriors. The war parties ranged as far as Fort Pitt; the Shawnee country in southern Ohio; Wheeling, West Virginia; and even Detroit.

A final act of vengeance was the destruction of the Oneida and Tuscarora settlements. The members of these tribes were given permission to return to their allegiance to the king by going to Niagara or to face destruction at home. Some yielded, others stayed with the Americans. The latter saw their homes, mills and churches burned, and their fields devastated. For months the Oneidas had been asking help from the Americans, but help never came.

A treaty of peace between Great Britain and the United States was not concluded until November 30, 1782. Even then the shattered remnants of the Six Nations were disposed to fight on. The reason was that the treaty made no reference to the Indians, did not protect their rights as prior treaties had done, and, in effect, confirmed the title of the United States to all the Indian lands.

Concerning the furious denunciation of this result by the Indians, who claimed at least the lands granted to them by the treaty of Fort Stanwix in 1768, and the subdued and evasive replies of the British who represented a government and people sick of the whole business, the reader will find two fine chapters on the peace treaty and the removal of most of the remnants of the Six Nations to Canada.

The grabbing-up of the Indian lands by the Americans, even while the peace negotiations were in progress, evidences best the slow but implacable and irresistible progress of the policy of taking the Indian lands for the benefit of the land-hungry masses of Europe and America, including many land speculators. Lacking other reason for the confiscation, the Americans relied on the right of conquest, a hard and cruel policy, although giving to the United States substantially the same kind of title derived by the Iroquois to the lands taken by them from the Hurons, Wyandots, Neutrals, Eries, Susquehannocks, and from the various tribes who dared to dispute the right of the Iroquois to the imperial domain of the Ohio Valley. On the other hand, the confiscation of the lands of the loyal Oneidas and Tuscaroras and the abandonment of them to penury and despair in the hour of victory is as reprehensible as anything the Iroquois ever did.

Barbara Graymont's book is a thoroughly satisfactory one, filling in — in an admirably professional, but thoroughly readable fashion — the gaps in this important story, recounting only those facts justified
by the sources and drawing her conclusions carefully and impartially. The bibliography is a triumph of research, containing immense resources of material. No worker in this field can afford to be without it.


This book is a volume in the Da Capo Press reprint series called the Era of the American Revolution. First published in 1955, Douglass's study treats the political struggle in the states during the American Revolution. The theme, as indicated by the subtitle, is "The Struggle for Equal Political Rights and Majority Rule."

Professor Douglass believes that the political leaders in most of the new states were conservatives. The constitutions of at least eight states were conservative in eighteenth-century terms. The events and processes which led to the adoption of state constitutions in New York, South Carolina, and Maryland are used as case studies to illustrate how the new conservative constitutions protected political privilege and economic interests. Although the author concedes that these documents provided safeguards against arbitrary government, the state constitutions of Connecticut, Delaware, New Jersey, Rhode Island, and Virginia are also placed on the conservative roster.

The constitutions of Georgia and New Hampshire are examined in two appendices. Douglass believes that they should be under the more radical category, but due to the lack of evidence he is reluctant to commit himself on the constitutions of these states on the northern and southern frontiers of the infant republic.

His main emphasis is placed on the development of state constitutions in North Carolina, Massachusetts, and Pennsylvania. Here the clashes between East and West, or the confrontations between the settled areas and the frontier, are brought into sharp contrast. Underrepresentation in the colonial legislatures and the urgent necessity for aid to combat the problems of a rapidly expanding community combine to make the frontier regions of these states ideal breeding grounds for democrats.

In North Carolina they developed their main ideas, but due to the