

George washington: war hero or war criminal? assignment



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Weston Traub FSEM 103 Professor Hess 11/2/10 Researched Story

Assignment War Hero or War Criminal? George Washington is often considered the “ Father of our Country” to most historians and schoolteachers. However, there is one event in history that remains untaught in most public schools, in order to preserve his reputation, that can make even the most patriotic Americans see their first president in an entirely different light. How do you perceive this man, as an initiator of Independence, or a town-destroyer?

Native American raids on the frontier alerted state officials to take immediate action during the Revolutionary War, and in 1778 Governor George Clinton of New York vowed to exert all effort into preserving the “ protection and comfort” of his frontiersmen (U. S. Archives 9). The same archives claim that Governor Clinton had attempted to gather an army of 1000 men to ward off the Indians, but Washington had quite larger dreams of destruction in mind.

Washington had his plan approved before Congress on February 25th, 1779, which assembled an army of roughly 4000 soldiers whose immediate purpose was to annihilate the six-nation tribes consisting of the Mohawks, Cayuga's, Seneca's, Onondagas, Iroquois, Tuscarora's, and finally the only pro-Colonial tribe of the Oneidas (U. S. Archives 9-10). A writer documented that to go about this task of “ protecting the colonists,” Washington instructed his men to execute “ total destruction and devastation of their settlements and capture as many prisoners as possible” (Fisher 288).

As mentioned in Joseph Fisher's book, Washington contemplated several other methods of assaulting the British, such as seizing their stronghold at Fort Niagara, but he somehow chose this option of exploiting his foe's weak spot and devastating an entire civilization in the process (Fisher 281-282). The outcome of this cruel game played by Washington was catastrophic for the Iroquois and their food supply. Within this analysis we will look at just how effective this injurious march was at providing colonial settlers with protection and comfort years down the road.

At the very beginning, the expedition moved at a lethargic pace. A historian notes that the campaign assembled three brigades at Easton, PA, on May 7th, and did not commence until July 31st. Despite these delays in the months of June and July, the three-pronged charge against the Indians was back to full stride in no time, burning crops, slaughtering livestock, capturing innocent prisoners, and desecrating orchards (Whittemore 121-132).

By August Commander John Sullivan, who led the main strike, was making great time plowing his way through the abandoned Iroquois villages of upstate New York (Timothy 563). Archives suggest that Indians were given word of Sullivan's lurking presence and fled quickly, causing Sullivan to rarely encounter opposition by the time he reached Seneca Lake in early September (U. S. Archives 202). However, one skirmish did take place near the present day city of Elmira, but casualties were meager on both sides.

Just because lives weren't being lost doesn't mean Washington's cruel aim of eradication wasn't functioning in full force however. According to a journal by one of Sullivan's men, on September 7th his troops reached the "

exceedingly beautiful” Seneca Lake, where they carelessly destroyed the old Iroquois settlement of Kanadesaga, located at present day Geneva (U. S. Archives 202). Clan leader “ Old Smoke,” was forced to flee his dwelling that harbored bounties of apple and peach trees, as well as a fruitful supply of corn (Geneva Historical Society).

Other documents state that after annihilating Kanadesaga, Sullivan’s brigade reunited with Clinton’s forces, reaching their final destination of Wyoming on September 30th (Adamiak). When the smoke cleared and troops dispersed, upwards of 40 villages had been devastated, along with 160, 000 bushels of corn burnt to a crisp. Washington was pleased with this mass carnage against the six-nation tribes, and although casualties were low, this so called “ war against vegetables” had been a noteworthy success in Sullivan’s mind as well (Adamiak).

Now let us revisit the question proposed earlier, as to the public view of George Washington as a whole. According to a study, George Washington is ranked as the third most popular president in our nations history (Imbornoni). However, doesn’t this seem odd when most people are unaware of his destructive attitudes during the Sullivan Campaign of 1779? An article provides insight that Washington was not only aggressive in his military tactics, but went so far as to advise Sullivan to not even consider offerings of peace until after destruction of settlements had taken place Adamiak). Other texts support this by saying that even if the enemy offered aid in capturing Britain’s hold of Fort Niagara (one of the campaign’s underlying objectives), Washington proclaimed these offerings were “ illusory” and ordered Sullivan to immediately proceed in abolishing the towns (Whittemore 134). Great job <https://assignbuster.com/george-washington-war-hero-or-war-criminal-assignment/>

Mr. Washington. Although the goal of extinguishing Iroquois settlements was met, the protection and comfort of settlers was still at risk.

Joseph Fischer writes that the British hold of Fort Niagara still remained intact, and although the Iroquois were exterminated for the moment, they would soon return with hostility and resentment towards colonial frontiersmen (Fisher 303-304). Another article quotes a colonial officer when he documented that “ The nests are destroyed, but the birds are still on the wing,” meaning that Iroquois raids would continue throughout the wars entirety (Adamiak).

These two reasons are in return why historians have labeled the Sullivan Campaign as “ A Well Executed Failure,” which was the title of Shannon Timothy’s book depicting the horrid events of 1779. ??????? When the expedition returned, journals were distributed from soldiers and scouts men that described the alluring and prosperous lands of the Finger Lakes, which in return initiated of a wave of settlers to the area around the mid 1780’s (Geneva Historical Society). This diaspora of coastal settlers to the upstate New York area, Fisher writes, was the ultimate factor that abolished the Iroquois presence in their homeland.

Sullivan’s detrimental campaign was not the dominant influence in providing American settlers with protection and comfort, and Washington’s orders of violent sovereignty over the six-nation tribes was in fact somewhat unnecessary (Fisher 304). However, this corrupt act of violence has been unrenowned for many Americans, and in kindergartens all across the U. S. ,

children are sheltered from the Sullivan Campaign in effort to preserve the image of their “ honorable” and “ noble” hero, George Washington.