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"The Desired Effect": Pontiac's Rebellion and the Native American Struggle to Survive in Britain's North American Conquest

Abstract

Ravaged by war and in debt after its victory in the French and Indian War, Britain was not only recuperating, but rejoicing over the signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1763. This treaty officially ended the fighting and gave Britain all of the land east of the Mississippi River, formerly owned by the French. The ink on the treaty was barely dry when a new insurgence arose in British occupied North America. Native Americans, dissatisfied after the war with their position as conquered people and not as allies, rebelled collectively against British colonists and forts along the frontier. Before the war had started, the French had traded and lived among the Native Americans, but perhaps most importantly, they had given them presents to show respect and diplomacy. The Native Americans had grown accustomed to this act of friendliness and when Britain, in debt after the war, wanted to considerably reduce the number of gifts given, there were severe consequences. In 1763, the Native Americans led an insurgence, commonly called Pontiac's Rebellion because of Pontiac, the Ottawa leader. This insurgence would culminate in the first extensive multi-tribal resistance to European colonization in America. In response to Britain's new policies, the Native Americans took ten of their forts, which led not only to excess in conflict, but to the British exposing smallpox blankets onto the Native Americans.

Keywords

Britain, Native Americans, Pontiac's Rebellion, frontier

“THE DESIRED EFFECT”: PONTIAC’S REBELLION AND THE NATIVE AMERICAN STRUGGLE TO SURVIVE IN BRITAIN’S NORTH AMERICAN CONQUEST



JOSEPH D. GASPARRO

Ravaged by war and in debt after its victory in the French and Indian War, Britain was not only recuperating, but rejoicing over the signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1763.¹ This treaty officially ended the fighting and gave Britain all of the land east of the Mississippi River, formerly owned by the French. The ink on the treaty was barely dry when a new insurgence arose in British occupied North America. Native Americans, dissatisfied after the war with their position as conquered people and not as allies, rebelled collectively against British colonists and forts along the frontier. Before the war had started, the French had traded and lived among the Native Americans, but perhaps most importantly, they had given them presents to show respect and diplomacy. The Native Americans had grown accustomed to this act of friendliness and when Britain, in debt after the war, wanted to considerably reduce the number of gifts given, there were severe consequences. In 1763, the Native Americans led an insurgence, commonly called Pontiac’s Rebellion because of Pontiac, the Ottawa leader. This insurgence would culminate in the first extensive multi-tribal resistance to European colonization in America.² In response to Britain’s new policies, the Native Americans took ten of their forts, which led not only to excess in conflict, but to the British exposing smallpox blankets onto the Native Americans.

The term ‘frontier’ will take on two meanings in this paper. A frontier in this paper will be regarded as an uninhabited region, one that has lacked major exploration and study. Because of the absence of examination and official colonization, a frontier will also be viewed as “geographic zones of interaction between two or more distinctive cultures.”³ At the time of Pontiac’s Rebellion, the British considered the Native Americans as savages and themselves civilized, a view echoed by Fredrick Jackson Turner, who felt a frontier was “the meeting place between savagery and civilization.”⁴ The term ‘Native American’ is used frequently throughout this paper, and while the word is vague in identifying certain tribes, the frontier was also vague, as aspects of it were oftentimes indistinguishable and unclear due to its vastness (see Figure 1).

¹ I would like to thank the Gettysburg College History Department, especially Michael J. Birkner, Scott Hancock, Timothy J. Shannon, and, of course, Barbara A. Sommer. I would furthermore like to thank the Carteret, New Jersey School District, especially Mary Comba and Nicholas G. Sysock. My family and friends are also deserving of my gratitude.

² Ian K. Steele, *Warpaths* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 234.

³ David J. Weber and Jane M. Rausch, eds., *Where Cultures Meet* (Delaware: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1994), xiv.

⁴ Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1920), 3.

During any given ambush or attack, numerous tribes would come and go as they saw fit, and oftentimes several members of a tribe felt uncomfortable with warfare. Relations between the Native Americans and British were also not uniform. There have been many accounts of Native Americans warning frontier settlers prior to an attack and even aiding in their actual escape.⁵ Similarly, British surgeons stationed at forts often provided medical care for the local Native Americans.⁶ The frontier was a “vast wilderness, interspersed with lakes and mountains,” and this not only impeded communication but access to reinforcements as well.⁷

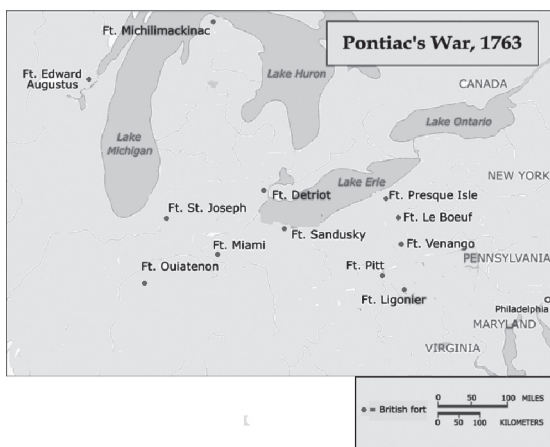


Figure 1⁸

In Fredrick Jackson Turner’s *Frontier Thesis*, published in 1893, he claimed that “[the] idealistic conception of vacant lands as an opportunity for a new order of things is unmistakably present” and that “never again will such gifts [such as] free land offer themselves.”⁹ The land Turner claimed to be vacant and “free” was actually the home of numerous Native American tribes. After the British victory in the French and Indian War, the British struggled to control the Native Americans who had already adjusted to French policy, with whom they had lived and traded more or less as equals.¹⁰ Richard White, who published *The Middle Ground*, described this situation as the “middle ground,” a way of finding a common ground and cooperating.¹¹ It is very likely that the British could have found a “middle ground” if they had kept the same policy as the French, especially in respect to gift giving, which the Native Americans took as a sign of diplomacy. Furthermore, Turner calls North America’s Indian policy “a series of experimentations,” and with good reason.¹² Britain’s policy towards Native Americans, while

⁵ C. Hale Sipe, *The Indian Wars of Pennsylvania* (Harrisburg: Telegraph Press, 1929), 424, 427-428.

⁶ Elias Meyer to Henry Bouquet, 24 September 1761, in *The Papers of Henry Bouquet*, Vol. 5, ed. Louis M. Waddell (Harrisburg: The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1984): 777-780.

⁷ Wilbur R. Jacobs, *Dispossessing the American Indian* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1972), 87.

⁸ Helen Hornbeck Tanner, ed., *Atlas of Great Lakes Indian History* (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 40-41.

⁹ Turner, *Frontier*, 261.

¹⁰ Gregory Evans Dowd, “The French King Wakes up in Detroit: ‘Pontiac’s War’ in Rumor and History,” *Ethnohistory* 37(1990): 266. The Native Americans were so accustomed to French traditions and way of life that Dowd calls them “Frenchified.”

¹¹ Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, empires, and republics in the Great Lakes region, 1650-1815* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 52.

¹² Turner, *Frontier*, 10.

constructed to help England's economy, also helped to provoke Pontiac's Rebellion. Faced with Britain's strict new policy, the Native Americans now struggled to alter their conceptions of European colonization and comprehend the policies of the victor.

Since Francis Parkman published *The Conspiracy of Pontiac* in 1851, there have been two major arguments on the subject of Pontiac's Rebellion. One of the crucial arguments questions how much power the Ottawa leader Pontiac truly had. Parkman's work portrayed Pontiac as the primary leader of the tribes and admirably said his "authority was almost despotic."¹³ Parkman even called the uprising Pontiac's own conspiracy. Other historians disputed Parkman's views and considered Pontiac's authority to be more akin to a local commander than a great chief. These historians even renamed the rebellion in order to avoid mentioning his name.¹⁴

Although debated for decades, Pontiac was indeed the true mastermind behind the insurgence. While an initial insurgence plot among the Native Americans failed in 1761, Pontiac was a more able leader and used the plans of that spoiled plot as a pattern for his assault upon the British forces.¹⁵ Years later in 1766, when it came time for peace talk, the British sought after Pontiac because they knew no lasting peace was possible without his approval.¹⁶ Historians also questioned the effect of the infamous smallpox blankets on the Native American uprising. Even though both men lack creditable evidence, Parkman, and Francis Jennings in 1988, agreed that the blankets had a major impact on the tide of the war.¹⁷ Contrastingly, in 2005, David Dixon rightfully belittled the consequences with exemplary statistics.¹⁸ Although there have been numerous publications on Pontiac's Rebellion, no author has had the viewpoint that the British were influenced to distribute the blankets because of the Native American's victories. Rather, these historians conclude that the blankets were distributed either for selfish reasons or out of genuine kindness.¹⁹ The idea, however, that the fall of the ten forts directly led to the distribution of the smallpox blankets has never been explored by historians in the past. Nevertheless, as views and sources have emerged and transformed over time concerning Pontiac's Rebellion, so too has the iconographic power of Pontiac and the success of the infamous blankets.

While Parkman, in a flattering language, justified Pontiac as the "Indians' forlorn hope" and the only leader of the rebellion, later historians not only added more leaders to the insurgence but belittled Pontiac's stature.²⁰ When C. Hale Sipe published *The Indian Wars of Pennsylvania* in 1929, he had nearly eighty years of scholarly research, of which Parkman never had had the chance to use. In this work, Sipe included other Native Americans besides Pontiac who helped in the insurgence.²¹ In 1947, when Howard H. Peckham published *Pontiac and the*

¹³ Francis Parkman, *The Conspiracy of Pontiac* (New York, 1991), 482.

¹⁴ Gregory Evans Dowd, *War Under Heaven* (Baltimore, 2002), 5; and William R. Nester, *Haughty Conquerors: Amherst and the Great Indian Uprising of 1763* (Connecticut: Praeger, 2000), ix.

¹⁵ Jacobs, *Dispossessing*, 86-87.

¹⁶ Parkman, *Conspiracy*, 482; Thomas Gage to Bouquet, 20 December 1764, *Bouquet Papers*, 733-734.

¹⁷ Parkman, *Conspiracy*, 482; Francis Jennings, *Empire of Fortune* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1988), 447-448.

¹⁸ David Dixon, *Never Come to Peace Again* (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2005), 152.

¹⁹ Knollenberg, *Germ Warfare*, 493-494; Sipe, *Indian Wars*, 494; Peckham, *Pontiac*, 227; Philip Ranlet, "The British, the Indians, and Smallpox: What Actually Happened at Fort Pitt in 1763?," *Pennsylvania History* 67(2000), 437.

²⁰ Parkman, *Conspiracy*, 485.

²¹ Sipe, *Indian Wars*, 412

Indian Uprising, he was the curator of manuscripts at William L. Clements Library, and learned from the Thomas Gage Papers, delivered to him in 1937, that Parkman's heroic Pontiac was but a local commander who "had fought a losing war."²² Peckham had the pleasure to view the papers of Thomas Gage, who succeeded the arrogant Jeffery Amherst as British Commander-in-Chief of North America in 1763. These papers of Gage were full of "crucial and previously inaccessible information on Pontiac and the ill-fated rebellion."²³ Written during the time of World War II, Peckham does give Pontiac the credit he is due, but in a much more humble light than the prodigious Pontiac of Parkman.²⁴

As time went on, historians were motivated not only by other publications, but by historical revisionism, or a reexamination of the facts. In 1972, Wilbur R. Jacobs published *Dispossessing the American Indian*, in which he stood behind Parkman and asserted Pontiac as the mastermind.²⁵ Jacobs was heavily influenced by Vine Deloria, who in 1969 wrote *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto*, in which Deloria felt Native Americans were being labeled as malicious savages. Deloria wanted to break the stereotype and illustrate the atrocious history of American expansionism into the west.²⁶ The publications of Richard White's *The Middle Ground* in 1991 and William R. Nester's *Haughty Conquerors* in 2000 established innovative views on the story of Pontiac due in part to the historical revisionism that emerged towards the end of the twentieth century.²⁷ White follows Peckham's view that Pontiac was only a local commander, but adds that after the uprising was subdued with the signing of a peace treaty, Native Americans' reception of frequent presents resumed again, lands were protected by the new proclamation of their British "father," and the so called 'middle ground' was restored.²⁸ Nester, on the other hand, was motivated by a reexamination of the documented facts and blamed Amherst's supercilious attitude and inability to listen to his British officers about his new policy, which concerned the Native Americans' revolt. Pontiac, Nester asserts, "was but one of many chiefs who took up the Seneca war cry" that was provoked by Amherst's "penny wise, pound foolish" gift giving policy to the Native Americans.²⁹

Aside from the debate over Pontiac's power, evidence that suggests the outcome of the infamous smallpox blankets at Fort Pitt in 1763 raises much discussion, as well as examination of which British officer should take credit for the idea. When Parkman published his renowned book in 1897, he cited two letters between Bouquet and Amherst in early July in which they discuss dispersing smallpox among the Native Americans.³⁰ The letters, however, were written two weeks after Captain Simeon Ecuyer had apparently already given the infected blankets to

²² Howard H. Peckham, *Pontiac and the Indian Uprising* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1947), xvi., 319; and Henry P. Beers, "The Papers of the British Commanders in Chief in North America, 1754-1783," *Military Affairs* 13(1949): 87.

²³ Howard H. Peckham, *Pontiac and the Indian Uprising* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1947), xvi.

²⁴ Peckham, *Pontiac*, xvii.

²⁵ Jacobs, *Dispossessing*, 88.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.

²⁷ Ranlet, *Indians and Smallpox*, 429.

²⁸ Steele, *Warpaths*, 246-247; White, *Middle Ground*, 271.

²⁹ Nester, *Haughty Conquerors*, ix.

³⁰ Parkman, *Conspiracy*, 648.

two Native American chiefs. Generals Jeffery Amherst and Henry Bouquet, who were both important and well-known British officers, also embodied the same qualities of leadership that Parkman admired in Pontiac. Captain Ecuyer, who historians affirm gave the Native Americans the blankets, conversely had neither the stature nor the popularity of Amherst or Bouquet.³¹ Parkman would thus not credit Ecuyer, merely a captain and subordinate to Bouquet, for the distribution of the smallpox blankets.

Parkman, who died in 1893, asserted that the smallpox from the blankets wreaked havoc on the frontier. Although Parkman lacked any statistical data, his theory would last among historians until 1954, when Bernhard Knollenberg's article "General Amherst and Germ Warfare" argued the contrary.³² The use of the term 'germ warfare' to describe the incident at Fort Pitt appeared among a generation which had just witnessed the largest armed conflict in world history—the dropping of the atomic bombs. Knollenberg, who, like Peckham, had the advantage of using the Thomas Gage Papers, stated that smallpox did impact the Native Americans, but it was not from the blankets. With the exception of Francis Jennings's *Empire of Fortune* in 1988, historians since Knollenberg's article argue that the blankets did not spread smallpox to the surrounding Native American tribes; rather, the tribes became infected by smallpox while ravaging villages where the disease was prevalent.³³ Before Pontiac or smallpox infected blankets even entered into the minds of the British, they were concerned with attaining land in the Ohio River Valley over the French. This is where Native American unrest first began to form.

The French and Indian War began as a struggle for British expansion west of the Allegheny Mountains in the Ohio River Valley. Prior to the war, three primary Native American tribes lived in the area: the Seneca, the Delaware, and the Shawnee. While their economy was self-sufficient and revolved around fishing and hunting, they had no great attachment to the French, unlike the tribes of the Great Lakes region: the Ottawa, Ojibwas, Potawatomis, and Hurons. These nations traded, lived, and intermarried with the French. France's three newly acquired colonies, Canada, the Illinois Country, and Louisiana, were also extremely dependent upon these Native Americans because their economic system was based upon a close trade relationship. In the late 1740s, both the French and the British laid claim to the land in the Ohio River Valley. Even though neither had settlers in the valley yet, the British needed an outlet for their booming population and the French wanted to protect their economy and authority over the land.³⁴

³¹ Sipe, *Indian Wars*, 424; Peckham, *Pontiac*, 170; Dixon, *Peace Again*, 153; and Elizabeth A. Fenn, "Biological Warfare in Eighteenth-Century North America: Beyond Jeffrey Amherst," *The Journal of American History* 86 (2000), 1557; and Bernhard Knollenberg, "General Amherst and Germ Warfare," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 41 (1954): 493-494.

³² Knollenberg, *Germ Warfare*, 493-494; Sipe, *Indian Wars*, 494; Peckham, *Pontiac*, 227.

³³ Jennings, *Fortune*, 448; Dixon, *Peace Again*, 153; Dowd, *War*, 190; Ranlet, *Indians and Smallpox*, 431; White, *Middle Ground*, 288; Jacobs, *Dispossessing*, 82; Adrienne Mayor, "The Nessus Shirt in the New World: Smallpox Blankets in History and Legend," *The Journal of American Folklore* 108 (1995): 58.

³⁴ William R. Nester, *The Great Frontier War: Britain, France, and the Imperial Struggle for North America, 1607-1755* (Westport: Praeger, 2000), 1-45; D. Peter MacLeod, "Microbes and Muskets: Smallpox and the Participation of the Amerindian Allies of New France in the Seven Years' War," *Ethnohistory* 39 (1992), 53.

There, Ohio River Indians eventually began to trade with the British for provisions such as alcohol. This enraged the French, who did not want to lose their economic monopoly. Aside from hanging plaques on trees by every major river confluence in order to show claim to the land, the French established forts in 1752 under Marquis Duquesne, Governor of Canada, “to make every possible effort to drive the English from our lands.”³⁵ While constructing the forts, the French were dismayed when they were warned by Native Americans to “not build any forts,” and to find out the British eventually set up their own fort a year later.³⁶ When the French received word of the building of the British garrison, they sent numerous troops who successfully surrendered the fort. A year later, in 1754, the British ordered a then unremarkable George Washington to help with the construction of their fort. When Washington realized the fort was under French rule, he attacked a French militia a few miles from the fort, and with that he “set the world on fire.”³⁷ The French and Indian War had begun.

Seven years of conflict and war would follow the Battle of Jumonville Glen, Washington’s attack on the French. Although Native Americans sided with the British before the war with the exception of the Iroquois Confederacy, once the conflict began they primarily fought alongside the French. Once the British began to build trading posts and an eventual fort in the Ohio Region, the French not only began to attack British soldiers but their Native American allies, made up mostly of the Iroquois Confederacy. After unsuccessful attempts to try to obtain weapons from the British in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and Winchester, Virginia in order to protect themselves, the Native Americans had no choice but to align themselves with the French. Furthermore, the events leading up to the Battle of Jumonville Glen proved to be particularly important. From the onset, the French had a more personal relationship with the Native Americans, intermarried and even lived among them. Early in the war, in 1758, the British signed the Treaty of Easton, stating that they would not settle west of the Allegheny Mountains as long as the Ohio Nation did not side with the French.³⁸ While the agreement was followed at first by the Native Americans, they eventually disregarded it because their intimacy with the French was stronger.

The war ended with the Treaty of Paris in February 1763, which gave the British all of France’s land east of the Mississippi River. As a result, the French no longer possessed territory in North America. With the French driven out, settlers began to move over the Allegheny Mountains with the motivation to not only advance, but to profit from the fur trade. Not only were the Native Americans angered by the defiance of the Treaty of Easton, but they were stunned to discover that the French had lost the war and that they were now under British rule.

³⁵ Fred Anderson, *Crucible of War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000), 32.

³⁶ Nester, *Haughty Conquerors*, 53-58.

³⁷ William M. Fowler, *Empires at War: The French and Indian War and the Struggle for North America, 1754-1763* (New York: Walker & Company, 2005), 43.

³⁸ Anderson, *Crucible of War*, 278. The Mingos, from the Ohio Country, unlike the Great Lakes region, had no great attachment to the French. The Mingos made peace with the British in 1758, with the Treaty of Easton, with the understanding that the British would withdraw from the Ohio Country. However, the British strengthened their forts in the region, and decided not to abandon. This drove the Mingos to uprising in 1763.

When the British began to enact new policies for their recently acquired people and land, the Native Americans were unwilling to comply with them.

Major General Jeffery Amherst, the commanding officer of the British forces in North America, had the responsibility of implementing these new policies among the Native Americans. Amherst, the 'hero' who overtook Montreal in 1760 to close the French and Indian War in North America, was not interested in conciliation with the Native Americans.³⁹ By late 1762, Amherst also had to deal with the drastic reduction of Britain's once powerful army due to the deployment of troops to participate in attacks on French and Spanish possessions in the Caribbean.⁴⁰ The remaining troops were spread so thinly around the newly conquered land that Amherst found it hard to maintain proper garrisons. Each region had their own distinctive way of treating the Native Americans, and this compounded disarray throughout the frontier. Although people in the Louisiana territory intermarried with the Native Americans, people in the Ohio region did not have any major ties to them. To enforce a universal Native American policy also proved to be a problem because Amherst had to consider the differences in each tribe's viewpoint on political and economical issues.⁴¹ Amherst had a major challenge before him, but whichever policy he employed, he had to consult Sir William Johnson, Native American superintendent, which was a challenge in itself. Johnson, aside from being well-known for the founding of Johnstown, New York, is also known for his cordial Native American policy. Amherst felt Johnson was resistant to change, and oblivious to the economic pressures the crown faced because he kept requesting money that Britain simply did not have.⁴² England was in a debt of over a million dollars, and there was no money left to spend on North America. As troops were deployed elsewhere, Britain focused its attention on more urgent problems and left Amherst to employ his own policies.

Amherst's first experience with Native Americans was when the Cherokees in the Carolinas revolted against their former British allies in the summer of 1761.⁴³ The Cherokees traded not only deerskins but war captives from other tribes to South Carolina. There was an immediate change, however, when Governor William H. Lyttelton imprisoned a group of Cherokee chiefs.⁴⁴ The Cherokees responded by revolting near Charleston, South Carolina. The rebellion died down shortly but not before the Native Americans seized one frontier post, killing twenty-five soldiers in the garrison.⁴⁵ Amherst knew the level of destruction the Native Americans were capable of and the British were already suspicious of their Iroquois allies who, during the French and Indian War, had proven frequent deserters and thieves. In a letter to Pennsylvania Governor James Hamilton, Amherst explained how he felt about his allies' actions:

³⁹ Anderson, *Crucible of War*, 407-408

⁴⁰ Dixon, *Peace Again*, 74.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁴² Colin G. Calloway, *The Scratch of a Pen: 1763 and the Transformation of North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 69.

⁴³ Dixon, *Peace Again*, 77.

⁴⁴ Anderson, *Crucible of War*, 460.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 466-467.

If they do not behave as good and faithful allies ought to do, and renounce all acts of hostilities against His Majesty's subjects I shall retaliate upon them, and I have the might so to do tenfold every breach of treaty they shall be guilty of and every outrage they shall committ.⁴⁶

With Amherst's questioning of his Native American allies, and with the Cherokee conflict still fresh in his mind, his first policy initiative was to cut back and deprive Native Americans of arms and ammunition. In a letter to Sir William Johnson, Amherst proclaimed "we have it in our power to reduce them to reason," assuming that Native Americans would be less likely to revolt without firearms.⁴⁷

In addition to decreasing arms for the Native Americans, Amherst also wanted to reduce the distribution of gifts to them as well. Amherst saw little need to supply Native Americans with gifts, as the British were conquerors and the Native Americans were subjects. This new view abolished Richard White's 'middle ground,' which White argued grew "according to the need of people to find a means, other than force, to gain the cooperation or consent of foreigners."⁴⁸ With England's debt in mind, Amherst thought he was doing the crown a favor by limiting gifts, and he verifies this in a letter to Sir William Johnson :

With regards to furnishing the [Indians], with a little cloathing, some arms & ammunition to hunt with, that is all very well in cases of necessity; but as, when the intended trade is established they will be able to supply themselves with these, from the traders, for their furs, I do not see why the Crown should be put to that expense.⁴⁹

The foundation of Amherst's policy was to eliminate presents that served as a token of the entire 'middle ground.'⁵⁰ The French regularly presented gifts to the Native Americans as a sign of diplomacy and peace, but Amherst saw gift giving, except in cases of dire need, as a bribe for good behavior. While Amherst was justifiable in keeping the needs of Britain as his primary objective, White would argue that he ultimately failed because he did not "convince [the Native Americans] that some mutual action was fair and legitimate."⁵¹ When the French had a conflict with the Native Americans, they would try to "gain an audience" with them and speak with kind words, calling them "their children," in order to work out a mutual agreement, 'a middle ground.'⁵² The British, on the other hand, ignored the Native American's opinion of the situation.

⁴⁶ Jeffery Amherst to James Hamilton, 30 March 1760, in *The Sir William Johnson Papers*, Vol. 3, ed. James Sullivan (Albany: The University of the State of New York 1921): 205.

⁴⁷ Amherst to William Johnson, 11 August 1761, *Ibid.*, 3:517; and Michael N. McConnell, *A Country Between: The Upper Ohio Valley and Its People, 1724-1774* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 163.

⁴⁸ White, *The Middle Ground*, 52.

⁴⁹ Amherst to Johnson, 22 February 1761, *Johnson Papers*, 3: 345.

⁵⁰ White, *Middle Ground*, 257; R. G. Robertson *Rotting Face: Smallpox and the American Indian* (Caldwell: Caxton Press, 2002), 119.

⁵¹ White, *The Middle Ground*, 52.

⁵² Dixon, *Peace Again*, 18.

The French, unlike the British, produced a Métis population from their intermarriage, “bound by family, religion, and culture” to both the French and the Native Americans.⁵³ Not only did the Native Americans resent the new policy, especially the pro-French Great Lakes region, but so did some British, Sir William Johnson among them.

Johnson, known by the Mohawks and other members of the League of Five Nations as “Warrahiyagey” or “the man who undertakes great things,” understood Native American politics best and greatly opposed Amherst’s new policy.⁵⁴ Johnson knew Amherst’s new plan would bring about severe repercussions. Aside from representing diplomacy, the gifts were a tribute to Native American chiefs and payment for allowing the whites to build forts on their land.⁵⁵ As White further described, Johnson tried to make Amherst “understand the world and reasoning of others” because not only would Native American chiefs lose power because they were not receiving tribute, but their suspicions of British intentions would be increased.⁵⁶ In a letter to Charles Wyndham, the Earl of Egremont and the newly appointed Secretary of State for the Southern Department responsible for the American colonies, Johnson wrote:

Your lordship you will observe that the Indians are not only very uneasy, but jealous of our growing power, which the enemy [France] (to engage them firmly in their interest) had always told them would prove their ruin, as we should by degrees surround them on every side, & at length extirpate them. . . . from the treatment they receive from us, different from what they have been accustomed to by the French, who spared no labor, or expense to gain their friendship and esteem, which along enabled them to support the war in these parts.⁵⁷

Johnson thought Amherst was naïve regarding the Native Americans’ capacity to wage war, and the only way to prevent it was to treat them fairly and to keep them supplied with arms, ammunition and, above all, gifts. Amherst, conversely, believed he had the power to demand ‘good behavior’ of Native Americans, rather than gifts, because he was the conqueror. Still, Johnson argued that the expense of presents would greatly outweigh the cost of fighting a war which the natives will not stop “until they have spread havoc over all the frontiers.”⁵⁸ Except for the elimination of presents and gunpowder to the Native Americans, Johnson did not “seriously question British measures; [he] only criticized the speed with which they were taken and the failure to negotiate them according to the diplomatic procedures of the middle ground.”⁵⁹

⁵³ Ibid., 71; Jennings, *Fortune*, 441; Dowd, *War*, 26-27.

⁵⁴ Dowd, *War*, 72-73.

⁵⁵ White, *Middle Ground*, 52.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Johnson to Charles Wyndham, Earl of Egremont, 31 May 1762, in *The Sir William Johnson Papers*, ed. James Sullivan (Albany: The University of the State of New York, 1951), 3: 461-462.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ White, *Middle Ground*, 259.

When Amherst repeatedly ignored Johnson's warnings, Johnson said Amherst "was not at all friend of Indians, which I am afraid may have bad consequences."⁶⁰

Johnson was not alone in opposing Amherst's Native American policy. George Croghan, Johnson's deputy Indian agent, also believed that several provisions were cheaper than funding a war against the Native Americans:

The British and French Colonies since the first settling [of] America . . . have adopted the Indian customs and manners by indulging them in treaties and renewing friendships.⁶¹

Captain Donald Campbell, the commander of the British stronghold Fort Detroit, further believed in a course of amiability and kindness when dealing with Native Americans. Campbell supplied Native Americans near his fort with provisions such as ammunition, even though he was fearful of going against the wishes of Amherst. To his defense, Campbell did "what [he] thought was best for the service," fearing a Native American uprising.⁶²

The fear would materialize soon enough. In the summer of 1761, two Seneca—Guyasuta, also known as Kiasuha, and Tahaiadoris—felt they were "ill treated" and called for a council among the neighboring nations for the purpose of planning a strike against all British garrisons.⁶³ Angered by Amherst's new policy, the Seneca leaders came to Detroit to distribute war belts to the Ottawas, Hurons, and Chippewas "to take up the hatchet" and to "cut off the English at Fort Detroit," which would "give [them] the greatest joy and pleasure."⁶⁴ The war belts, made of wampum and painted red, were sent to tribes as a summons of war. On the contrary, a wampum belt painted white was given to an adversary to symbolize peace. The Senecas, with the help of Pontiac, delivered red war belts and also made speeches to try and motivate other tribes to join the cause.

Not long after the Senecas were in the region, Native Americans from the Wyandot informed Campbell about their plan to attack his fort. Campbell told those members of the Wyandot who informed him to go to the Seneca council and report the news back to him. The Wyandot's reported back about the Senecas' well-constructed plan, triggered by Amherst's new policies, but more importantly they discovered that the tribes planned to act as one.⁶⁵ When Campbell learned of the plot, he called the local tribes into his own council and informed them he was conscious of their scheme against the English and that he,

⁶⁰ Amherst to Johnson, 16 January 1762, in *The Sir William Johnson Papers*, 10:354.

⁶¹ White, *Middle Ground*, 258.

⁶² Donald Campbell to Bouquet, 21 May 1761, *Bouquet Papers*, 5:491.

⁶³ Dowd, *War*, 105.

⁶⁴ "Minutes between Indians and Johnson in Detroit," 8 July 1761, *Johnson Papers*, 3:450-451.

⁶⁵ Jon William Parmenter, "Pontiac's War: Forging New Links in the Anglo-Iroquois Covenant Chain, 1758-1766," *Ethnohistory* 44 (1997): 624.

Advise[d] [them] with all [his] heart in the most friendly manner, to return home and ardently recommend it to your chiefs and those of other nations in concert with you to quit their bad intentions and live in peace, for if they proceed in their designs against the English it will terminate in their utter ruin and destruction.⁶⁶

The conference ended with the Native Americans dispersing and Campbell convinced of the Senecas' candor, but in actuality the Native Americans reasoned that since their plan was uncovered, they would wait patiently and allow the war belts to continue to circulate.⁶⁷ Because of the vastness of the frontier, not all the war belts that the Seneca leaders had dispersed had reached their destination. Moreover, once a tribe had received the Seneca war belt, they could circulate it among other tribes that were in their region to get more warriors.

The Seneca plot had mixed reactions throughout the British ranks. Amherst reasoned that the uprising "never gave [him] momentous concern, as [he knew] of their incapacity of attempting anything serious."⁶⁸ General Henry Bouquet, who was the commander of Fort Pitt, one of the largest British forts, decided to not only bring British settlers who had been living on the frontier inside the fort, but also to form two companies of militia to strengthen the garrison. Although Bouquet took those precautions, he felt the entire Native American plot would fail and that they "could only flatter themselves to succeed by surprise."⁶⁹ Johnson, along with his deputy Croghan, however, did not take the plot lightly, and soon Johnson wrote a letter to Amherst in which he exclaimed "[he was] very apprehensive that something not right is brewing."⁷⁰ Johnson did not merely feel troubled over one tribe but all of the tribes. As the British continued to deal with the Seneca hysteria, a new prophet from among the Delaware was emerging, and presented new troubles for the crown.

This new prophet's name was Neolin, who had supposedly fallen into a trance and visited the Master of Life, the supreme deity in Native American culture. During this trance, Neolin, or "Enlightened One," came to three forks in the road, and after two were blocked, he faced the third, alongside a woman who instructed him to purify himself before meeting with the Master of Life.⁷¹ This part of Neolin's trance symbolized for Native Americans a cleansing of themselves of their "white ways" through purification, or ridding themselves of the English.⁷² After Neolin completed his purification process, he was able to listen to the Master of Life, who provided him with a set of orders to take back:

⁶⁶ Campbell to Bouquet, 22 July 1761, *Bouquet Papers*, 5:649.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 648-650.

⁶⁸ Amherst to Johnson, 9 August 1761, *Johnson Papers*, 3:514.

⁶⁹ Bouquet to Campbell, 30 June 1761, *Bouquet Papers*, 5:597.

⁷⁰ Johnson to Amherst, 21 June 1761, *Johnson Papers*, 10:291.

⁷¹ Daniel K. Richter, *Facing East from Indian Country: A Native History of Early America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 194-195.

⁷² Dixon, *Peace Again*, 96.

The land where ye dwell I have made for you and not for others. Whence comes it that ye permits the whites upon your land. Can ye not live without them? Ye could live as ye did before knowing them, before those whom ye call your brothers [the English] had come upon your lands. Did ye not live by the bow and arrow? Ye had no need for gun or power, or anything else. . . . As to those who trouble your lands, drive them out, make war upon them. I do not love them at all; they know me not, and are my enemies. . . . Send them back to the lands which I have created for them and let them stay there.⁷³

Neolin's message served to further unify the diverse Native American people. The Delawares, Shawnees and Mingoes, all from the Ohio Valley, and the Ottawas and Potawatomes from the Great Lakes all came to believe that the Master of Life was punishing them for allowing the British to come onto their land.⁷⁴ Although Neolin denounced white practices, he really was preaching Native American guilt for embracing the practices; the great advantage of accepting guilt is that it restores power to the guilty party.⁷⁵ The only way to change their fate was to actively rid themselves of the English.

While spending time away from his fort in Philadelphia, Bouquet, who left Captain Ecuyer to command Fort Pitt, was informed by Croghan that war belts were still spreading among Native Americans throughout the frontier. The Native Americans felt it was "time for them to prepare to defend themselves and their country from [the English]."⁷⁶ When Amherst, who knew of the short supply of troops at the forts, heard of the activity on the frontier, he was surprisingly unworried. He felt the Native Americans' "power [was] altogether insufficient," and that they would not "attempt any mischief."⁷⁷ While Neolin was a key motivator for the Native Americans to take up arms against the British, Pontiac, leader of the Ottawa, was an even bigger problem for them.

Pontiac further used Neolin's religious awakening and on April 27, 1763 called all the surrounding nations for a grand council to discuss an attack.⁷⁸ Parkman admiringly stated that Pontiac, whose name was respected "from the sources of the Ohio to those of the Mississippi and to the farthest boundaries of the wide-spread Algonquin race," was determined to launch a surprise attack against the British.⁷⁹ A great orator, Pontiac called the grand council, which

⁷³ John Rutherford, *John Rutherford's Narrative in The Siege of Detroit in 1763*, ed. Milo Milton Quaife (Chicago: R.R. Donnelley & Sons Company, 1958), 14-15. John Rutherford, a British captive of the Native Americans, witnessed the speech made by Neolin. Rutherford was ambushed while on duty, and ended up a victim of circumstance. Although he was a captive, the Native Americans treated Rutherford with food, water, and shelter. Rutherford's accounts of Neolin, and later Pontiac (see footnote 85), I take to be accurate and not exceedingly biased; once Rutherford escaped captivity he had the chance to kill one of his captors, but decided against it.

⁷⁴ Dixon, *Peace Again*, 98; Parmenter, *Forging*, 672; For examples of the punishments see Gregory Evans Dowd, *A Spirited Resistance: The North American Indian Struggle for Unity, 1745-1815* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1992), 34.

⁷⁵ White, *Middle Ground*, 283.

⁷⁶ George Croghan to Bouquet, 10 December 1762, in *The Papers of Henry Bouquet*, Vol. 6, ed. Louis M. Waddell (Harrisburg: The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1994):137-8.

⁷⁷ Amherst to Bouquet, 31 October 1762, *Johnson Papers*, 3:920.

⁷⁸ Anthony F. C. Wallace, *The Death and Rebirth of Seneca* (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), 115; Thomas J. Maxwell, Jr., "Pontiac Before 1763," *Ethnohistory* 4 (1957): 43.

⁷⁹ Parkman, *Conspiracy*, 483.

consisted of the Potawatomes, Ottawas, Chippewas, and Hurons, to meet a short distance from Fort Detroit.⁸⁰ There, Pontiac used the doctrine of the prophet Neolin and the Master of Life as a supernatural sanction for his conspiracy, and inspired the Native Americans to go to war.⁸¹ Pontiac preached to the council who looked upon him as an “oracle” that the Master of Life had directed them to “drive off [their] lands those dogs clothed in red who will do nothing but harm.”⁸² In his speech, Pontiac urged them to take up arms and rid themselves of the British. The discourse by Pontiac and the fact that some Native Americans had received war belts two years prior to the council stimulated everyone because they were anxious and ready for war. The message was clear: Native Americans must not only purge themselves of English customs, but eradicate the foreigners from their land.

To have a greater chance of a victorious attack in Fort Detroit, Pontiac conceived of a plan that would allow both himself and his followers a better assessment of the fort. On May 1, 1763, while Pontiac and fifty of his faithful Ottawas approached Fort Detroit and were admitted to perform a ceremonial dance for the commander of the fort, Major Henry Gladwin, a few snuck off once inside and looked around to locate the British’s barracks and defenses.⁸³ Gladwin and his soldiers were not worried about Native Americans sneaking around prior to this event, for they had always been restless but never deceptive.⁸⁴ When the ceremony came to an end, Gladwin did not suspect anything to be astray, and Pontiac informed the British that he would return again in a couple of days so that more of his tribe could meet the commander.

Once back in their village, the Ottawas prepared for the attack. Pontiac held a council meeting at the Potawatomi village on May 5 and exclaimed passionately to them:

It is important for us, my brothers, that we exterminate from our lands [the English who seek] only to destroy us. . . . When I go to see the English commander and say to him that some of our comrades are dead, instead of bewailing their death. . . . He laughs at me and at you. . . . Therefore, my brothers, we must all swear their destruction and wait no longer.⁸⁵

At the council it was decided that on May 7, Pontiac and sixty warriors with tomahawks and other weapons hidden under their blankets would enter the fort while their women would enter with muskets under their clothing.⁸⁶ Pontiac would use a wampum belt to signal the attack inside the fort while the other Potawatomes, outside the fort, would attack any English with whom they came in contact.⁸⁷ Although Pontiac employed a wampum belt in a new and creative

⁸⁰ Parmenter, *Forging*, 627.

⁸¹ Wallace, *Death*, 121; For example of inspiring “gullible followers” see Dowd, *Spirited Resistance*, 35.

⁸² Dixon, *Peace Again*, 108; Richer, *Facing East*, 198-199.

⁸³ Rutherford, *Siege at Detroit*, 19-21.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 17-21.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁸⁶ Anderson, *Crucible*, 537-539.

⁸⁷ Rutherford, *Siege at Detroit*, 25.

way, using the belt as a weapon rather than for the more traditional purpose of a summons of war, his plan would end up being spoiled regardless.

Although Pontiac's plan was well organized, Gladwin and his troops were soon informed by several Ottawa Indians who were reluctant to fight. At this, the English began to frantically prepare the fort for an attack. On May 7, Pontiac and his warriors returned to the fort and were startled by the sight of the whole garrison at arms. Pontiac said to Gladwin, "We would be very glad to know the reason for this, for we imagine some bird has given thee ill news of us."⁸⁸ Rightfully chagrined and bewildered that their plan had been uncovered, Pontiac assured the soldiers of the misunderstanding and told the British that he would return once again to smoke the peace pipe.⁸⁹ Now well aware of the Native Americans' plot, Gladwin and his troops had more time to prepare and to welcome in any families living outside of the fortification's walls. When Pontiac and his warriors arrived back on May 9, the guard at the front of the gate was ordered to only let Pontiac and a couple of his leading men in. Pontiac, taking this as a sign of disrespect because all the Native Americans wanted to be involved in the ceremony, told the guard to tell Gladwin "that he may stay in his fort, and that I will keep the country."⁹⁰ Pontiac and his warriors returned to their village, picked up their hatchets and tomahawks and charged at Fort Detroit. With that, the siege of Fort Detroit had begun.

Chanting their war song, Pontiac and his willing warriors killed twenty-four head of cattle and even British Sergeant Fisher and his family on the way to Fort Detroit.⁹¹ Once arriving at the fort, Pontiac ordered the Ottawas to watch the north side of the fort to prevent anyone from entering, while the rest of the warriors tried to hide themselves as firing began from the British. Pontiac, low on supplies, arranged for a peace talk during the cease-fire, and sent envoys to the garrison with the hopes of truce. The British, with a lack of provisions themselves, entertained the idea and sent Captain Campbell, accompanied by Lieutenant George McDougall, to converse with the Native Americans because not only would it take months to get word to Amherst for supplies, but even if the supplies did come they would be confiscated by Pontiac.⁹²

The two British officers apprehensively walked with Pontiac to the house of Antoine Cuillerier, a Frenchman involved in the rebellion.⁹³ Pontiac told them that if the British abandoned Fort Detroit and their provisions, they would be allowed to march to Fort Niagara. The officers asserted that they would have to bring the proposal back to Gladwin, but just as they were about to depart, Pontiac seized them both and unexpectedly made them hostages.⁹⁴ The translator of the confrontation, Pierre LaButte, went back and informed Gladwin of Pontiac's

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 30, 33. Rutherford asserted Pontiac "found himself overwhelmed by various emotions; he looked like a lioness robbed of all her whelps." Pontiac then told the British he would return to smoke the calumet, a peace pipe, "in token of agreement."

⁹⁰ Charles E. Moore, ed., *The Gladwin Manuscripts* (Lansing: Robert Smith Printing, 1897), 619.

⁹¹ Nester, *Haughty Conquerors*, 80.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 81.

⁹³ Dowd, *War*, 121.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

terms and of the capture of two of his officers, but the commander would not negotiate while his officers were held prisoner.⁹⁵ The siege continued after the two sides failed to reach an agreement. The siege eventually ended in a stalemate in October, six months after it began, but not before British captives were taken and eventually killed. The attack on Detroit brought the British's worst fear to life, but it was only the beginning of the brutal violence that would ensue.

The first British fort to fall was Fort Sandusky. Stationed along Lake Erie in Ohio, this was a crucial fort to attack because it was on the vital trail of communication between Fort Detroit and Fort Pitt. The commander of the fort, Ensign Christopher Pauli, was on peaceful terms with nearby Wyandots. After being encouraged by Ottawas and Wyandots already involved in Pontiac's plan, the nearby Wyandots acquiesced to join in the war and on May 16 went to Fort Sandusky and requested to speak with Pauli.⁹⁶ Pauli, unsuspecting of trouble, allowed them to enter and they quickly scattered around the fort emitting war cries as they slaughtered and scalped the troops, fifteen in all.⁹⁷ Having achieved their goal, the Wyandots then burned the garrison, and spared Pauli, whom they took with them as a prisoner.⁹⁸ The Wyandots and Ottawas suffered no casualties in this victory at Sandusky and it helped motivate other Native Americans to join the fight.⁹⁹

The next British fort to be attacked fell in a very similar fashion to that of Ft. Sandusky. Located in southern Michigan, Fort St. Joseph, commanded by Ensign Francis Schlosser, was greeted on the morning of May 25 with a small group of Potawatomes who wanted to introduce their relatives to the commander.¹⁰⁰ The commander consented, and when the Potawatomes left to get their relatives, Schlosser was warned by a French resident of a possible attack.¹⁰¹ By the time Schlosser rushed back to his barracks to warn his undersized regiment of men, he found the garrison swarming with Native Americans. Before Schlosser had time to arm himself, a war cry was heard, and within two minutes the Potawatomes killed everyone except Schlosser and two others. The Native Americans were deceptive in their attacks not only because they wanted to outmaneuver their adversary, but because they felt their actions were justifiable since they were being cheated by Britain's new policy in regard to the allocation of gifts. An alarming pattern of treachery was developing, one to which the British were not accustomed.

The pattern of duplicity continued with the attack on Fort Miami. Commanded by Ensign Robert Holmes, its location was strategic: the intersection of the St. Mary and St. Joseph Rivers in northeastern Indiana, which was the direct route between Canada and Louisiana.¹⁰² When he was warned of cannon fire coming from the direction of Detroit, unlike most British officers who ignored rumors, Holmes put his small company of men on guard and prepared

⁹⁵ Nester, *Haughty Conquerors*, 82.

⁹⁶ Peckham, *Pontiac*, 154.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 154-155.

⁹⁸ Dixon, *Peace Again*, 119.

⁹⁹ Pechman, *Pontiac*, 155.

¹⁰⁰ Dixon, *Peace Again*, 119.

¹⁰¹ Timothy J. Todish, *The British Military and the Pontiac Indian Uprising of 1763-1764* (New York: Purple Mountain Press, 2006), 56.

¹⁰² Nester, *Haughty Conquerors*, 89.

for an attack. Yet Holmes, who was an experienced frontier officer, had foolishly taken a Native American mistress. When a Native American from the Miami village was sick, Holmes's mistress convinced him to assist, and no sooner than he arrived at the village he was killed by a member of the Miami tribe. The remaining soldiers at Fort Miami naturally shut their gates in worry. Two French messengers Jacques Godfroy and Mini Chene, acting on behalf of the Native Americans, approached the fort and convinced the British to surrender, but not before looting the fort and killing four of the eleven soldiers that were left.¹⁰³ The deception of the Native Americans had deepened, and this time it involved a woman.

Located along the Wabash River in southwestern Indiana, the fourth British fort to fall by duplicity was Fort Ouiatenon, commanded by Lieutenant Edward Jenkins. Jenkins, much like Pauli at Sandusky, was on very good terms with local tribes. However, the Ottawa told the Weas, Kickapoos, and Mascoutens about their past victories and influenced them to join in the attack.¹⁰⁴ The lieutenant was not aware of the Native Americans' past victories, and when the local tribes asked him to meet for a council, Jenkins had no suspicions of an attack. When Jenkins appeared at the council he was immediately seized, and his whole feeble garrison soon surrendered but not before the local tribes who subdued them asserted that they were "sorry, but that they were obliged to do it by the other nations."¹⁰⁵ Although the fourth British fort to fall, the Native Americans had yet to take a major garrison; but that was about to change.

The first major fort the Native Americans victoriously attacked turned out to be the bloodiest.¹⁰⁶ Fort Michilimackinac, a major fur-trading center in northern Michigan, commanded by Captain George Etherington consisted of over forty men and was one of the larger garrisons the British possessed.¹⁰⁷ Stubborn to a fault, when a French resident warned Etherington about Native American activity in the area, he ignored the caution and "threatened to send the next person who should bring a story of the same kind a prisoner to Detroit."¹⁰⁸ A few days later on June 2, numerous Chippewa and Sauk congregated outside the Etherington's fort to engage in a game of lacrosse.¹⁰⁹ The fort was not on alert, so British officers and soldiers alike went outside of the fortification to watch the game. As the game went on, Native Americans purposely tossed the ball inside the fort, and as they rushed in to retrieve it, they were handed weapons that were hidden under the blankets of their women, and opened fired on the helpless garrison.¹¹⁰ When the fighting ended, twenty-one British soldiers had been killed, while others, including Etherington, were held hostage.¹¹¹

¹⁰³ Todish, *British Military*, 57.

¹⁰⁴ Dixon, *Peace Again*, 120.

¹⁰⁵ Nester, *Haughty Conquerors*, 91.

¹⁰⁶ Peckham, *Pontiac*, 163.

¹⁰⁷ Todish, *British Military*, 58.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 58.

¹⁰⁹ Nester, *Haughty Conquerors*, 96.

¹¹⁰ Dowd, *War*, 93.

¹¹¹ Dixon, *Peace Again*, 123.

The Native Americans spared Etherington and his soldiers' lives, but not before the commander promised more captives. Etherington wrote a letter to Lieutenant James Gorrell, the commander of Fort Edward Augustus, ordering their small garrison to join him and his men.¹¹² If the Native Americans could take one of the British's larger forts in Fort Michilimackinac, he knew Gorrell's garrison would be no match for them. On the same day as the attack on Etherington's fort, Fort Ligonier, commanded by Lieutenant Archibald Blane, purposely set fire to some of its structures rather than surrender it to the Native Americans. Fort Edward Augustus and Ligonier, not as vital or as large as Michilimackinac, likewise fell to the Native Americans without much of a struggle. The triumphant attack on Etherington's fort was a key victory for the Native Americans. By taking one of the larger British forts, it raised not only the Native Americans' confidence and persuaded more tribes to join the attack, but it demonstrated to the British how severe this insurgence truly was.

Positioned in western Pennsylvania, Fort Venango was commanded by Lieutenant Francis Gordon and fifteen Royal Americans. The fort fell on June 16 to the Senecas through the same deceptive circumstances as Michilimackinac: a game of lacrosse.¹¹³ Once the Senecas rushed inside, with the help of the Mingoes, they slaughtered every soldier except Gordon. Instead of killing Gordon on the spot, they forced him to write down their grievances to the crown:

the scarcity and dearness of [gun] powder for these two years past. . . . [and] the English keeping so many posts in their country [which] gave them reason to think that [the English] were determined to posses their country, therefore we would destroy [the English].¹¹⁴

After the letter was written, the Senecas burned not only the fort, but Gordon too. The Senecas then sent the correspondence with a party of warriors who were traveling to Fort Pitt, and were told to drop the letter on the way with the intentions that the English would find it and raise tensions along the frontier.¹¹⁵ Although the purpose behind the letter was to justify to the British their reasoning for the attacks, it was fortunate that the letter was found by a British officer and not lost in the vastness of the frontier.

The Mingoes and Senecas then moved north to attack Fort LeBeouf. The western Pennsylvania fort, commanded by Ensign George Price, had a small squadron of thirteen other soldiers on guard when they were warned by other British officers at Fort Presque Isle that Native Americans had attacked Fort Detroit.¹¹⁶ The Native Americans appeared at Price's

¹¹² Peckham, *Pontiac*, 165.

¹¹³ Dixon, *Peace Again*, 147.

¹¹⁴ "Journal of Indian Affairs," 11 July 1763, *Johnson Papers*, 10:769.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ Dixon, *Peace Again*, 148.

fort on July 18, and after being turned away twice by the British upon asking for provisions assuming they were insincere, attacked. Aided by the Delawares, the three tribes added to their gunfire by shooting flaming arrows at the fort's structures.¹¹⁷ As fire spread, the soldiers wanted to evacuate the fort, but were compelled to stay by Price who exclaimed, "We must fight as long as we can, and then die together."¹¹⁸ If they were going to die, however, it would not be fighting the Native Americans, because before long, Price gave in to his soldiers' demand and ordered a retreat. The ninth British fort had fallen.

The Native Americans then concentrated their manpower to Fort Presque Isle, one of the larger British garrisons with twenty-nine men located in Erie, Pennsylvania; it was another crucial link on the communication trail between Forts Detroit and Pitt.¹¹⁹ Commandeered by Ensign John Christie, whom Amherst praised for "being prepared for the defense of his post," soon made Amherst regret his cordial words.¹²⁰ On the morning of July 20, the soldiers awoke to find that nearly two hundred and fifty Native American warriors from four nations had strategically set themselves upon two hills overlooking the garrison.¹²¹ Like the attack at Fort LeBeouf, these Native Americans once again used flaming arrows to subdue the fort. After two days of fighting and a continual bombardment of flaming arrows, which Christie later called a "smart" strategy, the Native Americans broke through the fort's gates and set fire to the officers' quarters.¹²² Convinced he was outflanked and that the Native Americans would only take the garrison and not harm his soldiers, Christie surrendered. Rather than live up to their words, the Native Americans divided the soldiers into groups for each tribe to take as their captives. Amherst would later write "It is amazing that [Christie] could put so much faith in the promises of the Indians."¹²³ Christie was not alone in both trusting the Native Americans and not thinking anything was amiss. With the exception of Fort Presque Isle in which they used sheer force, the Native Americans used deception in every other fort attack. The tenth British fort had fallen, and there was no sign of the Native Americans slowing their attacks.

Throughout late May and June, the soldiers at Fort Pitt under the command of Captain Ecuyer were informed of the destruction on the frontier. William Trent, an Indian trader and Indian agent before taking up the commanding job of the militia at Pitt, wrote down the day to day details of living at the fort. Trent's rationale for keeping a journal at Fort Pitt was to encompass everything from the daily activities of the fort to first-hand accounts from others about the annihilation on the frontier by Native Americans.¹²⁴ Bias in his journal, if any, can be seen in the latter, which contains an overwhelming cultural fear of Native Americans and

¹¹⁷ Sipe, *Indian Wars*, 417.

¹¹⁸ Dixon, *Peace Again*, 148.

¹¹⁹ Nester, *Haughty Conquerors*, 98.

¹²⁰ Amherst to Bouquet, 25 June 1763, *Bouquet Papers*, 6:257.

¹²¹ Simeon Ecuyer to Bouquet, 26 June 1763, *Bouquet Papers*, 6:260.

¹²² Todish, *British Military*, 95.

¹²³ Lorne Pierce, ed., *The Journal of Jeffery Amherst: Recording the Military Career of General Amherst in American from 1758 to 1763* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1931), 310.

¹²⁴ A.T. Volwiler, "William Trent's Journal at Fort Pitt, 1763," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 11(1924): 391-392.

misconstrued information due to the poor communication of frontier life. Nonetheless, Trent's journal not only gives the most detailed accounts available of life in Fort Pitt during the siege of 1763, but also highlights the succession of brutality leading up to Captain Ecuyer's famous decision regarding the smallpox-infested blankets.

Similar to the siege of other forts, Native American attacks were prevalent around the outlying regions of Fort Pitt in early June. Trent wrote on May 29 about both the death of Colonel William Clapham at his home and of two soldiers who were at the sawmill.¹²⁵ Emotions at Fort Pitt were heightened by this news because Clapham's homestead, along with the sawmill, were a mere twenty-five miles from their fort.¹²⁶ Ecuyer, convinced that a Native American uprising was certain, dispatched riders to Philadelphia to inform Bouquet that he thought "the [Native American] uprising [was] general [and] that he tremble[d] for [his] post."¹²⁷ Well aware of the Native Americans' hostile actions and close proximity to his fort, Ecuyer began to prepare for an attack.

The day after Ecuyer dispatched the letter to Bouquet, Trent's journal illustrated more ambushes and attacks on British settlers living on the frontier that were within the vicinity of Fort Pitt. On May 30, 1763, Trent writes of Thomas Calhoun, a profitable trader at the time, who had arrived at Fort Pitt from the village of Tuscarawas with crucial news. Calhoun was instructed by Delaware Chiefs on the May 27 to leave his trading post with his men on the Tuscarawas, because they did not want to see him killed.¹²⁸ As Calhoun and his men made their way to Fort Pitt, Trent describes how they were fired upon by Native Americans, which killed all but Calhoun and two others. After telling of his heroic escape to the fort, he further explained to Captain Ecuyer that the Delaware Chiefs also told him that, "Detroit was taken, the post at Sandusky burnt and all the garrison put to death, except the officer who they made prisoner."¹²⁹

Aside from Fort LeBeouf, Fort Pitt is unique in that it received firsthand accounts of the destruction of other forts, which undoubtedly prepared them for an attack. Even though Trent's account depicts a Native American victory at Fort Detroit, in actuality the fort did not fall, but as already stated, was stalemated. Still, Ecuyer had no other eyewitness accounts by which to act and truly believed that Fort Detroit, same in size and stature as Pitt, had fallen. While this alarmed him, so too did the surrendering of Fort Sandusky, which showed that the Native Americans were not just attacking major forts. Within Trent's brief account from Calhoun, he rendered Ecuyer and the British army's fear of a Native American uprising a reality.

Within a week, on June 7, Trent described an account by Lieutenant Abraham Cuyler that told of "Lieut. Schlossers Post [being] destroyed."¹³⁰ Cuyler was on a vessel with 139 barrels

¹²⁵ Volwiler, *Trent's Journal*, 394.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ Ecuyer to Bouquet, 29 May 1763, *Bouquet Papers*, 6:193.

¹²⁸ Sipe, *Indian Wars*, 420.

¹²⁹ Volwiler, *Trent's Journal*, 394.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 398.

of provisions en route to Fort Detroit when he was attacked by Native Americans. He then made his retreat to Fort Sandusky, which was already destroyed, and on to Fort Presque Isle where he learned of the Native Americans' victory at Schlosser's Fort St. Joseph.¹³¹ When William Trent and Captain Ecuyer heard news from John Calhoun and Lieutenant Cuyler of the destruction of their British forts, they tightened up their patrols with the thought that their time would soon come to defend Fort Pitt. The Native Americans periodically attempted to draw Ecuyer's soldiers out of their fort by setting fire to structures surrounding it, but the commander knew of their past deception and later wrote to Bouquet "[Native Americans] would like to decoy me and make me send out detachments, but they will not fool me."¹³² Even though Fort Pitt was the largest and most expensive of the western forts, Fort Detroit, which they thought had been taken, was the largest post of the Upper Great Lakes.¹³³ Upon taking Sandusky and then St. Joseph, Ecuyer thought that Native Americans had taken three major forts in a row, understandably concluding that this strengthened not only the latter's confidence in their own skills, but had also given them "expansive ideas" of further attacks.¹³⁴

On June 22, Native Americans, made mostly of Delawares, attacked Fort Pitt in hopes of continuing their victorious streak. Trent wrote in his journal that a "great number of Indians appeared on each river and on Grant's Hill" and began firing on the fort.¹³⁵ The firing lessened when Ecuyer ordered an explosive shell be thrown at the Native Americans, but the latter soon recovered as the night drew on. On June 4, a week after Ecuyer sent his dispatches, due in part to the vastness of the conflict ridden frontier, they were received by Bouquet who then sent them to Amherst in New York. Amherst felt "this alarm will end in nothing more than a rash attempt of what the Senecas have been threatening and which we have heard of for some time past."¹³⁶ Still, he assembled two light infantry regiments to hold in Staten Island. Within five days of sending troops to Staten Island, Amherst abruptly ordered them to march to Philadelphia to aid Bouquet. This was because Amherst had received word of Pontiac's actions to the west and wrote "I find the affairs of the Indians, appears to be more general than I had apprehended."¹³⁷ Amherst's immediate deployment of troops displays the urgency he must have felt for his forts. Throughout most of his dealings with Sir William Johnson, he was always careful with his provisions as well as his short supply of men. Although Amherst took the initiative to send troops to Bouquet, ten British forts had already fallen, with an attack on Fort Pitt in motion.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² Bouquet to Amherst, 10 June 1763, *Bouquet Papers*, 6:213.

¹³³ Todish, *British Military*, 85.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 155.

¹³⁵ Volwiler, *Trent's Journal*, 400.

¹³⁶ Amherst to Bouquet, 6 June 1763, *Bouquet Papers*, 6:209.

¹³⁷ Amherst to Bouquet, 12 June 1763, *Ibid.*, 6:220; Charles S. Grant, "Pontiac's Rebellion and the British Troop Moves of 1763," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 40(1953): 78-79, 81.

According to Trent, two chiefs, Turtle's Heart and Maumaultee, came before the fort for a truce on June 24 and announced that "all [British] _____ as Ligonier was destroyed."¹³⁸ Although the information in Trent's journal for this entry is misconstrued and missing a crucial word, one could read it as, "All British forts as far as Ligonier was destroyed." Native Americans spread word of their victories at forts to other tribes and regions with the hopes of drawing them in. Therefore, it is very likely that Turtle's Heart and Maumaultee knew of past British forts falling. Although Trent's journal, up to that entry, was written in a very concise and decipherable style, he wrote on June 24 that he was in the midst of a battle, and hence he was doubtlessly more worried about the fort's well being than the clarity of his journal. Nonetheless, even if the excerpt from Trent's journal only meant Fort Ligonier had fallen, then the British would still be troubled to think another British fort fell, making their own total at four.

The two chiefs, representing six nations, told Ecuyer several nations were ready to attack but were going to give the fort time to surrender and retreat.¹³⁹ Ecuyer thanked them but declined, and the chiefs told the fort that they would return after conversing with the other nations. As commander of Fort Pitt, Ecuyer knew he had to ward off the Native Americans and defend his garrison. With the assumption that Detroit had fallen, Pitt was the last major British stronghold the Natives had not taken. When the chiefs came back a second time to inform the commander they were going to hold their position, they requested some provisions for their journey home. Ecuyer, who was well aware of Native American deception, thought they only wanted the provisions in order to enter his fort and attack. The Native Americans had already attempted to draw the commander and his soldiers out of Fort Pitt, and they could easily be attempting to use the same setup again. Ecuyer decided to provide the chiefs with some rations, but among the supplies he deceptively gave them the infamously deadly gift: smallpox. While the two chiefs may have been suspicious that the British distributed gifts to them, they may have also thought the British finally capitulated, and realized that they could not win the war. Trent's words confirm without a doubt Britain's non-capitulating offensive strategy: "Out of our regard to [the chiefs] we gave them two blankets and a handkerchief out of the smallpox hospital. I hope it has the desired effect."¹⁴⁰

Trent and Ecuyer used this aggressive approach because they were well aware of the trickery that Native Americans used to besiege prior forts. That "desired effect" was to infect those two Native American chiefs with smallpox. The chiefs, then, would spread it amongst their tribe. When the two chiefs came to talk during the parley, Ecuyer did not know what their true intentions were. Ecuyer was conscious of the deception used at the prior forts where, for example, Native Americans guided British officers back to their camp under the guise of hospitality and then captured them. Aside from the craftiness Native Americans used, Ecuyer

¹³⁸ Volwiler, *Trent's Journal*, 400.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

also knew of their manpower and the lack of the British's around the frontier. Due in part to the majority of Britain's army being deployed after the French and Indian War to other places, and the scattered placement of British forts around the extensive frontier, the 'powerful' British army was spread so thin they could not maintain suitable garrisons. Along with Fort Detroit, if Fort Pitt had fallen, two of the largest British forts on the frontier would have been in the hands of Native Americans. If Fort Detroit, one of the largest forts in the country at that time was surrendered, Fort Pitt had just as much of a chance of seizure. To Captain Ecuyer, the Native Americans had just taken four major forts from the British, and were coming for Fort Pitt next with the strength of not only manpower but of motivation behind them. He was confident of the ability and morale of his men, but did not want to risk surrendering his fort. The Native Americans' underhanded victories at the previous forts thus compelled the disheartened British to employ germ warfare among them with the hope that it would stop their attack on Fort Pitt.

Even though there has been much discussion about Amherst and the infamous gifts, Captain Ecuyer and the other officers at Fort Pitt should be the ones to receive the credit for the idea.¹⁴¹ Ecuyer had already distributed the blankets when Amherst wrote to Bouquet on July 7, 1763 and stressed that "every commanding officer [should] never trust [Native American] promises," and then questioned "could it not be contrived to send the smallpox among the disaffected tribes of Indians?"¹⁴² Amherst's letter to Bouquet belittled any notion that Ecuyer and his officers at Fort Pitt gave the blankets to the Native Americans with sincere kindness; on the contrary, it was out of distrust. This declaration of mistrusting promises grew out of Amherst's knowledge of his fallen forts to the deceptive Native Americans. The conditions of the frontier meant that Amherst was always notified late of the Native American conflicts, while Ecuyer was informed of the destruction on the frontier daily as described through Trent's journal.¹⁴³ Ecuyer knew he could not await Amherst's orders, and on June 24, acted on his own when Turtle's Heart and Maumaultee came to his fort.

Although the British were commanded by Ecuyer, they may have been influenced to distribute the smallpox blankets by William Trent himself. Among the records of William Trent's trading firm's account against the crown it reads "The sundries to replace in kind those which were taken from people in the hospital to convey the small-pox to the Indians."¹⁴⁴ Recent scholars credit Trent for the infamous idea because not only was Ecuyer an inexperienced commander, but because he was furious that his trading industry was declining partly because of the Native Americans' unrest.¹⁴⁵ Trent was even further enraged when Native Americans stole ten horses

¹⁴¹ Fenn, *Biological Warfare*, 1554; Mayor, *Nessus Shirt*, 57.

¹⁴² Knollenberg, *Germ Warfare*, 492; To see Bouquet's response to Amherst see Noble David Cook, *Born to Die: Disease and New World Conquest, 1492-1650* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 213.

¹⁴³ Volwiler, *Trent's Journal*, 394-400.

¹⁴⁴ Fenn, *Biological Warfare*, 1554.

¹⁴⁵ Ranlet, *Indians and Smallpox*, 437

that personally belonged to him.¹⁴⁶ Not only were the Native Americans killing his customers, but they were making families living on the frontier disperse to other places. Even though Trent was an experienced soldier, his military skills were not highly regarded. Nevertheless, Ecuyer leaned heavily on Trent, who had spent much time on the frontier among Native Americans.¹⁴⁷ Still, even if Trent had come up with the plan because he had a personal vendetta against the Native Americans, Ecuyer was still in charge of the fort and was consulted on all matters. Ecuyer would not jeopardize his career as a British officer simply to satisfy the vengeance feelings Trent had towards the Native Americans. Although Trent was concerned with his declining financial stability, his duties as a soldier came first and was enraged that the Native Americans took ten British forts practically unopposed. Ecuyer ordered the blankets as an aggressive approach to halt the Native Americans victories, not to please Trent.

Although it was first believed that the blankets were successful in killing many Native Americans, recent studies belittle the blankets' effects. In 1851, when Parkman's book was published, he stated that the blankets "made havoc among the tribes."¹⁴⁸ A reexamination of the incident, however, indicated that the British experiment in germ warfare may well have been a failure. Although the blanket incident was Britain's first trial with germ warfare, the Native Americans attempted their own experiment in 1761 by trying to poison a well at Fort Ligonier "in hopes to hurt ye people."¹⁴⁹ The British, much like the Native Americans in 1761, would come up short of their desired effect. In March 1765, a Delaware chief told William Johnson that "the Shawanes lost in three months time a hundred and forty nine men besides women and children by sickness above a year ago, also many of them dyed last summer of the smallpox."¹⁵⁰ This account indicates that the epidemic took hold sometime later than June 1763, when the blankets were distributed to the Native Americans. Moreover, another eyewitness account in 1764 stated that "the smallpox has been very general and raging amongst the Indians since last spring" and has killed many Mingoes, Delawares and Shawneese.¹⁵¹ This statement, on the other hand, indicated that the epidemic began before June 1763, long before Ecuyer presented the infected blankets. Perhaps the most crucial piece of evidence that belittles the effects of the smallpox blankets was the return of Turtle's Heart and Maumaultee, the chiefs who received the blankets, to Fort Pitt a full month later. While it is plausible that both chiefs were already immune to the disease, it is more likely that the plot failed. Had the scheme succeeded, the "Indians vesting the fort would have been reeling from the plague."¹⁵² If the Native Americans had contracted the disease they would have certainly abandoned their disease-infested location surrounding Fort Pitt and moved to a healthier area. In contrast, the Native Americans continued with the siege through the end of July.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Parkman, *Conspiracy*, 649

¹⁴⁹ Dixon, *Peace Again*, 153.

¹⁵⁰ "Journal of Indian Affairs," 1-3 March 1765, *Johnson Papers*, 11:618.

¹⁵¹ Gershon Hicks to William Grant, 14 April 1764, *Bouquet Papers*, 6:514-523.

¹⁵² Dixon, *Peace Again*, 154.

The siege at Fort Pitt would come to an end not because of smallpox, but due to the advancing British forces led by Bouquet, who would eventually turn the tide of the war. When the Native Americans encountered the British Army led by Bouquet, the Battle of Bushy Run would commence. After the British fought to victory, they moved on and later relieved Fort Pitt on August 20. Even though the Native Americans retaliated a month later when they killed seventy-two British soldiers by Fort Niagara, after 1763, major combat in Pontiac's War was effectively over. In 1763 Amherst was recalled back to London, and replaced by General Thomas Gage, who was more willing to listen to Johnson in regard to Native American policy. The Native Americans, lacking ammunition and realizing they could not wipe out the British, were ready to negotiate. Upon signing the Treaty of Fort Niagara in 1764, and securing peace with the Seneca, Wyandot, Ojibwas and others, the British conducted two military operations that concluded in 1765, to further obtain peace from those Native Americans who were unwilling to negotiate.¹⁵³ George Croghan, Johnson's deputy, was sent in 1765 to the Illinois Country to persuade Pontiac to accompany him to New York where he could sign an official treaty of Peace with Johnson. The British knew no lasting peace treaty was possible without his approval; on July 25, 1766, a formal treaty was signed thus ending the rebellion.¹⁵⁴ Although no lands were ceded and no prisoners were returned, it was the "first major multi-tribal war against European invaders that ended in accommodation, rather than complete Amerindian defeat."¹⁵⁵

While there was tension with Native Americans prior to the French and Indian War, tensions only intensified after the victor, Britain, reconfigured a new policy. Before and during the war the French treated the Native Americans as equals. They established a long standing economy with and even lived among them. The gifts of good fruits and diplomacy the French presented to the various chiefs had additional meaning. When a chief went back to his tribe with the presents he had received, it reassured the tribe of their chief's power and authority. When the British applied new policy changes, specifically reducing the distribution of gifts and armory, chiefs were the first ones to worry. The chiefs knew they would lose power among their own people by being unable to bring back those two valuable necessities to their tribes. In general, the British's policy changes were foreign and offensive to the Native Americans who had followed French guidelines for years. To the British, their new 'subjects' were an impediment to their expansion, and a drain on their economy; the Native Americans could not live harmoniously because British rule by definition meant domination. When the Native Americans unsuspectingly revolted, the British were not only caught off guard, but bewildered to learn that their newly acquired 'subjects,' now adversaries, were so organized and deceptive in their attacks.

¹⁵³ Dowd, *War*, 213, 215-17.

¹⁵⁴ Jacobs, *Dispossessing*, 87.

¹⁵⁵ Steele, *Warpaths*, 246-247.

Within three months of the British imposing their new policies, which reduced the status of Native Americans from allies to their new ‘subjects,’ Native Americans realized that they would have to rise up to regain what they originally had. In only two months, the Native Americans had not only made the British army’s fear a reality, but they created a new fear that their treachery and man power might even be able to overtake them. These new policies were centered around the needs of the British and did not consider the needs of their new ‘subjects.’ Native Americans now had to adjust to not receiving the guns and ammunitions to which they had been accustomed. In turn, their chiefs suffered from losing the prestige they once encompassed within their tribes. By taking ten British forts, Native Americans thus reasserted their claim to their own land and were truly “masters of their country.”¹⁵⁶ Their victories, nevertheless, would stop short of their goal: as the British purged the land of them, the tide of the rebellion would turn. By taking the land and its inhabitants who had lived there for thousands of years, the British imposed an incontestable policy of domination in which Native Americans were an impediment to British rule and needed to be eliminated.

¹⁵⁶ Dixon, *Peace Again*, 150.

