

The “Long Knives,” the “Sons Of Nature,” and “Our Province”: Rev. John Strachan’s Views on the Indigenous People and the Motives for the American Invasion of Upper Canada, 1812-1814

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Rev. John Strachan arrived at York in the same week that America declared war on Great Britain.¹ Such a dramatic beginning to his ministry seemed to foreshadow that both Strachan and the muddy, isolated, under-populated village of York were destined to catapult each other to new levels of fame and prestige.² Strachan was a prolific writer during what came to be known as the War of 1812 and he mailed out sermons, letters, societal commentaries, reports on the war and ideas about strategy to insure that his opinion was well-known and widely-read throughout the land, especially after the American capture of York. He was nothing if not forthcoming with his opinions and critiques of various characters and events that occurred during the conflict with America. Although he spoke on a variety of topics, this paper will focus on his views of the native/indigenous peoples and explore why he believed that Upper Canadians should embrace these “sons of nature”³ as brothers.

I. The Native Issue

On 18 June 1812, American President James Madison declared war on Great Britain. Along with comments regarding Britain’s treatment of American sailors and maritime rights, Madison concluded his arguments

for the necessity of war against Britain with the following statement:

In reviewing the conduct of Great Britain toward the United States our attention is necessarily drawn to the warfare just renewed by the savages on one of our extensive frontiers . . . It is difficult to account for the activity and combinations which have for some time been developing themselves among tribes in constant intercourse with British traders and garrisons without connecting their hostility with that influence and without recollecting the authenticated examples of such interpositions heretofore furnished by the officers and agents of that Government.⁴

For the Americans, the use of indigenous peoples to do the dirty work of destabilizing the west was British skullduggery. Sophisticated weapons found in Prophet's Town after the Battle of Tippecanoe⁵ gave the Americans the evidence they needed to invade Canada while simultaneously being able to plead that the invasion was a defensive action taken against a hostile and threatening force.⁶

After taking the town of Sandwich in July of 1812, Brigadier General Hull's battle proclamation made the following statement about British citizens fighting with the native people:

If the barbarous and Savage policy of Great Britain be pursued, and the savages are let loose to murder our Citizens and butcher our women and children, this war, will be a war of extermination. The first stroke with the Tomahawk the first attempt with the Scalping Knife will be the Signal for an indiscriminate scene of desolation, *No White man found fighting by the Side of an Indian will be taken prisoner* Instant destruction will be his Lot.⁷

The fear of a British-Native alliance is evident in this quote and the American Northwest Army quickly tried to drive a wedge between the two factions by stating that no mercy would be extended to those who fought alongside the natives against the Americans. That kind of fear and contempt displayed towards the natives was an issue that Strachan raised in his critiques of the American policies regarding the Indians and will be dealt with in greater detail in a subsequent section of the paper.

If the Indian issue was one of the prominent motives for America to declare war, the Battle of Tippecanoe proved to be a deciding factor for the natives as well.⁸ The famous native warrior, Tecumseh, had been

attempting to join the western tribes together to form an Indian Republic, but to little avail. However, his idea gained new impetus in the wake of the skirmish at Tippecanoe. Allan Eckert's sweeping epic about Tecumseh, *A Sorrow in our Heart*, speaks of the distinguished and greatly-admired native's pleasure when the Americans turned their attention to Upper Canada. Tecumseh's followers in the Ohio Valley, alongside Great Britain, could finally engage in a battle that he had seen coming and had been preparing to fight. Eckert writes, "[Tecumseh] immediately stated that he and his followers were allies to the British . . . In preparation for this eventuality of war . . . for several weeks prior to this time Tecumseh had been sending, from Tippecanoe, small parties of twenty to forty warriors toward the Detroit area."⁹ The Americans believed that the Indians were too scattered and frightened to pose any serious threat. However, with British support the Indians were a deadly force that could potentially overrun the western front of the American force.

Sadly, the sources left that allow anyone access to the mindset of the native people of this time are few and those that do remain are written by white men interpreting – and filtering – the words of the people. What is apparent is that these “sons of nature” were used and exploited on both sides of the conflict; their land was coveted by the Americans, and their anger and indignation was channeled by the British for their own purposes. General Hull understood that the natives needed the British as much as the British needed the natives. In a letter to the American Secretary of War, Hull wrote: “The British cannot hold Upper Canada without the assistance of the Indians . . . The Indians cannot conduct a war without the assistance of a civilized nation.”¹⁰ After the natives proved incredibly useful in several key battles, including taking Detroit from Hull, the people of Upper Canada were overjoyed. However, it appears that some people were complaining that using the natives in battle was unethical due to their viciousness in combat. Therefore, men of influence and moral standing were called upon to weigh in on the matter; Rev. John Strachan was just such a man.¹¹

II. A Defensible War is a Just War

The fact that America attacked during the Napoleonic Wars was equated with joining the French side and, for that, Strachan considered America a traitor to global peace. In a sermon given shortly after the death of Isaac Brock, the minister seemed saddened by America's actions

because he had hoped they would align themselves more with England instead of strengthening Napoleon's France. He said:

The only nation from which she might have hoped for kindness, sympathy and gratitude; a nation descending from herself, pretending to greater freedom and still connected by all the charities of private life; instead of encouraging her efforts in maintaining the liberty and happiness of the world, deserted the cause of humanity and joined the tyrant.¹²

However, as the war continued, Strachan became more displeased with the Americans. In 1813, Strachan preached to his congregation at St. James:

our neighbours blinded with ambition; and arrogant, from the great wealth and extensive trade which they had acquired by the miseries of Europe; and tempted by views of immediate aggrandizement, became traitors to the peace and happiness of mankind; and anticipating the downfall of the last citadel of liberty, hastened to seize upon a part of her territories. They have been sadly disappointed, and are about to meet with the punishment which their baseness deserves. The same victories which have prostrated the Tyrant of Europe [Napoleon], will prostrate *his Satellites in America*.¹³

The American declaration of war against Great Britain was seen as nothing less than acting as Napoleon's army across the Atlantic and Strachan reveled in the idea that America would soon follow their French tyrant into defeat.

This was not simply a question of Strachan's loyalty to the English Crown, but of his belief that the success of the Empire was directly linked to the peace of the world. Without Britain, the tyrant Napoleon would sweep the planet and remove all freedoms. In a sermon from 1804 Strachan told his parishioners of the need to fight someone such as Napoleon:

The ruin they [France] have brought upon others is great beyond conception but it would be little to what they would inflict upon us. Never did we stand up in a more glorious cause . . . now we combat not only for our existence as a nation but for religion and liberty . . . if we are victorious in the contest the chains of Europe will be broken and peace and happiness again shine upon its dejected inhabitants.¹⁴

Strachan despised the American avarice, irresponsible government and lack of social manners that led to chaos and upheaval and threatened the stability of God's chosen instrument of civilization: the British Empire.¹⁵ The *Pax Britannia* was the tool God was using to spread his message around the globe. Therefore, any attack on England was an attack on the Kingdom of God on earth and there could be no expense, or strategy, spared to defend the Province's role within that greater kingdom. To Strachan, the war with the Americans was justifiable because it was a war forced upon them. The people of Upper Canada were simply defending their section of the Empire. Strachan, in a letter dated August of 1812, made the following comment: "All defensive wars are just. We were at peace and war has been declared against us; we have been invaded and attacked, we are consequently acting on the defensive, that is, we are repelling injury."¹⁶ As long as the soldiers fought as Christians they had no cause to fear judgment from the Almighty. He eased any concerns through scripture:

The very precept, "Love Your Enemies," presupposes the existence of enemies, and consequently of wars . . . How can you love those whose destruction you desire, and against whom you are fighting? To this the Christian may answer, that he seeks not the destruction of his enemy, but his return to justice and humanity. The end proposed by all wars is peace; and as soon as this can be obtained on equitable terms by the friend of the Gospel, he wars no longer.¹⁷

For Rev. John Strachan, once the nation's hand had been forced to war, it was the duty of each person within Upper Canada who was loyal to the crown of England, and who saw the cowardice and vice within the United States to stand up and fight to support England. To that end he wrote:

Our wise and brave ancestors had judgment to perceive and courage enough to vindicate the national rights of man; at the same time they generously submitted to the reasonable and high prerogative of supreme executive power . . . They have succeeded in establishing a Constitution of Government, the wonder and envy of surrounding nations; they have shewn the world that British subjects are free men in the best sense of the word and that rational liberty is no way incompatible with prompt obedience to legitimate authority . . . we in this remote Province are blessed with an exact epitome of its

government, as far as suits our infant state; and enjoy the invaluable privilege [sic] of its mild and equitable laws; which secure to us and our posterity all the civil and religious rights and free born British subjects.¹⁸

His call to arms was both designed to shame America and instill in the Upper Canadians a sense of pride in their connection to England. He preached:

[America has] threatened with unblushing arrogance to subdue this fine colony; to separate us from that heroic nation which enjoys the gratitude of the world. They mocked our attachment to the best of kings; and tho' born to the most exalted freedom and independence, they reproached us with being slaves.¹⁹

The Americans threatened the nation that set people free and dared to call themselves liberators. To Strachan, nothing could be further from the truth.

III. The Use of Natives in War

Strachan realized that in order to defeat the Americans, the British army in Upper Canada needed all the help it could get. He took issue with those who accused Britain of dirty tactics because they used native warriors to bolster their military presence in Upper Canada. He knew that the Americans were just as eager to employ natives in the war as the British were. In a letter to Wilberforce defending the use of Indians in battles, Strachan considered this American hypocrisy, "These tribes [within our borders] have been solicited & offered bribes by the Americans to desert from us."²⁰ The only reason the Americans were complaining was because their efforts to win the natives over to their side were proving less fruitful than they had hoped. For this, Strachan argued, they had to look only to their policies to understand the Indians' hesitation, "the Indians have experienced [American] deceptions too often to trust them except in cases of necessity."²¹ He charged the Americans with being both deceitful and unabashedly destructive towards these people and he never seemed to waver in his convictions that the Indians were a powerful ally that had been treated with great disrespect by those who were now trying to buy their loyalty with more false promises.

The reverend frequently pleaded the cause of the natives and lauded the British government for treating them much better than the Americans.

Despite the prevailing attitudes of the day, Strachan adamantly opposed the practice of ranking races to determine which were of more value because he believed this could lead to un-Christian behaviour. His contempt for such a practice can be seen in the following excerpt, written by Strachan, in the January of 1811 issue of the *Kingston Gazette*:

The moment that we begin to suppose that mankind are [sic] composed of distinct species, that moment our most noble and sublime conception of the human race is extinguished. We no longer discover in every individual, whatever be his color or his language, a child of Adam; a brother, a person of the same feelings and of the same natural powers with ourselves, though differently modified by peculiar circumstances and habits, that grand and affecting idea which represents mankind as one family, one blood branching from one primitive stem, is lost . . . As Christians then we must recognize the copper-colored Indian and the sable Negro . . . for our brethren.²²

At the beginning of the war Strachan became even more verbal in his praise of the native people. He frequently encouraged the use of natives in the war and instructed leaders to treat them with respect and allow them to maintain their heritage and way of life. He championed their character and was noticeably incensed by their perceived mistreatment at the hands of the Americans. He believed that it was a Christian's duty to offer grace and he believed that while the Americans boasted of civilizing the natives they were, in fact, attempting to wipe them out.²³ In defence of the rumoured native excesses in battle, Strachan simply replied: "When you hear of the cruelty of the Savages, think of the still greater cruelty of the Cabinet at Washington."²⁴ Given the level of contempt afforded the native people by most Europeans at this time, Strachan's comments were quite progressive and very much in the minority.

IV. Respect for Native Character

Strachan was deeply impressed by the native people and readily identified some of their characteristics which he greatly admired. Strachan appears to have respected them as warriors and supported the decision of Brock to use them in battle. To this effect he wrote:

We are told some wise acres find fault with General Brock for employing the Indians, but if he had not done so, he & all his men

must have perished – besides if we do not employ these people they will employ themselves – they have been at war with the United States for some years & by attending us, many of their excesses have been restrained.²⁵

This quote shows Strachan's awareness that the Indians had problems with America long before the War of 1812. To him, the treatment of the natives at the hands of the United States government was just another example of the inferiority of their system.

However, it appears that Strachan was also impressed by the natives' bravery and care for their fellow warriors. He agreed with the Indian belief that a victory won at the cost of numerous lives was no victory at all. That was a trait that Strachan was especially fond of within certain ranks of the British army as well. In perhaps one of his most profound compliments, John Strachan compared the honour of the native chiefs with those of his own beloved English military. He wrote: "Among [the natives] military merit consists in beating the enemy with little loss. In fine, an Office of Riflemen & an Indian Chief are praised for the same kind of conduct: to repulse the enemy with a severe loss on their own part is disgraceful not meritorious."²⁶ The conduct displayed by the natives on the battlefield was commented on by Strachan, especially in light of the growing contempt he possessed for the vacillating leadership of General Prevost.

Strachan saw the natives as the key to victory against the Americans. Early on, Brock had used them well and they had proven to be beneficial to the cause, if somewhat unreliable. However, according to Strachan, Colonel Bishoppe understood how to best utilize the native skills of war. It was not prudent for the British people to attempt to force the natives to fight as the British fought, that would be a poor use of their skills. Instead, Strachan argued, allow them to fight as they would normally but channel their skills to a common goal. In "Life of Col. Bishoppe" Strachan insisted,

[Natives] are a fierce and independent people, incapable of submitting to controul [sic]: they are easily led but will never be driven. He, that desires to profit by their services, will study their inclinations, and by seasonable encouragement & heading them in their expeditions with a few whites, he will render them most efficient on the wings of his army. They are at all times terrible to the enemy and beyond measure after a defeat. Col: Bishoppe knew well how to turn these sons of nature to the best advantage: not by changing their mode of fighting,

or assuming authority over them; but by reaping benefit from their incessant activity.²⁷

If the leadership would allow the natives to maintain their way of life and military traits, the British would find themselves with a most grateful, and skillful, military ally.

V. America's Treatment of Natives Inexcusable

John Strachan never minced words when he discussed his opinion of the American people and their treatment of the natives. He had no respect for their new system of government – which he thought was too similar to the French – and he saw the American government's treatment of the native people as just one more example of the moral failure of democracy.²⁸ In a letter to the famed abolitionist William Wilberforce, Strachan remarked: “The American Government neither attend to the feelings or rights of the poor Indians but as they are independent they have a right to the privileges of independent nations.”²⁹ The American failure to treat the Indians with respect opened up an opportunity for the British to capitalize on the good rapport they had built to win them over to their side of the conflict.³⁰ Naturally, such strategies present in the early days of the war lent support to the American charge that the British were secretly supplying the natives with weapons and inciting them to war in the Ohio Valley.³¹ Strachan saw these charges as nothing more than false accusations dreamt up by the American leaders to deflect from the truth that they alone were responsible for the natives' displeasure. In the letter to Wilberforce John Strachan listed eight reasons why the native people were upset with the Americans; six of the eight dealt with issues related to land. He wrote:

The Indians . . . have been at war with the United States for several years, not at the instigation of the British as the American government have falsely reported, but for the following reasons which they publicly assign. 1. Because the Americans drive them from their hunting grounds. 2. Because the American government make fraudulent purchases of their lands from Indians who have no power to sell – one or two insignificant members of a village for example.³²

Strachan was not sympathetic to the Americans' complaints and frequently wrote about their abuse of the native people to show that the Indians

needed no push from Britain to engage in war with the people who had stolen their land away.

VI. The Real Reason for the War

Early in the war John Strachan agreed with the military assessment that the Americans wanted Canadian land and that they were determined to take Upper and Lower Canada for their own. However, by November of 1812, Strachan believed that a far more sinister plan was in motion. He suggests this in a letter written to the Marquis Wellesley:

It will perhaps surprise your Lordship but it is nevertheless true, that the Great object of the United States at present is to take Upper Canada in preference to Lower Canada. This Province is of much greater importance to them. Possessed of Upper Canada the Indians are entirely at their mercy for not being able to procure supplies they must submit I know that it is commonly said that so long as we keep possession of Quebec Upper Canada is of no use to the United States but this is a great mistake.³³

To Strachan, the issue was not about British territory at all, it was about the natives.

One of the more controversial positions espoused by Strachan was that the motives cited by the American government for the war were, “popular baits,”³⁴ designed to hide the true reasons away from the British people. The Reverend condemned Prevost for, what Strachan defined as, timidity and an unwillingness to act aggressively towards the Americans. Although Prevost’s plan to hold Lower Canada so that America could not advance made sense strategically, Strachan argued that the American goal had always been Upper Canada and to guard only the Lower Province played directly into their hands. Strachan offered his reasons for disagreeing with Prevost in a letter to James McGill:

General Prevost has not certainly so high an opinion of the value of this Province as our Enemies – he thinks perhaps that they cannot keep it as long as he remains in possession of Quebec . . . But our enemies do not covet the Lower Province because they would be forced to give it up to the French who are ready to demand it. And even should Great Britain refuse to make any peace till this country was restored, still a couple of years possession would answer the

policy of our enemies – in that time they would alienate from us all the Indians & reduce them to a state of subjection, and they would oppress & destroy all the Loyalists.³⁵

For Strachan, the Indian issue was more than just a matter of some importance in the war; it was the entire reason for the war!

In that same letter to James McGill, John Strachan argued that as long as the Indian tribes of the Ohio Valley remained strong the Americans could not expand to the west. Because the western frontier was so massive, it would be impossible to hunt down all the natives and kill them. However, with the natives contained in a smaller space, like Upper Canada, the Americans had an opportunity to wipe them out and, in so doing, open the west up to their people. Consider Strachan's assessment:

Nor can it be concealed that the importance of [Upper Canada to the United States] is incalculable – the possession of it would give them the complete command of the Indians who must either submit or starve within two years and thus leave all the Western frontier clear & unmolested. The Americans are systematically employed in exterminating the Savages, but they can never succeed while we keep possession of this country. This my Dear Sir is *the true cause of this war*, & so long as there is any prospect of conquering us the war will continue.³⁶

Thus, Strachan's compassion for the natives, his disdain for the Americans, and his anger at the timidity of leaders like Prevost each found their significance in the fact that he believed this war was not about the political reasons cited by Madison in June of 1812. Instead, the greedy Americans were staging a war to eradicate a threat to their nation's expansion. Therefore, for Strachan, the War of 1812 was about stopping the systematic extermination of people that, he believed, were allies of the British Empire and, more importantly, fellow children of God.³⁷

Strachan's theory appears to be somewhat of a stretch, and one he did not repeat after 1812. It would be easy to dismiss Strachan because of the apparent unpopularity of this position even within his own later writings. However, it must be remembered that his desire to defend both the native people and Upper Canada formed the backdrop for many of his writings and teachings regarding the war. His belief in the just position of Upper Canada and the divine nature of the British Empire balanced the concern of the reputed native excesses in combat. In other words: Britain's

right made the Native might permissible. Strachan's letters and sermons are a wealth of information regarding this formative period in Canadian and American history and to dismiss the man's beliefs because they were not oft-repeated impoverishes any study of this period in time.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has shown that the reason behind Rev. John Strachan's opinion of the native people was both theological and political, both compassionate and strategic. As the invasion of America into Upper Canada grew, John Strachan understood that the province, so far removed from its benefactor, was in real danger of being co-opted into the United States. The anger and distrust that the natives felt towards the United States coupled with their skills at war could be used to strengthen the British position. However, Strachan's words regarding the Indians were also filled with compassion and care for a people group that had been so obviously abused and exploited. This government that he believed was morally inferior to England in every way proved its moral laxity in its treatment of the natives. He did not entertain any notion of peace with America and, once war was declared, counseled active military action against them. He wrote about his admiration for the character of the native people, he advocated that they be allowed to live as they saw fit and he was proud that they chose Britain as their ally because of the respect they were shown by the crown; an attribute he credited to the Christian nature of the British Empire.

John Strachan's writings regarding the Indians were not abundant but they were repeated to several different people at high levels at several different times. He defended the use of the natives in military operations because it helped the British cause and gave the natives a chance to win back some of their decimated honour. He comforted those who thought that a civilized nation like Britain should not stoop to using "uncivilized savages" by reminding the critics that British influence could help moderate unnecessary excesses. It would be too much to say that John Strachan's opinions of the natives in 1812 defined his views regarding the war but this paper has tried to show that, for a while at least, the Indian issue was an issue that Rev. John Strachan saw as central to the survival of Upper Canada and extolled it as such.

Endnotes

1. The United States of America officially declared a state of war between itself and Great Britain in the afternoon on 18 June 1812.
2. Noted Strachan biographer, J.L.H. Henderson, makes the following comment: “John Strachan arrived in York at the same time that war came again to British North America. That war was to bring the missionary and schoolmaster to a prominence he had not known before” (*Canadian Biographical Studies: John Strachan 1778-1867* [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969], 16).
3. This term was used by Strachan of the natives and will be used in a subsequent section of the paper. The term “long knives” was a designation that several of the native tribes used when talking about Americans.
4. Irving Brant, *James Madison: Commander in Chief, 1812-1836* (Indianapolis, MN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1941), 312.
5. During a visit in 1819 to Upper Canada, James Strachan, brother of John, defended the act of gift-giving by stating that it was a tradition that long predated any struggle with America. He wrote, “The custom of giving presents to the Indians in the neighbourhood of settlements is coeval with the first planting of North America by Europeans; and as many of the settlements of this province are in contact with these fierce children of nature, we seem bound, both by honour and interest, to cultivate a friendly intercourse with them, and, in some measure, to contribute to their support. This is the more reasonable, as the whole country, which is now covered in Europeans and their descendants, was once inhabited by the Indian tribes, who have been dispossessed of it by means not always justifiable; and who are hemmed in, particularly in Upper Canada, by the rapid progress of the whites . . .” (James Strachan, *Visit to the Province of Upper Canada in 1819* [Aberdeen: D. Chalmers Co., 1820], 146).
6. The following is an excerpt from the speech given by Brigadier-General William Hull after the American capture of Sandwich: “Inhabitants of Canada! After thirty years of Peace and prosperity, the United States have been driven to Arms, The injuries and aggressions, the insults and indignities of Great Britain have *once more* left them no alternative but manly resistance . . . I come to *find* enemies not *make* them, I come to *protect* not to *injure* you” (in Carl F. Klinck, *Tecumseh: Fact and Fiction in Early Records* [Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1961], 131).
7. Klinck, *Tecumseh: Fact and Fiction*, 131.

8. Pierre Berton credits this fight with supplying the final provocation that the native tribes needed to join the British force. He writes, “for the Indians, [The Battle of Tippecanoe] will be the final incident that provokes them to follow Tecumseh to Canada, there to fight on the British side in the War of 1812” (*The Invasion of Canada, 1812-1813* [Toronto: Anchor, 1980], 69).
9. Allan W. Eckert, *A Sorrow in Our Heart: The Life of Tecumseh* (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1992), 570.
10. William Hull, “Letter to the Secretary of War,” quoted in Klinck, *Tecumseh*, 121.
11. Thomas Robertson, in *The Fighting Bishop*, writes “Strachan emerged from the conflict like a triumphant and snorting war-horse reinvigorated by the fumes of gunpowder. At the end of the war, on the nomination of the lieutenant-governor [Francis Gore], he was appointed to the executive council. He had arrived” (*The Fighting Bishop: John Strachan – The First Bishop of Toronto and Other Essays in His Times* [Ottawa, ON: Graphic Publishers, 1926], 29). Strachan wrote military leaders to give his insights regarding the war and was sure to remind them of his position and offer any service he could to aid them. He wrote to Sir George Prevost to make the following offer: “I beg leave to add that I am ready to exert myself in any way consistent with my Clerical character to contribute towards the defence & security of the Provinces” (John Strachan, “Letter to Sir George Prevost, October 1812,” in *The John Strachan Letter Book, 1812-1834*, ed. George W. Spragge [Toronto: Ontario Historical Society, 1946], 13). Strachan’s days of teaching in Cornwall also added to his power. When he sent a letter to the influential John Richardson explaining the events that had taken place at York, he was sure to explain that the man delivering the letter was of certain importance both to Strachan and the Province. He wrote, “This [letter] will be presented to you by my adopted son Mr. John Robinson our temporary Attorney General.” To this end it must also be noted that Strachan was responsible for the education of a young man by the name of John Ridout who was the son of the Surveyor General of Upper Canada, a man of “great Respectability” (Strachan. Letter 25 June 1813, in Spragge, *Letter Book*, 40). This is not to impugn the man’s integrity or to imply that he only taught children of prominent citizens. There is no evidence that this is the case, but it is another example of Strachan’s ability to become entrenched in the spheres of influence that existed at the time. He even maneuvered himself into becoming a liaison on military matters. After recommending Lieutenant Colonel Neil McLean of Cornwall and Joseph Anderson to Colonel Nathaniel Coffin, the bishop made the following plea: “may I request to communicate to me the conditions of that approbation and the number of men required to enable them to retain their respective rank, that I may give them early notice for a little time is of the greatest consequence to

- them in procuring volunteers” (John Strachan, “Letter to Col. Coffin,” 19 March 1813, in Spragge, *Letter Book*, 17).
12. John Strachan, “Sermon from 3 June 1814,” in Norma MacRae, *The Religious Foundation of John Strachan’s Social and Political Thought as Contained in his Sermons, 1803-1866* (M.A. Thesis, McMaster University, 1978), 92.
 13. John Strachan. *A Sermon Preached at York, Upper Canada, On the Third of June, Being the Day Appointed for a General Thanksgiving* (Montreal: William Gray, 1814), 33. Italics added for emphasis.
 14. John Strachan, “Sermon from 17 March 1804,” in MacRae, *Religious Foundation*, 91.
 15. While Strachan seems to have written as if the Americans were of one mind on the issue of the war; scholarship on the topic shows that this was not so. The United States became divided over this issue and many people were adamantly opposed to fighting at all. New England avoided fighting altogether and even continued to trade with New Brunswick. For a fascinating look at this dynamic see John Boileau, *Half-Hearted Enemies: Nova Scotia, New England and the War of 1812* (Halifax, NS: Formac Publishing Company, 2005). Of particular interest to the topic at hand is the work done on the days of prayer called by American Churches in the summer of 1812. The Massachusetts day of prayer was political and accusatory to the motives and dangers Americans faced as they waged this war. The prayers of that day, “pleaded for protection from an alliance with infidel France, *asked justice for the persecuted Indians*, and begged pardon for the country’s many sins” (William Gribbin, *The Churches Militant: The War of 1812 and American Religion* [New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 1973], 20) (italics added). The American people were divided and many in the spiritual community would have found Strachan’s accusations correct even if they could not side with him officially.
 16. John Strachan, “Letter from 2 August 1812,” in *Memoir of the Right Reverend John Strachan*, ed. A.N. Bethune (Toronto: Henry Rowsell, 1870), 42.
 17. Strachan, “Letter from 2 August 1812,” in *Memoir of the Right Reverend John Strachan*, 42.
 18. John Strachan, “A Sermon on Ecclesiasticus 4:3,” in MacRae, *Religious Foundation*, 85. Her note that follows this sermon states that it is not dated, but she believes that it was written shortly after the death of Isaac Brock in August 1812.

19. John Strachan. *A Sermon Preached at York, Upper Canada, On the Third of June, Being the Day Appointed for a General Thanksgiving* (Montreal: William Gray, 1814), 37.
20. John Strachan, "Letter to Mr. Wilberforce," 1 November 1812, in Spragge, *Letter Book*, 21.
21. Strachan, "Letter to Mr. Wilberforce," 1 November 1812, in Spragge, *Letter Book*, 21.
22. John Strachan, "The Reckoner," *Kingston Gazette*, 22 January 1811, 1. For discussion on this quote and others like it see J.L.H. Henderson, ed., *John Strachan: Documents and Opinions* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1969), 28.
23. Strachan's attitude is evident in his comment to Wilberforce, "and the farce of their civilizing them is the Cant of Mr. Jefferson to gain applause from foreign nations" (Strachan, "Letter to Mr. Wilberforce," 1 November 1812, in Spragge, *Letter Book*, 23).
24. Strachan, "Letter to Mr. Wilberforce," 1 November 1812, in Spragge, *Letter Book*, 22.
25. John Strachan, "Letter to John Richardson," 30 September 1812, in Spragge, *Letter Book*, 17.
26. John Strachan, "Life of Col Bishoppe," December 1813, in Spragge, *Letter Book*, 6.
27. Strachan, "Life of Col Bishoppe," December 1813, in Spragge, *Letter Book*, 6-7.
28. This is evidenced by the following comment: "Of the two experiments made in America and France to constitute governments productive of virtue and happiness only, both have completely failed (John Strachan, *A Sermon Preached . . . General Thanksgiving*, 29).
29. Strachan, "Letter to Mr. Wilberforce," 1 November 1812, in Spragge, *Letter Book*, 22.
30. Strachan's views were also extolled when, in 1819, his brother, James Strachan, visited Upper Canada to see the land that had so captivated his sibling. Despite the completion of the war nearly half a decade earlier he still wrote about the American mistreatment of the natives and juxtaposed it with the British. He penned the following sentiments that echo the words of his brother from the war times: "The treatment bestowed upon the Indians by the British has been at all times humane, and the greatest deference has been paid

to their manners and customs . . . the United States say in their own praise as to their kind treatment of the Indians, and to give the British government no credit for any thing they have done; but were the matter truly stated, it would be found that the Indians, within the bounds of these States, had been most cruelly – the very agents of government have cheated them out of the nominal prices given for their lands . . . the policy of that government, instead of civilizing, is to exterminate the natives; and it has not hesitated, on many occasions, to massacre whole villages. On the contrary, the British government treat them at all times like children, and observe most religiously every stipulation entered into with them” (James Strachan, *Visit to Upper Canada*, 134).

31. Certain members of the British military were also adamant in their desire to see the natives’ cause honoured. The following quote was found in a letter belonging to Robert Dickinson: “I think that I have now attained the object I had always in view, that of uniting all the Indian nations . . . [please help me in] fulfilling the solemn pledges that have been made to the Indians” (Letter from Lieut. Duncan Graham as found in letter from Robert Dickinson to William McGillivray, 29 July 1814, Provincial Archives of Ontario, Toronto).
32. Strachan, “Letter to Mr. Wilberforce,” 1 November 1812, in Spragge, *Letter Book*, 22.
33. John Strachan, “Letter to The Marquis Wellesley,” 1 November 1812, in Spragge, *Letter Book*, 30.
34. “My leading ideas are that the conquest of the Canadas, particularly Upper Canada, is with the enemy the true cause of the war, in order to dissolve our connection with the Indians; that the other causes alleged are mere popular baits; that the forbearance persisted in by us in these provinces, and especially on the sea-coast has been and continues to be most pernicious . . .” (Strachan, *John Strachan: Documents and Opinions*, 45).
35. John Strachan, “Letter to James McGill,” November 1812, in Spragge, *Letter Book*, 26.
36. Strachan, “Letter to James McGill,” November 1812, in Spragge, *Letter Book*, 25.
37. It is impossible to simplify the causes of something as complex as a war into one, or even several, motives. However, John Strachan’s opinion of the American desire to eradicate the Indians was not heavily supported in the writing of the time nor in the academic community. Historian Louis Hacker does agree that the Americans were less than forthcoming with their true reasons for attacking Upper Canada. However, he thought that it was Canadian, and not western, land that whetted the American appetite (Louis M.

Hacker, "The Desire for Canadian Land," in *The Causes of the War of 1812: National Honor or National Interest?* ed. Bradford Perkins [New York: Holt, Reinhart, Winston, 1962], 50). Hacker makes the argument that the American west was not desirable land at this time because the settlers lacked the technology to make the vast prairie-land viable. Therefore, while expansion may have been their goal, the direction they desired to go was north and not west.

Julius Pratt argues against Hacker based on the latter's inability to provide sufficient evidence to prove his assertions. Pratt argues that since many Americans made no bones about using the war to rid the fur trade of British traders, it is unlikely they would conceal their desire for land as if it were more sinister. He writes, "Was it more wicked, and hence more to be concealed, to covet Canadian lands than to covet the profits from Canadian furs? Yet the fur trade again and again creeps into war speeches and war articles"(Reginald Horsman, "The Conquest of Canada a Tactical Objective," in *The Causes of the War of 1812*, 55). Pratt argues that it was the fear of Indians and the even deeper anger that the British were spurring them on that is easier to prove through primary sources and logical reasoning.