Project Title: The Great Awakening: Native American and colonial perspectives

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Overview of project: This lesson plan is designed to supplement traditional US History I books that either do not mention or give very little mention to the impact of the 1st Great Awakening on the Native American people. This lesson plan is designed to give students the opportunity to study the Great Awakening from the perspective of a Native American and understand how religious conversion led to loss of land, cultural identity as well as Native resistance and selective Christian communities. Lastly, students will understand that some Native Americans some positive attributes in Christianity.

Essential Question: How did the Great Awakening contribute toward Native American literacy, education and therefore advocacy?

Primary Sources with citations:


Historical Background information: The Great Awakening had a profound effect on the Native American community. Beginning in the 17th century, Christian missionaries began an intense campaign to civilize the Native Americans by converting them to Christianity. These efforts involved Spanish, French and English missionaries. Brutal tactics were used to coerce the Natives to convert to Christianity. Natives often played lip service to these early missionary efforts and were brutally punished if European missionaries discovered the Natives continuing to practice their religion. The second wave of missionary work began in the 18th century where efforts to convert Native Americans were assisted by John Eliot translation of the Bible into Native language in 1661. Puritans established praying towns where Natives were expected to renounce their language, customs, religious beliefs, dress, and ceremonies. Native children were adopted or bound to colonial families in order to educate them in Christian tradition. Christian boarding schools were established where brutality and abuse forced obedience and conversion. During the 18th century, the New England Company (NEC) focused their energy on converting unevangelized Natives. The framework for understanding Native relationship to Christianity includes two parts. First, students must understand that there is a difference between Native conversion and religious affiliation. Conversion was static, permanent preference of white Christian notions. Religious affiliation was a dynamic, process that allowed for change over time where Natives
supplemented their own religious beliefs with Christian tradition. Secondly, students should realize that some Natives embraced Christianity and became indigenous Christians. As their world was turned upside down by disease, population devastation, and war, Christianity offered stability, a Christian message of life after death and the possibility of seeing their loved ones in heaven, and provided solace and peace of mind to the Native American community.

Jesuit and Moravian Missionaries were highly educated and practiced a more accommodating method of conversion than the Puritan Protestant missionaries. Natives accept religious teaching because they really preferred the education component that came with catechism. Education and literacy became tools for Native advocacy. Land sales and deeds were written in English legalize, recorded in colonial government agencies and disputes were handled in the colonial legal system. As the colonial world outgrew the Native world, literacy and education were tools needed for native survival. An example of Christian schools can be found in John Mason’s school on Mohegan land in 1720.

The First Great Awakening was a trans-denominational religious revival that emphasized personal experience, enlightened principles of democracy and self-determination and a dynamic, energetic, form of preaching. Religious revival meetings went on for days, where banquet tables were laid out with food and drink and members danced and sang all day into the night. Ministers were dynamic, charismatic and dramatic.

The Great Awakening emphasized the compatibility between Christianity and Native spirituality. Rituals and song were common in both Christian and Native religious ceremonies. Revival meetings also stressed the personal relationship with the Holy Spirit allowing for direct participation. In addition, the First Great Awakening offered Native American an outdoor venue where worship did not fall into the rigid schedule set Church service but rather a festival designed around feasting, singing and enthusiastic carnival like practices.

Native Americans participated in revival meetings because the meetings were more emotional than Puritan Protestant Church services, the meetings encouraged lay preaching which coincided with matrilineal authority and tribal organization, and revival ministers were seen as Native allies. Natives who accepted Christianity refashioned Christian notions to serve their own purposes. As Natives learned more about Christian teachings, they expressed their frustration over Puritan Protestant hypocrisy. Indigenous Christians began to separate or relocate away from white colonial influence establishing Christian towns such as the Brothertown in New York in 1780. Significantly, Native engagement with Christianity happened slowly over time during the 18th century. Indigenized Christian communities slowly developed over time and limited in number. Indigenized Christians were deeply concerned about balancing Christian doctrine and their own religious and cultural traditions. The process of conversion was very complex as Indigenized Christians fought to retain their cultural identity while using literacy and education to reclaim their tribal lands and fight for sovereignty.

Annotated bibliography of secondary sources:

Lesson Plan: Native American Christianity in the 18th century Great Awakening

Class time: two class periods

Materials:
1. Linford Fisher’s *The Indian Great Awakening*, pp. 107-135
2. Occum, “Autobiographical Narrative, Second Draft”

Objectives:
1. Students will acquire more information about Native American Great Awakening experience
2. Students will be able to conceptualize Occom’s “Autobiographical Narrative, Second Draft” within the historical period.

Skills:
1. Students will practice assessing reliability of documents
2. Students will make meaning out of broader circumstances
3. Students will practice note-taking and paragraph writing
4. Students will practice team building and communication skills by working within a group and then reporting out of their group.

Instructions:
1. Read about the Great Awakening in your text book. Take notes on the “who,” “what,” “where” and “why”; define all vocabulary words; include the historical significance of the Great Awakening.
2. Read Fisher’s, *The Indian Great Awakening*, pp. 107-135. Be prepared to explain the significance of Native American praying towns, conversion and religious affiliations.
3. During class time, read and discuss Occom’s “Autobiographical Narrative, Second Draft.”
4. Divide the class into four groups.
5. Instruct the students within each group to answer the following questions:
   a. What was the impact of Christianity on Native Americans
   b. What were the reasons why the English engaged in converting Native Americans to Christianity
   c. Describe the Great Awakening’s impact on colonial life.
   d. How did the Great Awakening lead to democracy and the American Revolution?
   e. Describe three distinct differences experienced by the Native Americans who converted to Christianity and three ways that Christianity led to cultural assimilation
   f. Assign each group a different perspective: Samson Occom’s Samuel Niles, Samuel Ashop
   g. Ask each group to identify the differences and similarities between the three Native American perspectives and the impact that each Native American Christian experience had on the larger Native American tribe.
h. Using the Occum document, address when Occum wrote the document, why he wrote the document, who the audience was reading the document and the possible historical significance of this document in terms of cultural assimilation upon religious conversion.

i. Discuss the difference between religious conversion, religious affiliation and Native American separatists' communities.

j. Have each group report on their findings.

k. Measureable assessment:

1. Assign for homework a one page essay answering the following questions:
   a. Why did Native Americans respond to the Great Awakening and Christianity
   b. How did Christianity negatively and positively impact the Native American culture?