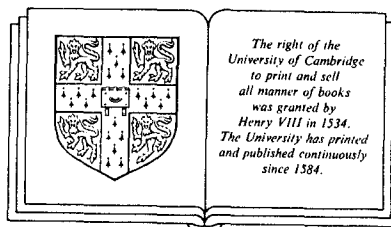


# The middle ground

Indians, empires, and republics  
in the Great Lakes region,  
1650-1815

RICHARD WHITE



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2/100 different nations as hunting parties - all may subsist on it.  
(2) only "owners" could hunt  
The middle ground derive economic benefit

example, acquired a special social meaning because, more than any other goods produced by the Algonquians, they could be transformed into European goods. And the Algonquians, apparently for this reason, began to treat furs differently from other products of the hunt. By the late seventeenth century, for example, any hungry man was entitled to kill game even outside his usual village or tribal hunting territory, but if a hunter did not have hunting rights in a territory, he was obliged to give the furs of the animals he killed to those who did. In other words, to obtain food, hunters could kill animals wherever they found them; to obtain kettles or blankets, however, they could kill only where they had certain rights.<sup>17</sup>

Similar small changes took place elsewhere as Algonquians fitted European goods into existing social niches, for Algonquians increasingly relied on Europeans for culturally required items. Acquiring sufficient European goods became a requirement of Algonquian ceremonials and diplomacy. In one sense, such goods became as "Indian" as moccasins, but in another, complementary sense they remained exotic, for this is what gave them their value. Indians now clearly desired goods they could not produce themselves, but more than that, they had integrated these valued goods into a series of social relationships on which the honor, power, and prestige of both individuals and groups depended. Those who had access to goods had access to influence totally out of proportion to the physical effects the goods they gave away could achieve. In 1683-84, La Durantaye made a gift of two guns. The guns had little material impact on the outcome of the Iroquois wars, but as gifts, they helped hold the alliance together during a crisis and placed hundreds of warriors in the field. Kondiaronk's gift of a gun, similarly, won over the Potawatomi leader Onanghisse, who, in turn, brought the wavering Green Bay peoples to Montreal to make peace with the Iroquois in 1701. Symbol and utility merged here to give European trade goods an influence far beyond their simple use value.<sup>18</sup>

III

The accommodation between French and Algonquian models of exchange that became the French fur trade of the *pays d'en haut* was structured by the overarching political relationship of French fathers to their Algonquian

<sup>17</sup> For hunting rights, see La Potherie, *Histoire*, 3:176-77; 4:79-81. By the early eighteenth century disputes over hunting territories and the willingness of French traders to buy even immature beaver had led to serious depletion, *Mémoire que les Directeurs*..., 26 avril 1703, AN, C11A, v. 21, f. 132-43.  
<sup>18</sup> See, e.g., Perrot, *Mémoire*, 67-70; La Potherie, *History*, WHC 16:3, 8. For these gifts, see Expense Account of La Durantaye, 1683-84, IHC 23:60-67. For Kondiaronk, see La Potherie, *Histoire*, 4:224.

children. This alliance provided the means for linking the Algonquian system of exchange, with its emphasis on the primacy of social relation, to a much larger world economy. Such a connection involved considerable cultural adjustment, but this adjustment cannot be understood separately from the whole range of other changes taking place on the middle ground.<sup>19</sup> Its departure point was the alliance against the Iroquois.

In the 1650s and 1660s, with the Iroquois threat dominant, exchange took place in an openly political forum - the Montreal trade fairs - whose rules initially conformed closely to Algonquian cultural forms. During the years when the Iroquois did not block the western trade routes, large convoys of Ottawas, Huron-Petuns, Saulteurs (and other proto-Ojibwa groups), Nippissings, and occasionally Potawatomis came to Montreal. Undeniably, a strong desire for European goods prompted these dangerous journeys, but this was not their sole motive. As early French traders in the West such as Radisson and Des Groseilliers discovered, the desire for allies against the Iroquois could stir western Indians to trade when purely commercial incentives could not. The Indians regarded these trade fairs both as annual renewals of the alliance and as commercial transactions. The Indians held ceremonies and formal councils with the French officials, were feasted, exchanged gifts, renewed the alliance, engaged in supervised exchange, and departed.<sup>20</sup>

The Indians who brought the furs down to Montreal were middlemen who gathered the furs of numerous groups for exchange at the trade fairs. The motives and identities of these middlemen are, however, easily confused. The "Ottawas" were perhaps the most famous middlemen of the late seventeenth century, but the name *Ottawas*, as used in the late seventeenth century, does not necessarily designate any specific tribal group. During much of the seventeenth century, *Ottawa* was the generic French name for any western Indian who traveled east to trade with the French. Ottawas seemed to monopolize the trade, but as the Jesuits explained, "all who go to

<sup>19</sup> For attachment to world economy, see Eric Wolf, *Europe and the People Without History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 158-194.  
<sup>20</sup> M. Duchesneau's *Memoir on Western Indians*, 13 Nov. 1681, NYCD 9:20-21. The Potawatomis appear on at least one occasion to have consented to accompany the French to Montreal as much from fear of losing the French as allies as from a desire for trade goods; Arthur Adams (ed.), *The Explorations of Pierre Esprit Radisson* (Minneapolis: Ross & Haines, 1967), 98-100; La Potherie, *History* 1:337.  
For a discussion of the trade fairs and their forms, see Abraham Rotstein, "Trade and Politics: An Institutional Approach," *Western Canadian Journal of Anthropology* 8 (1972): 13-22. For Huron trade ceremonies, see Bruce Trigger, *The Children of Aotutic: A History of the Huron People to 1660*, 2 vols. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1972). For a contemporary account, see JR 42:219-11. For Lahontan's description of fairs, see Reuben Gold Thwaites (ed.), *New Voyage to North America by the Baron de Lahontan*, 2 vols. (Chicago: A. C. McClurg, 1905), 1:92-95.