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A Gathering of Rivers

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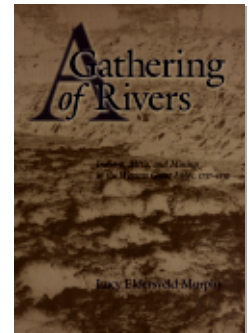
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Conclusion

AUTONOMY

Although Native women of this region maintained autonomy within their own societies, the autonomy of all the Indians was threatened by Anglos attracted to the very resources Native women and their families developed—mines and cornfields. As long as the Indians maintained control of their resources and independent diversified production for domestic use and the market, their economic vulnerability was at a low level. Among the commercial products they developed to avoid a reliance on furs alone, the most important was lead. Their success with it, unfortunately, attracted thousands of Anglos to the region, people who would neither acculturate nor hesitate to seize the lead mines for themselves. The lead rushers—and to a lesser extent, officials, soldiers, and the militia volunteers who put down rebellions in 1827 and 1832—discovered not only the beauty but also the richness of the land. Federal and state officials decided to help them take it, agreeing with treaty commissioner Caleb Atwater who believed, in an early version of Manifest Destiny, “That such a beautiful country, was intended by its Author to be forever in the possession and occupancy of serpents, wild fowls, wild beasts and savages, who derive little benefit from it, no reasonable man, can for one moment believe who sees it.”¹

ACCOMMODATION

Removal was not inevitable. Indians and non-Native neighbors did achieve accommodation in a variety of settings in the Fox-Wisconsin region. Creoles of the fur trade towns cooperated with Indians of nearby villages and incorporated some into their families and communities. At Dubuque’s Mines of Spain and Gratiot’s Grove, Indians and non-Native people negotiated and communicated to achieve accommodation in lead-producing areas. There were even instances where Indians and settlers worked out a neighborly peace in farming areas, such as the Dixon–Grand Detour neighborhood or on the Parkinson farm.

Accommodation between Indians and Creoles had been based on

economic specialization and interdependence, on cultural syncretism, on personal relationships that were most often cemented with marriages, and on mutual understanding and communication. Both the fur trade and early commercial lead mining had followed this pattern. But specialization, interdependence, cross-cultural relationships, and communication declined as Anglos took over the lead mines. Conflict rather than cooperation was the result.

As an alternative to specialization and interdependence, economic cooperation sometimes led to accommodation. Indians did find temporary wage work in the increasingly Anglo-dominated economy, but opportunities decreased as the seasons passed. Fewer men were needed as fur trade workers: guides, *voyageurs*, and guards. Larger numbers of domestic livestock reduced the need to hire Indian hunters. Gender role differences meant that most Indian men were not interested in farm work or mining, but these differences also meant Anglos were unlikely to consider Indian women as appropriate workers in these endeavors.

Although domestic production in the Creole towns demonstrates that economic cooperation could be achieved through cultural syncretism, Anglos resisted acculturating to indigenous patterns. On the contrary, the avenues to accommodation envisioned by Anglos required the Native people to acculturate to Euro-American norms, but Indians preferred to hold on to their cultures, seasonal economic migrations, and gender roles. Sauks and Mesquakies opposed any efforts to acculturate them, according to Maj. Morrell Marston of Fort Armstrong. If they knew that a man had been sent “to learn them how to cultivate the soil, spin, weave cloth and live like white people, they would be sure to set their faces against him and his advice, and say that he is a fool,” arguing that the Great Spirit did not wish Indians to be like whites.² For example, in 1806 Indian men showed their contempt for the efforts of agricultural agent William Ewing—who had been sent to show the Indian men how to farm—by shooting his draft animals full of arrows.³ Winnebagoes believed, according to Juliette Kinzie, “that if the Great Spirit had wished them different from what they are, he would have made them so.”⁴ She paraphrased the typical Winnebago view of the whites: “‘Look at them,’ they say, ‘always toiling and striving—always wearing a brow of care—shut up in houses—afraid of the wind and rain—suffering when they are deprived of the comforts of life! We, on the contrary, live a life of freedom and happiness. We hunt and fish, and pass our time pleasantly in the open woods and prairies. . . . What should we gain by changing ourselves into white men?’”⁵

Women were central to accommodation, and both gender roles and gender relations explain important elements of its failure.⁶ As wives,

mothers, sisters, daughters, and friends, countless Indian and Métis women linked communities in the Fox-Wisconsin region. As interpreters in social and economic relationships, they were called upon to learn about and teach the ways and languages of other cultures and to introduce and obligate people to each other. Careche-Coranche, Elizabeth Baird, and other women with their French Canadian and Anglo-American husbands and Métis families created multicultural Creole communities in fur trade centers at Prairie du Chien and Green Bay. Mawwai-quoï, Madame Dubuque, and other lead traders' wives linked Indian miners with buyers for a distant market. The interpreter Catherine Myott mediated between Winnebagos and Francophone lead rushers in a rare example of accommodation during the 1820s in the mineral region. Honinega Mack, Madeline Ogee, and other holdovers from the fur trade era united Anglos and Indians or provided transitions from Native to settler economies in areas such as Grand Detour.

Gender explains some, if not all, of the reasons that Anglos and Indians too often failed to develop workable long-term relationships. Because the character of interracial gender relations was a major factor in determining whether conflict or harmony would prevail, it is important to consider both the sex ratios of different waves of colonization and the expectations that immigrants had for gender relations. French and Anglo-Canadian immigrants were men, many of whom married across cultures and contributed to the creation of Creole societies and economies. The lead rushers included some white and black women who did not marry Indians in part because many were already wives of Anglophone men. The majority of the lead rushers, however, were unattached men of marriageable age, but their expectations, behavior, and character repulsed rather than endeared them to Native and Creole people. Although there were important exceptions, settlers tended to come in families with little desire to establish permanent relationships outside their ethnic groups; they seldom married or formed strong friendships with Indian people. Furthermore, even when intermarriage was uncommon, especially as economic specialization deteriorated, cooperative economic endeavors might have led to personal relationships across cultures. However, gender-role differences prevented cooperative farming and mining efforts.

AUTONOMY, ACCOMMODATION, MUTUALITY, AND HIERARCHY

When Euro-Americans came into the region, the Indians could keep their resources and the security to carry on production when they and

their new neighbors were able to reach accommodation in social and economic life. This was often possible with the Francophone Creoles because of the economic and social partnerships the Indians and Creoles created. Although some Anglos and Indians negotiated peaceful relations, by and large the encounters between people of these two groups were frustrating, belligerent, and conflicted.

An important reason for the difference between the cooperation of Creole-Indian relations and the difficulties of Anglo-Indian relations was that patterns of hierarchy and mutuality in Anglo society differed in important ways from such patterns in the other two cultures. Anglos had come from a tradition of social hierarchy, but since the American Revolution increasing numbers of them held ideals of equality among white men. This (limited) democratic principle together with the Homestead Ethic caused them to resist the control of their own elites while expecting those same elites to remove Indians so that settlers could take their land and other resources.

Anglo elites in the mining region and places like the Saukenuk–Rock Island area were too weak and/or unwilling to prevent lead rushers and settlers from disrupting relations with Indians and seizing their resources. The all-too-rare occasions when Anglo leaders such as Zachary Taylor stepped forward to control whites and protect Indians were bitterly resented by most frontier citizens. Even the good intentions of the Dixon and Parkinson families were not strong enough to restrain their independent compatriots. Though it had been the Indians in the mid-eighteenth century who “could not control their young men,” by the 1820s Indian elites were better able than Anglo officials to keep their own people from allowing conflicts to become violent. Ironically, Indian men found themselves in the position of trying to control other people’s young men with police patrols in the mining area.

But if Anglos embraced mutuality among white men, they believed in hierarchy with regard to ethnic and gender relations. Their idea of multiethnic economic cooperation usually cast non-Anglos in subordinate roles and was expressed in efforts to recruit Indians and Métis as household servants and laborers. In addition, Anglo and Indian patterns of gender relations were incompatible. Few Anglos could envision women—particularly women of color—as mediators, teachers across culture, diplomats, or interpreters. These attitudes also worked to discourage intermarriage between Indians and Anglos that could have created intercommunity ties, even though Anglo men usually considered their own women to be subordinate. The exogamy that worked to the advantage of families in the cultural logic of Indians and Creoles was

seen by most Anglos as casting a stigma on families. Men such as Henry Baird, with kin who had elite aspirations in Anglo society, could expect to meet with resistance from their family members if they chose to marry an Indian or Creole woman. Anglo women seem not to have even considered marrying Indian men although they occasionally married Creoles.

Indians, on the other hand, expressed hierarchy and mutuality somewhat differently. Like Creoles, their society included families with a range of social ranks, and people gained in authority as they aged. Mutuality in gender relations gave women a fair amount of autonomy and provided a basis for negotiation in Creole and Indian families. But race or ethnicity was less important than family ties or achievement in determining social status. A man might be a Pawnee captive or a Euro-American outsider, but if he married well and his work showed him to be skilled, honest, responsible, and valuable to the community, he might achieve status. Women too could gain authority and status in similar ways. This view of appropriate hierarchy caused Indians to resist taking subordinate roles in Anglo families and communities when they realized that Anglo concepts of appropriate hierarchy differed. Although the Indians and Creoles were less egalitarian in their intragroup relations than Anglos, they were much more willing to negotiate and compromise on issues related to intercultural, racial, and gender relations, arenas in which there was much mutuality if not equality.

The Indians were able to keep their autonomy until the late 1820s because they diversified their economy and maintained varied production along with the resources and skills associated with it. To the extent that they participated in markets, they cultivated a wide enough variety of customers and traders to avoid vulnerability, despite the efforts of people like George Davenport to monopolize commerce.

Indians maintained traditional lifestyles and gender roles, adapting them to new and commercialized forms of production, and continued to be economically autonomous until Anglos seized the lead mines and the land and forced the Natives out. Indians resisted the seizure of their resources in both the Winnebago Revolt of 1827 and the Black Hawk War of 1832, but these rebellions served as excuses for the United States to demand more land cessions even though only a minority of Indians actively participated.

Multiple removals and treaties substituting money payments and rations for the resources with which to make a living created terrible hardships and high mortality. Some of the Natives persisted however.

While many Indians and Métis in the Creole communities continued to live in the area after 1832, so too did many Winnebagos who either hid out during removal or individually returned afterward. Similarly, the Mesquakie community at Tama testifies to the survival of the people and their culture in the upper Mississippi Valley.