The process of American and Russian expansion and colonization of the northern plains and the Kazakh Steppe is complex and occurs over centuries. The roots and chronology of American and Russian expansion and colonization represents a major difference between the two processes. French and British traders and trappers penetrated the North American continental interior very slowly in the search for the profitable trade that, in some ways, paralleled Russian expansion into Siberia.¹ In both cases, furs and other natural resources initially attracted Euro-Americans and Russians to the continental interiors; but eventually that attraction waned, and the northern plains and the Kazakh Steppe became contested territory that Americans and Russians believed needed their active intervention in order to stop indigenous attacks against American and Russian traders and settlers.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Euro-Americans were a trifling presence in the North American continental interior, whereas Russians were already crossing the Ural Mountains into Siberia and penetrating the northern steppe regions. Russia’s contacts, trade relations, and diplomacy with the Kazakhs began almost a century before the French even learned about the Sioux. The Sioux only peripherally integrated into the French and British trade networks—certainly not as fully as some other tribes, such as the Iroquois, Huron, or Ottawa. But scholars struggle to understand fully the Sioux world of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries because it was a world that generally,
as Richard White noted, consisted “largely of dim shadows” pieced together and “preserved in fractured memories.”

White correctly noted that the “history of the northern and central American Great Plains . . . is far more complicated than the tragic retreat of the Indians in the face of an inexorable white advance. From the perspective of the most northern and central plains tribes, the crucial invasion during this period was not necessarily that of the whites at all. These tribes had few illusions about American whites and the danger they represented, but the Sioux remained their most feared enemy.” Despite their focus on their own successes, British, French, and Russian sources reveal that Euro-Americans and Russians expanded into regions that were not empty but were somewhat unstable and contested by numerous challengers. Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Sioux and the Kazakhs fought against non-Europeans and indigenous rivals for control of the northern plains and the Kazakh Steppe. The Sioux fought against the Chipewa, Cree, Crow, Iowa, Mandan, and others for control of land and resources and the Kazakhs fought against the Bashkirs, Kalmyks, Kirghiz, Bukharans, and Khivans for control of the steppe. The Sioux and the Kazakhs held their territories with martial strength. Moreover, because of their experiences with other indigenous groups, they often did not feel threatened by Euro-Americans or Russians. Both the Sioux and the Kazakhs developed societies that could resist change, but important differences existed. The Sioux were an expanding power in the northern plains from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries but the Kazakhs were fighting on multiple sides, and with each other, as the Russians extended their empire into Siberia and the Kazakh Steppe.

The age of what might be called American expansion unquestionably has its roots in the age of European overseas expansion into the North and South American continents, Asia, and Africa in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. America’s eventual expansion across the North American continent traces its birth to European overseas imperialism, whereas Russian expansion was, from the start, an exercise in contiguous territorial expansion. That perception gives Russian expansion an organic flavor, a natural reincorporation of lands dominated by 250 years of Mongol barbarity. The age of Russian imperialism commenced with the slow disintegration of the Mongol Empire (often referred to as the Mongol Yoke), the Golden Horde. In the late fifteenth century, the rise of the Muscovite state under Ivan III (1462–1505), or Ivan the Great, continued a process in Russian history often called the “gathering of the lands of Rus.” In the process, the Muscovite state morphed from a relatively small principality into what becomes the Russian Empire.
Euro-Americans, on the other hand, understood their expansion precisely for what it was: economic expansion and imperialism that morphed into settler colonialism.5

Most scholars agree that in the seventeenth century, the Eastern Sioux (Dakota) were hunter-gatherers living in the lakes and woodlands of Wisconsin and Minnesota. The Sioux likely hunted buffalo at this time as well, but they were not yet the acclaimed horsemen of the nineteenth century. By the mid-seventeenth century, sporadic contacts with French traders and Jesuit missionaries slowly incorporated the Sioux into the lucrative European trade and commercial orbit of the Great Lakes region. External pressures, however, compelled the Sioux to fight against various rivals to preserve their territory. By the eighteenth century, the Sioux started to migrate west into the Minnesota prairies and northern plains. Nonetheless, it remains unclear why the Sioux left; the debate centers on whether the external pressures exerted by the fur trade pushed the Sioux out or, on the other hand, the acquisition of the horse provided the tool to hunt buffalo more efficiently and allowed them to abandon their semisedentary existence.6

By the seventeenth century, Kazakhs divided into the Three Hordes and lived in the steppe regions, but they were not the only peoples fighting to control the steppe. Violence and constantly shifting authority and control seemingly epitomized life in the northern steppe during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Zhanibek and Kerei resisted incursions in the southern steppe region by former Uzbek allies—Kyrgyz, Oirats, and others. Under Zhanibek’s son, Kasym Khan, the Kazakhs defeated the Uzbeks and seized control of Tashkent and the Syr Darya region, including the Silk Road town of Otrar, although these military victories did not bring peace or stability to the steppe.7 Like the Sioux, the Kazakhs underwent change and expansion.

In the seventeenth century, Euro-Americans and Russians sought to facilitate trade with indigenous populations and ensure security along the boundaries and throughout the networks established by Europeans and Russians; however, in order to facilitate that trade, Europeans and Russians used both negotiations and military force to secure and expand the trade. They built trading posts and military fortifications in order to secure the footholds. In addition, Euro-Americans and Russians structured trade relationships through treaties and oaths negotiated with indigenous peoples. Euro-Americans facilitated relations with the native populations by reciprocal relations and gift giving; Russians awarded those who cooperated with benefits such as titles and privileges rather than symbolic reciprocity.8
Comparing Sioux and Kazakh history up to the eighteenth century is not exact. Whereas Sioux history seemingly divided between three distinct periods, Kazakh history was less precise, although it roughly corresponded. Nonetheless, they share many common experiences. Euro-American and Sioux relations in the seventeenth century reflect the “push” forces that later compelled many Dakota and Lakota to migrate from their lakes and woodland homes to occupy parts of Minnesota, Iowa, Nebraska, North and South Dakota, and eastern Montana and Wyoming, where the Americans encountered them in the nineteenth century. The first era was the Iroquois Wars (1641–1701), followed by the French era (1720–1761) and the British era (1761–1819). Russian and Kazakh relations in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries did not easily partition, but Khan Abulkhair’s 1732 decision to pledge his allegiance to Russia distinguished the two eras. This division corresponds approximately to the Dzungarian-Kalmyk Wars (1680s–1740s) and the era of rebellion (1740s–1822).

The first phase that brought the Sioux into the realm of European expansion began by the late sixteenth century, as the French established settlements along North America’s eastern shores but struggled to establish a presence in the interior until 1608, when the French founded the colony of Quebec. The first French trading companies were already operating—mainly purchasing furs—but Quebec settlements were small, with only a handful of inhabitants. The French allied with Algonquian tribes that served as essential partners in the fur trade. The British allied with the Iroquois and, for much of the seventeenth century, the Iroquois and French clashed in small-scale attacks followed by retaliations. By the second half of the seventeenth century, French economic interests oriented toward the fur trade, with Montreal quickly becoming the economic center of the trade. The British firmly established their colonies—which stretched across the eastern seaboard—east of the Alleghany Mountains. Throughout the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the French designed policies to contain Britain and restrict its expansion to the small eastern towns and settlements. In general, the Sioux did not establish specifically strong trade relations with either individual European power; however, they gravitated toward the various French and British trading networks then operating in the plains and Great Lakes region.

Russia’s expansion in the sixteenth century, by comparison, was much more vigorous. The conquest of Kazan in 1552 served Russia’s growing trade interests to the east, particularly the assumed riches in central Asia, Persia, and China. In 1573 one of the first Kazakh delegations visited Moscow, some twenty years after the conquest of Kazan and Astrakhan. This delegation’s purpose...
remains somewhat uncertain, but the Russians likely wanted to negotiate with the Kazakhs to use routes through the Kazakh Steppe to expand trade with the central Asian khanates of Bukhara, Khiva, and Kokand and perhaps with China and Persia as well. In the early years, the Kazakhs acted as middlemen in the central Asian trade, but their most important contribution was to provide protection to caravans crossing the steppe. The problem was that the Kazakhs were just as likely to attack a caravan as protect one. An assurance of protection by one Kazakh clan or horde did not guarantee that a different Kazakh clan or horde was obligated to respect its route or safety.

It is unlikely that this delegation was the first contact between Kazakhs and Russians, but it occurred almost a century before known Sioux-European interaction. The earliest mention of the Sioux appears to be in 1641 by two Jesuit missionaries, Isaac Jogues and Charles Raymbault. They did not meet any Sioux. According to the story, they learned from the Chippewa about a people “who lived eighteen days’ journey to the west”; but it was another twenty years before a documented meeting occurred between Sioux and French Jesuit representatives. During this period, the Iroquois were a powerful force in the western Great Lakes region, fighting against the Hurons and Ottawas and pushing these weaker tribes into Sioux territories. The Sioux, according to Reuben Gold Thwaites, “were disposed to welcome the newcomers,” but “the impolitic fugitives repaid their kind hosts with base treachery, and the [Sioux] turned upon them with fury.” War between many Sioux bands and those tribes pushed west by the Iroquois was common in the 1640s and 1650s. According to historian W. J. Eccles, in the 1650s—after the Iroquois “virtually destroyed the Huron nation”—French traders and missionaries started to establish direct trade relations with tribes, such as the Sioux, who previously hunted and then traded with the “Huron middlemen.” The Sioux met the French after the Iroquois destroyed the Huron, breaking a trade barrier rather violently.

It was in the epoch of Iroquois Wars that the first record of a French-Sioux meeting occurred. In 1659 or 1660 Pierre Esprit Radisson and Médard Chouart de Grosseilliers likely met with the Sioux. Radisson believed the Sioux bands, likely Dakota, wanted French goods, especially firearms. He wrote that they met in order for the Sioux to “make a sacrifice to the French, being Gods and masters of all things, as of peace, as wars; making the knives, the hatchets, and ye kettles rattle, etc. That they came purposely to put themselves under their protection.” He also assumed that the Sioux desperately needed the French goods to survive, noting, “we kept them alive by our merchandises.” Radisson and Grosseilliers did not introduce the Sioux to European commerce or merchandise; the Sioux likely traded with other tribes in the area and were familiar with some products
before they met the two Frenchmen. In 1665 missionary Claude Allouez met with some Sioux who described their home along the “Messepi” River, the prairies that abounded in all types of game, and “their fields of tobacco.” In 1685 Nicolas Perrot built a trading post called Fort St. Antoine along the east shore of Lake Pepin, in Wisconsin, where he established a brief but profitable trade with some Sioux bands.

As these two meetings suggest, the Sioux and French coupled trade to diplomacy, or at least those who met with the Frenchmen did. It seems the Sioux hoped to establish direct trade relations in order to acquire firearms and other merchandise. According to Radisson, the Sioux wanted French “protection,” but it was just as likely that the Sioux perceived the French to be potentially powerful allies against their enemies. Unfortunately for Radisson, the French government refused to authorize his trip, and the governor of New France confiscated all his furs and profits. The government in New France wanted to control the trade, much as the Russians sought to monopolize trade in Siberia, but both governments constantly dealt with natives and Frenchmen or Russians who operated outside official channels. These individuals proved to be intrepid traders and explorers and typically penetrated farther into the plains and steppe than the large, cumbersome government-supported expeditions. In many cases, they did not want, nor need, government sanction.

The construction of small posts by French traders was comparable to Russian expansion, although the French expansion differed in that these were individual traders or monopolies and not military or settler posts. The French generally established posts on land that no tribe claimed or only built with the express permission of the tribe. A French post was strictly a commercial site because the French did not typically establish agricultural settlements; however, coureurs de bois (runners of the woods) caused the French colonial government considerable anxiety as they adopted Indian customs and language, married Indian women, and settled around these posts. They played an essential role in the French fur trade, which was individually motivated without much military or government assistance.

In the seventeenth century, Euro-American expansion differed significantly from Russian imperial expansion and colonization in the Kazakh Steppe, which, acclaimed nineteenth-century Russian historian Vasilii Kliuchevskii characterized by “jerks and jolts.” The Russian government accomplished expansion, he wrote, not by “spreading out, but by changing its lines of advance.”

That line of advance was a series of small Cossack posts and forts—the “Trans-Kama Line”—constructed to preserve Russia’s territorial gains around the Ural Mountains. Cossacks manned each fort under the command of a voevoda, or
military governor (who was also the top civil administrator), and the Russian government allotted the Cossacks land adjacent to the fort to farm. Security against Tatar, Bashkir, and other peoples’ raids on Russian and Cossack settlements and Russian desires to expand trade pushed the Russian movement eastward. Euro-American expansion into Sioux lands centered on commerce rather than the settler agriculture evident in the Russian advance but was also characterized by jerks and jolts. Interestingly, much as French colonial officials expressed concern that the “coureurs de bois were metamorphosing into sauvages, that is, men beyond the control of legitimate authority,” Russian officials struggled to understand that Cossack settlers rarely shared interests that coincided or aligned with the empire’s interests.28

The French and Cossacks who settled near the Sioux or the Kazakhs were not agents of the state sent to conquer the region but rather represented typically “mutualistic and cooperative” relations that transformed the identity of both.29 The French were merchants or missionaries; they were not serving a conquest agenda. The posts were not zones of imperial subjugation or separation but were, as White argued, the middle-ground places “in between cultures, peoples, and in between empires and the nonstate world of villages.”30 In both cases, the imperial state was unable to regulate fully the interactions between traders-settlers and indigenous populations; their interests did not coincide because of the weakness, or outright absence, of imperial institutions in the distant regions.

The imperial state relied instead on the social and economic networks established by the French and Cossacks to exert, at the very least, its symbolic power, influence, and authority. Later Russian historians depicted the Cossacks as the vanguard and agents of “Russian civilization on the wild Asiatic east” but without the similar expectation expressed by the French traders in this early contact period.31 When the Cossacks blurred the imperial vision by “intermarriage, interactions, conversions, acculturations, and desertions,” that environment was comparable to “borderland communities of interests” in North America, where, as Thomas Biolsi observed, the “middle ground has commonly been a marrying ground” as these posts and places became zones of cultural as well as economic exchange.32

Throughout the seventeenth century, while the French busied themselves trying to establish their trading networks and fending off the British and their Iroquois allies, the Russians struggled to maintain their networks in Siberia and the Kazakh Steppe. From the fall of Kazan in 1552 until the ascension of Peter the Great in 1682, the Russian advance was slow and oriented toward increased territorial expansion in Siberia and exploitation and trade in the region’s natural resources. Siberia’s fur and timber wealth continued to attract Russian interest
and compelled its further expansion. In 1558 Anika Stroganov successfully petitioned the tsar to grant him the monopoly rights to develop the western regions of Siberia, which was followed by similar charters bestowed on his two sons in 1574. Shortly thereafter, the Cossack Ermak defeated the Tatar khan of Sibir, Kuchum (who fled south into the Kazakh Steppe). Within a century, Russia crossed the continent, and by the early eighteenth century, explorations of the Aleutians and Alaska began.

To facilitate trade in Siberia and central Asia, Ivan IV’s charter instructed the Stroganovs to grant traders from the Kazakhs or Turkestan unfettered travel to trade. The instructions forbid the Stroganovs from imposing a tax or any financial burdens on this trade. The problem was that trade traffic required mutual benefit. With seeming impunity, Kazakhs frequently attacked Russian trade caravans traveling through the steppe, plundered the goods, and often sold Russian survivors in the slave markets in Bukhara. An English emissary to the Russians in the 1550s, Anthony Jenkinson, described how the Kazakhs, “living in the fields without house or towne,” dominated the steppe and hindered trade. Consequently, he wrote that the Kazakhs made it “impossible for any Caravan to pass unspoiled, so that 3 years before our being there, no Caravan had gone.” By this time, the Kazakhs proved to be a significant barrier to Russian trade and expansion, a process that later played out in the plains when Americans pushed into a region dominated by a powerful indigenous force. Although the chronology differs significantly, both the Americans and the Russians perceived barriers to overcome in the plains and steppe with military force, trade, and colonization.

By the ascension of Peter I (1682–1725, Peter the Great), the Russian government consolidated its authority in western Siberia but found that the frontier along the Kazakh Steppe was fragile and perennially threatened by Kazakh incursions. Under Peter I, Russia’s expansion continued eastward, and the regime turned its “gaze to the Kazakh hordes” because the tsar regarded the Kazakhs as potential “partners in trade and political affairs”; but he also considered the Kazakh Steppe a “beach-head for extending its own trade objectives in the east.” Russia, however, expanded into a volatile situation in the steppe, and it was decades before Russia fully controlled it. The Kazakhs weakly exercised control over the steppe, and they were constantly fending off rivals who attempted to push the Kazakhs from the prime pastures and water sources. Kazakhs faced serious incursions by the Oirat-Kalmyk hordes in the southeast, along the Ili River valley, and in the northeast, along the Altai region between China, Mongolia, and Kazakh territory. Comparable to the Kazakhs, the Sioux also struggled to fend off rivals in the lakes and woodlands of Minnesota and
Wisconsin. Some western Sioux bands, particularly the Teton, started migrating deeper into the northern plains, and many remained there on a permanent basis.

Throughout the seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries, the Sioux engaged in intermittent conflict with the Chippewa, Ottawa, Huron, and others. French traders in the late seventeenth century also tried to cement diplomatic ties with the Sioux and other Indian tribes in the Upper Mississippi River region, which meant that trade and alliances, according to White, “became inseparable.” The British government’s 1670 charter of the Hudson’s Bay Company motivated the French to obstruct British efforts, but the British did not yet desire direct competition with the French in the interior. Instead, the British sought profit rather than conquest, as “long as enough furs reached its posts to produce a dividend for its shareholders, the company’s servants were content to remain in a ‘sleep by the frozen sea.’”

In 1671 the French informed the Wisconsin tribes that they were “the subjects of the great French king across the ocean,” although this probably meant very little to the tribes. It took another twenty years before the French government established a formal alliance ceremony that some Sioux bands acknowledged as legitimate. The French wanted to end the intertribal warfare and secure safe passage for their merchants and their native allies. In the 1670s, the Sioux and Chippewa were at war with one another, and that disrupted trade. In 1679 Daniel Greysolon Dulhut (Duluth) negotiated a tenuous peace between the Sioux and Chippewa at Mille Lacs; he also claimed “possession of the Sioux country” in the name of Louis XIV of France.

The economic competition to furnish peltries to the French and British in order to secure European goods likely increased warfare between the Sioux and their rivals, creating new motivations, or as Bruce G. Trigger observed, “new forms” of intertribal warfare that were often more deadly and more economically motivated than before European incursion into the upper Mississippi region. In 1695 the first Sioux delegation, led by Teeoskahtay (or Tioscaté), visited the Onontio, the governor of New France, which, according to Louise Phelps Kellogg, “cemented the alliance” between the Sioux and the French.

By most accounts, it seems Teeoskahtay desired guns—something the French were reluctant to trade—but the meeting resulted in the first formal alliance between the French and the Sioux. Interestingly, the Russians were also reluctant to trade guns with the Kazakhs and issued a decree in 1749 that forbid selling Kazakhs “weapons, gun-powder, flint, or lead.” The French and British believed that the weapons trade might positively affect the fur trade, but only if natives used the weapons to hunt and trap and not in warfare against traditional enemies—or worse, against their traders. The French and the British never resolved
the problem. Frequently and hypocritically, they willingly traded in weapons if it obstructed their enemies’ trade rather than benefited their own. Restricting the trade in weapons was something that both the British and French tried but failed to do to limit conflict between the Sioux and their enemies. The British and French wanted unhindered trade, but they also believed that conflict destabilized the region. The Russians also wanted to expand trade and believed that Kazakh hostilities in the steppe needed to cease, but they also failed to obstruct the weapons trade with the Kazakhs. There was no evidence to suggest that trade in weapons increased warfare in the plains and the steppe, but colonizers certainly believed it did.

1700 TO MIDCENTURY

The first half of the eighteenth century marked significant transitions for the Sioux and the Kazakhs. The Sioux—in particular, the Teton—were migrating westward, having abandoned Wisconsin Territory to occupy regions between the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers, territory claimed by France. Moreover, the French presence in the western fur trade greatly weakened after the Treaty of Ryswick (1697) and subsequent wars with Britain. These imperial conflicts involved numerous Indian tribes, but the conflicts between the Sioux and their rivals continued throughout much of the eighteenth century—in part, for territory, and also, as White noted, because “exchange and alliances were so closely linked, no nation could countenance trade, particularly in weapons, with its enemies or its enemies’ allies.” The Sioux were only one of the dominant tribes in Minnesota in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The Ojibwa were the dominant tribe in the northern forest regions, whereas the Sioux occupied the southern and western “prairie” parts of the state. Other tribes that migrated into the region included the Hurons, Ottawas, Winnebagos, and Crees.

The Sioux, between 1700 and 1750, were an expanding power on the eastern regions of the northern plains. Most scholars believe that they were motivated to move westward to pursue prime buffalo hunting grounds and due to pressures being applied by Cree expansion into Eastern Sioux regions. There is some evidence to suggest that some Sioux already acquired horses and became quite skilled hunters on horseback. According to the journal of Peter Pond, who spent years living among and trading with the Sioux, the band he traveled with possessed large numbers of horses and dogs, and “thay Run down the Buffelow with thare Horses and Kill as Much Meat as thay Please.” As the Sioux migrated westward, they displaced other tribes, such as the Arikara, Mandan, Hidatsa, Assiniboine, Iowa, Omaha, and Ponca. By this time, Euro-Americans reported
that the Sioux possessed firearms and frequently referred to them as “turbulent trouble-makers.” The Sioux and Chippewa seemingly engaged in ceaseless warfare during this era as the Sioux fought to defend prime hunting grounds, which were vital for survival. War parties from both tribes attacked each other relentlessly if they found an enemy on disputed territory; these skirmishes were necessary for economic security rather than to trade with French or British traders. Euro-Americans were not occupying Sioux territory in this era; although they certainly desired to increase trade, the interaction between the Sioux and Europeans remained chiefly economic, not territorial acquisition.

The Kazakhs were dealing with two slightly different territorial incursions. First, the Russians were actively penetrating the Kazakh Steppe in the early eighteenth century. Between 1714 and 1725, Russia expanded trade with the Kazakhs, profitably exchanging raw materials such as hides, wools, and livestock—especially horses and sheep—and Kazakhs wanted Russian manufactured goods such as “iron and metal shovels and axes, trivets, scissors, buckets and barrels, metal bits, kitchen wares, stirrups, and other goods.” In 1713 Siberian governor Prince Matvei Gagarin recommended to Peter the Great that the government build a line of forts to defend the empire’s interests.

In 1714 the Russians started construction along a military line—that consisted of a string of towns and small forts. Several fortified towns started popping up along the Kazakh Steppe, including Omsk (1716), Semipalatinsk (1718), Pavlodar (1720), Ilek (1731), Orsk (1735), Orenburg (1743), and Petropavlovsk (1752). The line extended more than 2,500 miles and eventually included more than forty forts and over one hundred
smaller posts.\textsuperscript{37} It would be more than a century before any sort of comparable American presence existed in the northern plains. A significant difference was that the Russians forbid Kazakhs from migrating across the Irtysh Line, a restriction ostensibly placed on Russian peasants as well. The French and British posts, linked loosely together, imposed no such restrictions; no boundary prevented French, British, or, later, Americans, from crossing. The tsarist government, on the other hand, generally barred its peasants from crossing the Irtysh Line into the steppe.\textsuperscript{38}

By the early eighteenth century, Russians confronted the Kazakhs along the Irtysh Line, but a second territorial threat seriously challenged Kazakh control in the steppe and altered the relationship between the Kazakhs and the Russians. In the 1720s, a period in Kazakh history called the Aqtaban-shubyrlyngdy (the Great Calamity), the Dzhungar-Kalmyk invasion threatened to overrun the Kazakhs. Chokan Valikhanov, a nineteenth-century Kazakh intellectual, wrote, “the first decade of the eighteenth century was a horrible time in the lives of the Kirgiz [Kazakh] people. The Dzungars, the Volga Kalmyks, the Siberian Cossacks and Bashkirs from all sides thundered, stole cattle and carried off whole families as prisoners.”\textsuperscript{39} It was during the era of the Dzhungar-Kalmyk threat that the Russian government exploited the situation and seized nearly 45 million desiatin (1 desiatin equals 2.7 acres) of the most “fertile” land and “secured water sources” for settlement by Russian-Cossack peasants.\textsuperscript{60}

Here again is an important difference between the Sioux and the Kazakhs throughout the eighteenth century. Most scholars agree that either the Sioux fled their homeland or they deliberately migrated westward to camp closer to vast plains’ buffalo herds, their principal food source. In any event, as the Sioux moved westward, they forced migrations by other tribes and, subsequently, fought to hold the territory formerly occupied or bounded by tribes unable to resist their invasion of the northern plains. Unlike the Kazakhs, the Sioux were an expanding power. By the mid-eighteenth century, guarding and occupying the Kazakh Steppe required constant vigilance and defense against external aggressors. The Sioux were equally vigilant to incursions by neighbors but enemies pressed the Kazakhs from all sides: Russia and its allies; the Tatars and Bashkirs, from the west; China, in the east, claimed parts of the steppe; and, from the south, Turkestan khanates, Kirgiz, and Turkmen were pressing from different flanks. Enemies did not encircle the Sioux in quite the same way. Clearly, other tribes tried to push the Sioux from the prime hunting grounds, but Sioux enemies never mustered a comparable military power to succeed. Added to this volatile, tenuous mix, the Dzhungar-Kalmyk threat rivaled Kazakh military power, and the Kazakhs struggled to find allies to defend their lands. What
happened next fundamentally altered the relationship between the Russians and the Kazakhs.

In 1730 two missives from Abulkhair, khan of the Little Horde, reached Saint Petersburg, requesting Russian assistance against the Dzhungar-Kalmyk threat—a request the Russians seemed eager to exploit. In 1731 the Russians dispatched a mission to complete negotiations to bring the horde under Russian suzerainty—or that was how the Russians viewed this diplomatic mission. Abulkhair promised “faithful service” to Russia, but there continues to be a debate about his motives.\(^6^1\) Abulkhair was fighting against the Bashkirs, who were already subject to Russian rule, and the Dzhungar-Kalmyks. Moreover, Abulkhair faced internal opposition from Sultan Kaip for leadership of the Little Horde. The Russian government was well aware of Abulkhair’s precarious position and decided to exploit it in order to strengthen the Irtysh Line and advance its trading interests with Bukhara and Khiva.\(^6^2\)

In taking the oath, Abulkhair claimed to be “Khan of all the Kazakhs,” a dubious notion due to the fact that his authority did not extend beyond the Little Horde—a fact that did not seem to alarm the Russians.\(^6^3\) In fact, it likely served Russia’s interests. The problem was that Abulkhair’s interests conflicted with Russia’s interests and expectations. Abulkhair wanted to enhance his own authority and perhaps receive an “official” title from Russia. What he wanted was assistance against both the internal challenges to his rule and aid against the external Dzhungar-Kalmyk threat rather than incorporation into the Russian Empire.\(^6^4\) He was not surrendering Little Horde sovereignty, but that was exactly how the Russians interpreted the oath of loyalty.\(^6^5\)

This was a turning point because from this moment forward, Russia claimed sovereignty over all of the Kazakhs, not just Kazakhs of the Little Horde. In addition, Russia claimed control of the territory—the Kazakh Steppe—and simply annexed it into the empire. Since the 1730s, many Russians claimed that Abulkhair’s request represented the unification \(\text{prisoedinenie}\) of Kazakhstan to Russia. Nineteenth-century Russian Orientalist Vasilii Grigoriev insisted the “voluntary submission of the numerous Horde of Kirghiz [Kazakh] who had been formerly hostile to us . . . and it was recalled to mind that Peter the Great himself had been of the opinion . . . that ‘this Horde, though a nomad and light-thinking people, was yet the key and the gate of all the lands and countries of Asia.’ ”\(^6^6\) Historian Geoffrey Wheeler succinctly summarized the consequences this way: “It can be said with a fair degree of certainty that although by 1730 the Russians had formulated no definite plans for the overrunning of the Steppe Region, the fate of the Kazakhs was sealed in the sense that henceforward their future was to be bound up with Russia.”\(^6^7\) The Kazakhs did not cede or sell the
land to the Russians, but that mattered little from the Russian perspective. Over
the course of the next several decades, many Kazakhs fought vigorously against
Russian rule, and others cooperated with the Russian government. Russia
eagerly bestowed titles, lands, and salaries on Kazakh khans, sultans, aksakals,
and others who embraced Russian expansion and colonization.

This is an important comparative difference, not just in the temporal sense
of Russian internal colonization but also in the manner that incorporated the
land into the empire. A border-frontier zone between the Russian Empire
and the Kazakhs emerged along the Irtysh Line, but the Russians interpreted
Abulkhair’s oath as not just the allegiance of the Little Horde to the Russian
Empire but Kazakhs surrendering their sovereignty to Russian imperial rule.
It was, from the Russian perspective, the surrender of Kazakh claims to the
land. In comparison, the French might claim parts of Wisconsin for New France
or interpret Teeoskatay’s visit to Montreal as cementing an alliance between
the French and the Sioux, but it was a commercial alliance, not the surren-
der of political and territorial sovereignty, which is precisely how the Russians
interpreted Abulkhair’s oath. Comparatively, the French might claim the posts
gave them title to the land where they built them, but the original purpose was
to exclude the British from the region rather than assert spurious title to the
land or deny Indian title.68 The French did not assume title to all Sioux lands or
authority over all Sioux bands. The Russians were not the first external power
to claim suzerainty over the Kazakh Steppe, but the numerous pressures in the
steppe prevented the Kazakhs from using the vast lands to flee to safety; it was
no longer the refuge from external threats. In other words, flight into the steppe
no longer provided safety and security for the Kazakhs. For the Sioux, however,
the northern plains and Minnesota prairies became the sanctuary from French,
British, and, later, American expansion.

Another difference was that the British tended to settle along the eastern
seaboard; the French did not occupy large tracts of land in what became the
United States. French, British, and Spanish colonies were sufficiently distant
from Sioux territories that trade relations remained sporadic. Settlements near
the Sioux were small when compared to the Russian presence near or in the
northern Kazakh Steppe. According to the Orenburg governor, in 1755 almost
37,000 Cossacks were dispersed along the Irtysh Line, stationed at the various
forts and small posts. This does not take into account the number of Russians
living well behind the line or engaged in trade.69 In the colony of New France,
in 1698, the population of Quebec was slightly more than 15,000; in 1754, it
was roughly 55,000, well away from Sioux territories.70 In comparison, between
1719 and 1750, the number of French engaged in the western fur trade was
small, perhaps from 200 to 600 men. The French were not inclined to leave the colony or settle outside the comforts of Quebec. The Russians, on the other hand, were actively pushing the line of advance that Kliuchevskii described. No such line of advance appeared in the plains until after American independence. It was not until the nineteenth century that the Sioux confronted American pioneers and military power as an escalating source of confusion and conflict.

**Midcentury to 1800**

In the second half of the century, the Sioux were an expanding power in the Minnesota prairies and the northern plains, but Sioux relations with the French or British—or, subsequently, the United States—were chiefly economic. Intertribal warfare, however, caused concern among traders and French and British military men, particularly if it disrupted trade. The Seven Years’ War—or, as it is often called in the United States, the French and Indian War—was fought between Great Britain and France for imperial dominance; and when it ended in 1763, according to nineteenth-century historian Francis Parkman, it “made England what she is. It crippled the commerce of her rival, ruined France in two continents, and blighted her as a colonial power.” The British pursued a different course than the French in their relations with Indians—in particular, many British leaders believed that the French pampered the Indians, gave unwarranted gifts, and followed a “kind of imperialism that civilized men thought they should by right exert over ‘savages.’” Consequently, the Sioux cautiously gravitated toward improved relations with the British. It was a different matter altogether in the Kazakh Steppe.

Following Abulkhair’s oath in the 1730s, interludes of peace and trade were shattered by periods of internecine conflict and clashes between Russians and Kazakhs. The Russians attempted to reinforce the Irtish Line with the Cossacks and expand trade with the Turkestan khanates and China. In 1740 Ablai, of the Middle Horde, swore an oath of loyalty to Russia, but that did not give Russia dominance in the steppe, nor did it end the internecine conflict among the Kazakhs. Ablai became the dominant Kazakh political player in the mid- to late eighteenth century but was unable to assert his control over other Kazakh khans, hordes, or clans. By the 1750s, however, Russia and China eliminated the Dzungar-Kalmyk threat, reached a trade agreement, and temporarily reconciled their imperial differences.

The Russians pursued a different course with the Kazakhs in an effort to protect their settlements and secure trade routes with China and the Turkestan khanates. In 1757 the Russians imposed further restrictions on Kazakhs that
forbid any from migrating and camping within ten *versy* (versta, singular form, a unit of distance equal to 1.06 km) of any Russian fort. If any violated this territorial restriction, Russians required the aksakal to make an “oath of peacefulness” to the post commander. By this time, however, many Kazakhs openly resisted Russian control and Russian officials wearied of “coddling” the Kazakhs and detested addressing their demands with “pleasures and tenderness.” Russian historian M. A. Terent’ev understood the issue in a respectable imperial approach: the “submission of the Kirgiz [Kazakhs] was quite odd; they paid no taxes nor fulfilled any obligations, but our government courted them only for the honor of being considered the master of the Kirgiz.” In both the British and Russian case, the expanding empire asserted authority over territory claimed by the Sioux and the Kazakhs.

The Treaty of Paris (1763) forced the French to cede Canada and the territory east of the Mississippi River to the British and relinquish the Louisiana colony to Spain. No imperial power consulted the Indians affected, nor did the Sioux fully comprehend that the territory they defended against the Chippewa, Crow, Mandan, and Blackfeet was also claimed by Spain. The Sioux did understand, however, that the French lost the war and the British became the new dominant trading partner. The Spanish made little attempt to engage the Sioux through trade, but the Sioux eagerly hoped to acquire more guns and horses from the Europeans.

Following the Seven Years’ War, the British restricted all commercial land transactions between individuals and Indians. After 1763 only colonial governments, acting on behalf of the Crown, conducted and sanctioned land purchases between individuals and Indians. The Proclamation of 1763 transformed the colonial land market, but more importantly, transactions were agreements between sovereign nations rather than contracts agreed to between individuals. The British feared that unregulated land purchases unnecessarily increased tensions with the Indians, particularly in the Ohio Valley and trans-Alleghany west. It transformed a formerly private matter into one in which title to the land was conveyed only by treaty. This fact, according to historian Stuart Banner, made it easier to perceive of Indians’ claim to the land as less than title to it.

There was also a concern that the uncivilized environment might seduce European settlers into becoming something less civilized. The fear of the “menacing Asiatic character of the plains” in nineteenth-century American thought echoed British concerns about unregulated settlement in the Ohio Valley and trans-Alleghany west. One reason so many Indians fought alongside the French during the Seven Years’ War was the widespread fear that the war was only for the British desire to “plunder Indians.” The tribes did not want to surrender
their relationship or land rights from one European power to another that might dislocate them or, as the British did, claim the land for themselves. The British vowed to retreat from the Ohio Valley region after the war but changed their minds and occupied the various abandoned French forts.82

For this comparison, the concern expressed by British parliamentarian and philosopher Edmund Burke in 1775 is too irresistible to ignore. He explained to the House of Commons that it might isolate settlers cut off from all civilizing influences if the British government failed to occupy the newly acquired territory and tried to prevent settlement in the Ohio Valley and trans-Alleghany west. He reasoned, accordingly, and with utilitarian imagery, that eventually the infected and exposed settlers would “become hordes of English Tartars, and, pouring down upon your unfortified frontiers a fierce and irresistible cavalry” to plunder and pillage in characteristic Asiatic fashion.83 It was a fear often expressed by Russian officials as well—namely, that Cossacks or Russian peasants might become more native than the natives. In other words, the wilderness—the wild untamed land, a land without civilization—influenced the inhabitants’ character and behavior and caused them to regress from civilized to barbarian. Therefore, it was necessary to tame the land and bring the inhabitants under the sway of civilization through trade and sedentary agriculture.84

To settlers and peasants settling on either side of the frontier, there was a blurred line between civilization and native. In imperial capitals, there was a clear and absolute demarcation.

During the 1760s and 1770s, the Russians also debated the future of relations with the Kazakhs, particularly the continued internecine conflict in the steppe and the Kazakhs’ failure to protect caravans. In addition, the Russians were reacting to one of the most serious peasant rebellions in Russian history—the Pugachev Revolt (1773–1775)—in which many Kazakhs also participated. Emelian Pugachev was a Cossack from Siberia, a military deserter who objected to Cossacks’ increasing acceptance of Saint Petersburg’s authority over them. The revolt tapped into growing peasant discontent and attracted peasants, religious dissenters (“Old Believers”), and many non-Russians, including Kazakhs, Bashkirs, Tatars, and Kalmyks. Pugachev claimed to be Catherine the Great’s murdered husband—Peter III—and promised freedom from serfdom, taxes, and military service. Catherine dismissed these promises as “castles in the air,” but the revolt spread rapidly.85 One reason that many Kazakhs joined the revolt was because for several years, the Russians limited and then completely restricted access to various pastures near the Irtysh Line and the fertile fields between the Ural and Volga Rivers, commonly referred to as the Inner Side. Kazakhs continued—illegally, from the Russian perspective—to pasture
livestock there, crossing the Ural or, in the minds of many Russian officials, trespassing on regulated lands. These tensions between Kazakhs pasturing their livestock on traditional lands and Russian desires to restrict access heightened tensions between colonized and colonizer.

The revolt was violent, marked by looting and the destruction of large estates and factories. The revolt threatened every major town in western Siberia and the steppe. Well-trained government troops, fresh from Russia’s war with the Ottoman Empire, eventually defeated Pugachev’s rebel forces, and Pugachev’s own men turned him over to the government. He was caged, hauled to Moscow, tried, and decapitated, with his various body parts displayed throughout the city.

Kazakhs divided during the rebellion; some clans fought with Pugachev, some against him, and many remained neutral. Some, such as Nurali, khan of the Little Horde, switched sides during the rebellion, fighting first with Pugachev and then with the Russians. After the revolt, in 1801, the Russians rewarded Nurali for his support during the Pugachev Rebellion and allowed his Little Horde followers to cross the Ural River to pasture their herds on the Inner Side. This prompted his rivals in the Little Horde, and some Kazakhs in the Middle Horde, to accuse him of perfidy. These internal Kazakh political tensions exacerbated the internecine conflict in the steppe. As with American Indians, often forced to side with the French or the British during their imperial conflicts in North America, the Pugachev Rebellion forced many Kazakhs to choose. Many, such as Nurali, sided with the Russians in order to accrue greater benefits, whereas others seemingly believed that rejecting Russian expansion was more in their self-interest. Similar to the Kazakhs, the Sioux confronted difficult choices.

Following the British victory in the Seven Years’ War, some Santee Dakota attempted to establish diplomatic and trade relations with the British. In 1763 twelve Dakota leaders offered allegiance to Great Britain, but the motivation to do so was probably similar to Abulkhair’s oath to the Russians. Many Sioux bands sided with the colonizing power, and others did not. It appeared that some Santee Dakota wanted British trade goods and assistance against their enemies; siding with the British possibly offered the opportunity to reinforce the relationship. In 1774 Captain Arent DePeyster, commander of Mackinac, mediated a dispute between the Santee Dakota and the Ojibwa. Early in the American Revolution, Wabasha, a Santee chief, traveled to Quebec to pledge alliance to the British, thereby becoming “King George’s westernmost allies.” Some Sioux attempted to negotiate with the Spanish to increase trade. The Sioux did not play a noteworthy role during the American Revolution. Nonetheless, two significant events followed the war that consequently affected the Sioux as well as all Indians in the newly established United States.
Shortly after the war ended, the United States, following British practice, signed treaties with tribes in the Ohio Valley region that procured large territorial cessions. It was a tactic the United States pursued throughout the nineteenth century, including with various Sioux bands. In May 1783 the British evacuated their forts, and Congress directed the secretary of war to advise the various Indian nations that the conflict was over and that the United States wanted peace with the numerous tribes. In September of that year, Congress prohibited settlement on inhabited or claimed Indian lands outside state jurisdiction and banned the purchase or receipt of any Indian lands “without the express authority and direction of Congress.” All such acquisitions, either through purchase or cession, became invalid. These treaties, according to White, were “products of American illusions” that “launched the republic into a confrontation” with western Indians. The United States was unable to control immigration from the eastern states into the Ohio Valley, yet these settlers were “at once the strength of the new republic and the greatest threat to it.” More than two thousand families moved onto land in Ohio closed to settlement, a problem that also played out in the Kazakh Steppe throughout the nineteenth century. The Russians called illegal settlers *samovol’tsy* (unauthorized), peasants who defied Russian authorities and moved into the Kazakh Steppe to settle on land putatively set aside for the Kazakhs. As in the United States, these Russian settlers were the vanguard of expansion but were doing so illegally. The government decided to move the boundary rather than remove the settlers.

The expanding American republic did not initially confront the Sioux, as the American boundary remained east of the Mississippi River, but subsequent events brought significant changes. Many Sioux bands continued their own westward migration, but the British and Spanish still played a more important role in the Mississippi and Missouri River regions. The British, in particular, tried to block American fur traders from operating there, but the 1780s experienced a revival in the upper Missouri fur trade. In 1787 the United States passed the Northwest Ordinance to govern its newly acquired lands in Ohio. The essential feature of this act was that it outlined how to admit new states to the union, and, importantly for future expansion, it guaranteed equality between a newly created state with the original thirteen states.

In 1790 the “Act to Regulate Trade and Intercourse With the Indian Tribes” stipulated the right of the United States to invalidate any sale of lands by individual Indians. According to the act, “no sale of land made by any Indians, or any nation or tribe of Indians, within the United States, shall be valid to any person or persons, or to any State, whether having the right of pre-emption to such lands or not, unless the same shall be made and duly executed at some public treaty,
held under the authority of the United States.” The government designed the act to prevent land speculators from taking advantage of Indians, widely called the right of “pre-emption,” but, as Banner argued, it was misleading. It was not the right to preempt the purchase of land before someone else, but rather to deny or prevent anyone but the government to purchase land. Section 7 of the act mention that it “shall be in force for the term of two years,” but the act remained in effect throughout the nineteenth century and, in fact, is still US law.

In the 1790s, the trader Jean Baptiste Truteau noticed that many Sioux were engaged in hunting beaver and other peltries that they “exchange for merchandise with the other Sioux.” Jay’s Treaty in 1794 established reciprocal trade privileges for Americans and British Canadians, easing tensions that trade with the Sioux—in particular, among the Yankton and Teton—improved substantially. The close of the eighteenth century witnessed further expansion of the Sioux into the western plains but also set the United States on its own course of westward expansion. Thus, whereas the United States was only establishing the mechanisms to incorporate and colonize new territories that brought American traders and pioneers closer to the Sioux, the Russians encountered stiff Kazakh resistance to their further colonization in the steppe.

In conclusion, Euro-American and Russian expansion into the lands claimed by the Sioux and the Kazakhs, respectively, followed different paths. Russian expansion started roughly two hundred years before an American presence in the northern plains. Before the nineteenth century, the northern plains and the Kazakh Steppe were in constant flux and constant struggle, and neither the Sioux nor the Kazakhs controlled the lands they claimed except through the
exercise of their own military power. Powerful external forces pushed and pulled the Sioux and the Kazakhs to defend the land against various rivals, of which the Russians, Europeans, and, later, Americans, were only one part.

Europeans barely penetrated the eastern shores of North America when the Russians conquered Kazan in 1552. The waves of the Euro-American trajectory into the northern plains is decidedly different than Russia’s route to Siberia and the Kazakh Steppe, but it eventually shared a similar pattern of contiguous territorial advances and stages. Russians had already started building a line of forts bordering the Kazakh Steppe, manned by Cossacks, by the time of the first known tentative meeting between a French Jesuit trader and a Sioux in 1659–1660.

From Euro-American and Russian perspectives, it was necessary to support imperial expansion in order to secure economic profit, which required further access and expanded networks. Moreover, the expansion required security and, ultimately, peace and stability in the frontier regions, but when the Euro-Americans and Russians moved closer to the regions inhabited by the Sioux and the Kazakhs, what they encountered was sporadic warfare that was an obstacle to economic and settler expansion. Euro-Americans and Russians sought to end conflict on the northern plains and in the Kazakh Steppe in order to facilitate trade. The Sioux and the Kazakhs engaged in the fur trade sporadically and in some capacity, but neither were principal participants.

By the nineteenth century, Americans and Russians eventually used the conflicts in the northern plains and the Kazakh Steppe to justify their own military presence and territorial expansion, claiming that violations and depredations committed by the Sioux or the Kazakhs demanded a martial response. In the eighteenth century, as Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron observed in the North American context, the Sioux and the Kazakhs lived astride frontier regions that became the sites of “intense imperial rivalry and of particularly fluid relations between indigenous peoples and European interlopers.”

Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the French and British sought to increase trade with the Sioux, not expand their territory to force the Sioux to surrender their political or territorial sovereignty. In the seventeenth century, Russia played a minor role in the Kazakh Steppe, but following Abulkhair’s oath, the threat to Kazakh sovereignty became tangible. In North America, the Sioux control over their territory was threatened, which lessened as the Sioux migrated west, but the French and British threat was not, as it was with Abulkhair’s pledge, an attempt to incorporate the Sioux into the French or British Empires in North America. The French and British wanted trading partners; there was not the comparable territorial extension, which was evident in
Russia’s territorial expansion, by the French and the British that posed a threat to Sioux sovereignty. The more strident threat, however, as it was in the steppe, to Sioux sovereignty came from the Chippewa or other tribes and not from European imperialism. Russia’s expansion was both a commercial and territorial expansion, whereas in the centuries before American independence the French and British expansion was chiefly economic. In both cases, however, commercial expansion instigated intertribal or internecine conflict.  

The Sioux and the Kazakhs defended their territory against powerful, non-European rivals, but Euro-Americans and Russians used their economic relations to foster relations with the Sioux and Kazakhs that slowly evolved to serve as levers for territorial expansion throughout the nineteenth century. In a sense, land was central to these agreements and central to the disputes. The Russians apparently never hesitated to annex the land, whereas Europeans in North American pursued two different paths. Generally, they tried to purchase the land from Native Americans, but on some occasions, they too simply annexed it by right of discovery and conquest. What emerged in American and Russian expansionist thinking in the nineteenth century was a moral argument, or civilization versus savagery, that was largely absent in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when trade and security were the principal incentives for expansion that was more indirect than the direct settler internal colonization of the nineteenth century.

NOTES

1. I decided to use the term Euro-American merely to represent, in a generic sense, the French, British, and Spanish expansion into North America for the period before American independence. A comparable generic label describes “Russian” imperialism for this period because more often than not. Russian expansion was the result of Cossack colonization and settlement securing for the Russian regime a region rather than the Russian army or Russian peasants. When appropriate, I will identify French, British, Spanish, or Cossacks specifically.

2. Richard White, The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650–1815 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 2. As with so many others, I owe a debt of gratitude to White for piecing together this “fragmented” history into an excellent, coherent whole. The Russian expansion into Siberia and the Kazakh Steppe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was a complex process, and historians are fortunate to have a deep historical record to draw upon to examine the process of trade and expansion in the Kazakh Steppe. Historians, however, lack the same dense historical record to examine the world of the northern plains in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, although a rough sketch emerges based on the periodic travelers’ and traders’ reports that survive. By the second half of the eighteenth century, the historical record of events in the northern plains, while still sparse, is much broader. Given the paucity of information about the Sioux when compared to the Kazakhs in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, scholars are required to
piece together the history by gleaning bits and pieces of evidence almost exclusively from a handful of French materials, usually by Jesuits or traders who learned about them from other tribes or had brief contact with some bands. Piecing together the histories of Euro-American expansion into the northern plains and Russian expansion into the Kazakh Steppe requires a heavy reliance on Euro-American and Russian sources, but that is unavoidable.

Some of the earliest French visitors wrote about their times with the Lakota and Dakota, who they usually referred to in these written records by the name “Scouix” (or some variant of “Nadoustious,” “Nadousse,” “Natoressiwak,” or “Nadouessioux”) and other phonetic renderings. By the late eighteenth century, however, sources start to use terms such as Teton or Lakota, or Teton Lakota or Teton Sioux. In other words, references started to be more consistent and reflected what the Teton or Santee, for example, called themselves. There is similar confusion about the Kazakhs in Russian sources. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Russians referred to the Kazakhs as “Kirghiz” or “Kirghiz-Kazakhs,” sometimes “Kirghiz-Kaisaks,” terms used until the 1920s. The people we know today as Kirgiz the Russians called “Kara-Kirgiz” (Black Kirgiz) or “Dikii-Kirgiz” (Wild Kirgiz).


5. By the nineteenth century, Russian expansion remained this organic process—a natural gathering of lands—but American expansion presumed a divine mission: Manifest Destiny.


8. In the mid-seventeenth century, however, the Russian expansion in Siberia was more comparable to a network and, as James Belich noted, was a “system of interaction similar to that of the French fur trade in North America at the same time.” *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Anglo-World, 1783–1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 38.


10. Bulakhair was khan of the Little Horde.

11. According to Janet Martin, Russian traders long participated in the fur trade, noting, “In the 11–12th centuries sable, ermine and other northern luxury fur had been exported to the oriental world from Bulgar and to the Byzantine Empire from Kiev.” Moreover, “The


13. Tarar R. Ryskulov, Kazakhstan (Moscow, 1927), 22.


20. Bruce White, "Encounters with Spirits: Ojibwa and Dakota Theories about the French and Their Merchandise," Ethnohistory 41, no. 3 (Summer 1994): 381.


23. One later scholar writes that Radisson “made a treaty” with the Sioux, although he also writes that little was known of his travels among the Sioux, which suggests he did not consult any number of works that reprint "Radisson’s travels." See Clarence A. Vandiveer, The Fur Trade and Early Western Exploration (Cleveland, OH: Arthur H. Clark, 1929), 89.


25. Gilman, "Fur Trade in the Upper Mississippi Valley," 6; White, Middle Ground, 58.


30. White, *Middle Ground*, x.


38. Gavin Hamblin, *Central Asia* (New York: Delacorte, 1969), 140–49. Oirat is the name given to several groups of Western Mongols inhabiting the Lake Baikal region. By the fifteenth century, an Oirat confederation expanded westward to establish a region called Dzungaria, situated on the border between modern-day Kazakhstan and China. Kalmyks are an Oirat tribe that resettled in the Kazakh Steppe region. The Kalmyks eventually submitted to Russian suzerainty in the early eighteenth century.


41. Frank E. Ross, “The Fur Trade of the Western Great Lakes Region,” *Minnesota History* 19, no. 3 (September 1938): 275. It is unlikely that any Sioux were included in this ceremony, but it reflects French aspirations to control the fur trade. Moreover, according to Gary Clayton Anderson, early sources seem to confirm the fact that, by the late seventeenth century, the majority of Dakota already migrated west of the Mississippi, so the Sioux that the French dealt with in the 1750s and subsequently were Lakota. See Anderson, “Early Dakota Migration,” 22.

42. Ross, “Fur Trade of the Western Great Lakes,” 277–84; White, *Middle Ground*, 31–33.

45. White, "Encounters with Spirits, 389.
46. I. I. Kraft, Shornik uzakonennii o kirgizakh stepebkh oblastei (Orenburg: Zharinov, 1898), 20, 25.
47. Gilman, "Fur Trade in the Upper Mississippi Valley," 6. King William's War, between France and Britain, however, spilled over into North America and renewed hostilities between the French and the British-backed Iroquois. Less than a year after Teesakatay's visit to Montreal, the French closed the western trading posts, resulting in a two-decade disruption to the French fur trade.
48. White, Middle Ground, 107.
55. Istoriia Kazakhskoi SSR s drevneslakh vremen do nachakh dnei v piati tomanakh (Alma-Ata: Nauka, 1979), 3:27. According to W. Bruce Lincoln, Gagarin will later be executed by Peter the Great "for all he had stolen during his term." Conquest of a Continent, 151.
60. G. F. Dakhshileiger, "Iz opyta istorii osedania Kazakhskikh kochromeykh i polukochevkh khoziaystv (do massovoi kollektivizatsii sel'skogo khoziaistva)," Sovetskaja etnografiia, no. 4 (July/August 1966): 4.
61. Krasnyi arkiv 5 (78) (Moscow: Tsentral'noe arkivnoe upravlenie, 1936), 188.


69. Omskogo oblgosarkiva, f. 366, o. 1, d. 24, l. 2–3; d. 25, l. 6–7. A copy of the documents is in the Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnography, Academy of Sciences, Republic of Kazakhstan.

70. Censuses of Canada, 1608 to 1876 (Ottawa: Maclean, Roger, 1878), 5:166–68.


73. White, Middle Ground, 256.


80. Stuart Banner, How the Indians Lost Their Land: Law and Power on the Frontier (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 85–108. Banner notes that the proclamation was an “abyssal failure” that created a black market in land sales from Indians. He quotes Lord Hillsborough, secretary of state for the colonies, who claimed that the proclamation had “so entirely failed in its Object, as to have produced the very Evils to which it was proposed as a Remedy” (104).


82. White, Middle Ground, 248–52.

83. Burke quoted in Smith, Virgin Land, 177.

84. According to Yuri Slezkine, a typical Cossack did not divide the world “into the Christian and non-Christian spheres” and did not regard Kazakh ways as inferior to their own. Arctic Mirrors: Russia and the Small Peoples of the North (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press), 40.

85. In the 1762 palace coup that brought Catherine to power, her husband, Peter III, who was more Prussian than Russian and quickly made enemies at court, was killed several months later, possibly during a drunken argument with one of Catherine’s favorites. Many peasants believed he was deposed and killed because he planned to emancipate the serfs, a sentiment that Pugachev exploited by calling himself Peter III. See Nicholas V. Riasanovsky and Mark D. Steinberg, A History of Russia, 8th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 257–59.
86. Istoriia Kazakhskoi SSR s drevneishikh vremen do nasikh dnei v piati tomakh (Alma-
Ata: Nauka, 1979), 394–97; For more about Pugachev and the revolt, see Paul Avrich, Russian
87. See Alan Bodger, The Kazakhs and the Pugachev Uprising in Russia, 1773–1775
(Bloomington: Research Institute for Inner Asian Studies, Indiana University, 1988).
88. For a brief analysis of Wabasha and Santee Dakota diplomacy during the American
Revolution, see Paul L. Stevens, "Wabasha Visits Governor Carleton, 1776: New Light on a
Legendary Episode of Dakota-British Diplomacy on the Great Lakes Frontier," Michigan Hist-
89. See US Department of War, Indian Treaties, and Laws and Regulations Relating to
Indian Affairs: To which is Added an Appendix, Containing the Proceedings of the Old Con-
gress, and Other Important State Papers, in Relation to Indian Affairs (Washington City: Way
& Gideon, 1826), 8–10.
90. Francis Paul Prucha, American Indian Treaties: The History of a Political Anomaly
91. White, Middle Ground, 417.
92. Ibid., 418.
93. See Abraham P. Nasatir, "Anglo-Spanish Rivalry on the Upper Missouri," Mississippi
Valley Historical Review 16, no. 3 (December 1929): 359–82.
95. See Laws of the Territory of the United States North-West of the Ohio (Cincinnati: W.
Maxwell, 1796), iii–xiii.
96. US Congress, “An Act to Regulate Trade and Intercourse with the Indian Tribes,” in The
Debates and Proceedings in the Congress of the United States; with an Appendix Containing
Important State Papers and Public Documents and All the Laws of a Public Nature, With a
Copious Index (Washington, DC: Gales & Seaton, 1834), 1:2242–43.
97. Truteau quoted in Abraham P. Nasatir, ed., Before Lewis and Clark: Documents Illus-
99. Materialy po istorii Kazakhskoi SSR (1785–1828) (Moscow: Akademiia nauk SSSR
1949), 4:137.
100. It is important to note that describing Sioux or Kazakh conflicts does not mean that
the entire Sioux or Kazakh nation went to war or that the conflict engulfed the entire Sioux or
Kazakh peoples in some life or death struggle. Sources from the seventeenth and eighteenth
centuries describe a conflict—for example, between the Sioux and Chipewa or the Kazakhs
and the Kalmyks—but they do not distinguish between the Lakota and Dakota or the Great
and Middle Horde. It is more important to recognize that Euro-Americans and Russians viewed
the conflicts as serious obstacles to trade, and their efforts to mediate to end the conflicts were
simply to increase commerce and protect their traders and merchants. The sources very rarely
reveal which division or band or which clan or horde was involved. Thus, using the more generic
reference to the “Sioux” or the “Kazakhs” is necessary to illustrate Euro-American and Russian
perceptions and concerns about the seemingly perpetual conflicts in the plains and steppe.
States, and the Peoples in Between in North American History,” American Historical Review
104, no. 3 (June 1999): 817.
102. The intertribal warfare in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was the conse-
quence of the “commercialism” introduced by the European fur trade, which, according to
Gary Clayton Anderson, became more frequent as “nations on the upper Mississippi fought
over resources.” “Early Dakota Migration,” 19. The Russians, on the other hand, established a military administration and offered titles and gifts to leaders they believed facilitated Russian commercial expansion in order to “guarantee . . . security and regular delivery of the fur tribute.” The result was internecine conflict among the Kazakhs and external pressure by Kalmyks and others. Lantzef, “Siberian Colonial Administration,” 52.