

## BOOK REVIEWS

**Michael A. McDonnell.** *Masters of the Empire: Great Lakes Indians and the Making of America.* New York: Hill & Wang, 2015. Pp. 402. Cloth, \$35.

In the quarter century since the publication of Richard White's seminal *The Middle Ground* (1991), historians studying colonial North American history have been rewriting the story of Indian-European relationships, largely liberated from the idea of imperial Europeans dominating over-matched Indians reeling from infectious diseases and reduced to dependency by white traders peddling guns and alcohol. While Michael McDonnell's *Masters of the Empire* joins this historiographical tradition, like all effective monographs, it pushes the field in new directions, arguing for the centrality of a group of Algonquian-speaking Indian groups he refers to collectively as the Anishinaabeg, to the "making of America."

McDonnell draws on an impressive array of French and English primary sources, as well as on much of the outstanding recent work in this field to present a persuasive story of Indian peoples in the northern and western Great Lakes driving imperial events and conflicts far more than the French and English traders, missionaries, and settlers we have until recently been used to. For McDonnell, the arrival of Europeans, while certainly significant, did not fundamentally reorder Indian life in the Great Lakes but instead complicated existing trade networks and rivalries by creating a demand for furs—and by the introduction of guns and of the various Europeans who brought the guns—to trade.

The focus of this study is the Straits of Michilimackinac, the area where lakes Huron and Michigan meet, just miles from the eastern end of Lake Superior. In this region, the Anishinaabeg, comprised of the Ottawa, Potawatomi, Chippewa, Algonquin, Nippising, and Mississauga Indians, in the seventeenth century drew the newly arrived French into the region's rivalries that had been exacerbated by the introduction of firearms by Samuel de Champlain in 1608. The gun trade, along with infectious diseases, pushed Indians from the eastern seaboard to the Mississippi River (and beyond) into a cycle of warfare and power politics that, in turn, compelled Europeans to ally with one group or another in an ever-shifting diplomatic landscape that mirrored the balance of power politics Europeans were used to at home.

Except that Europeans at the time, and most historians, until recently, did not see it that way. They instead saw a somewhat homogeneous race of Indian people caught up in the imperial conflicts of Europeans, forced to choose sides or more often to be manipulated by one side or the other on their way to their inevitable marginalization, if not destruction. McDonnell brushes past this standard narrative to portray the Anishinaabeg as central to this story, principally due to their location in the crucial Michilimackinac crossroads area. He argues that this location brought prosperity, influence, and protection to the Anishinaabeg because the French found it difficult logistically to protect power farther west than the Straits while western Indians such as

the Sioux found it equally difficult to travel farther east than the Straits to trade for European goods.

We are thus presented with a reading of historical events that foregrounds Indian agendas, casting the Seven Years War, in North America, at least, as the First Anglo-Indian War and Pontiac's Rebellion as the Second Anglo-Indian War. From this perspective the American Revolution was not a catastrophe for the Anishinaabeg, but merely another diplomatic challenge to be dealt with. Moving into the nineteenth century, McDonnell argues for an Anishinaabeg who were able to avoid formal Indian removal even as they are forced to give up much of their land and then later repurchase parts of it in order to continue living near the Straits.

Instructors seeking monographs that reflect current historiography in this field will find *Masters of Empire* a useful book for students who already have an understanding of the basic chronology of colonial events. The introduction and/or conclusion to the book might also be used as excerpts for classes where a three hundred plus page monograph would not work. By shifting his primary perspective from Europeans to Indians, McDonnell not only engages with contemporary historiographical issues but also helps point the way to a new standard colonial narrative that hopefully avoids both European triumphalism and Indian declension while helping bring into view the far more complicated and compelling histories of the many varied regions that comprise North America.

Illinois State University

John Reda

**Daniel Geary.** *Beyond Civil Rights: The Moynihan Report and Its Legacy.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015. Pp. 265. Cloth, \$45.00.

In *Beyond Civil Rights: The Moynihan Report and Its Legacy*, Daniel Geary, assistant professor of history at Trinity College in Dublin, draws on prodigious research, including numerous archival sources, to investigate the longstanding controversy surrounding Daniel Moynihan's 1965 position paper, *The Negro Family: A Case for National Action*, popularly known as the Moynihan Report. Assistant Secretary of Labor in the Johnson Administration at the time, Moynihan urged government action to stimulate black employment. But the report's correlation between the breakdown of the patriarchal family and what Moynihan identified as the pathology of black poverty proved contentious from the start. Johnson backed away and ignored Moynihan's policy proposals. Regardless, Geary contends *The Negro Family* was significant for the fierce debate it generated. Moynihan asserted critics misunderstood his report. Geary instead argues that the "multiple and conflicting meanings" within *The Negro Family* allowed for varying interpretations among liberals, conservatives, civil rights leaders, Black Power advocates, feminists, and academics who came to view