

Masters of Empire: Great Lakes Indians and the Making of America

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Book Reviews and Notices

Masters of Empire: Great Lakes Indians and the Making of America, by Michael A. McDonnell. New York: Hill and Wang, 2015. 402 pp. Maps, illustrations, notes, index. \$35.00 hardcover.

Reviewer John P. Bowes is professor of history at Eastern Kentucky University. He is the author of *Land Too Good for Indians: Northern Indian Removal* (2016) and *Exiles and Pioneers: Eastern Indians in the Trans-Mississippi West* (2007).

It is a wonderful time to be involved in studying the history of the Great Lakes region. Twenty-five years ago the publication of Richard White's award-winning *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650–1815* (1991) altered our perspective on the events and peoples that shaped the history of the *pays d'en haut*. White's exploration and explanation of Native American agency and of a mutually created world instead of one shaped by European desires and demands reconfigured scholars' narratives of the Great Lakes specifically and North America in general. Michael Witgen, one of Richard White's former students, published *An Infinity of Nations: How the Native New World Shaped Early North America* in 2011, and his study has advanced our understanding of Native agency even further. Witgen's analysis of Anishinaabewaki, the land of the Anishinaabeg in the western Great Lakes, demonstrates the autonomy the Anishinaabe people maintained well into what most historians would call the American era.

Michael A. McDonnell's *Masters of Empire* stands on its own as insightful scholarship even as it can be seen as a partner of those two prominent works. Perhaps most importantly, McDonnell takes the notion of Native autonomy that is so crucial to Witgen's analysis and shifts the geography eastward, locating the axis of influence at Michilimackinac. More specifically, McDonnell argues that "the history of the Odawas at Michilimackinac revealed just how much the Anishinaabeg of the Great Lakes had shaped early America" (7). Over the course of more than 300 pages he takes what appears familiar and forces readers to reconsider the historical actors and processes that shaped those events. That characteristic alone makes *Masters of Empire* a worthwhile read.

This book has its origins in McDonnell's intention to write a biography of Charles Langlade, an eighteenth-century Michilimackinac fur

trader of mixed descent. What began as a twist on the founding father genre soon became a story about the larger influence of the Odawa community within which Langlade was enmeshed, for the man who became known as one of the "Fathers of Wisconsin" did not function outside of that larger kinship network. In short, Langlade's well-known actions, including his leadership of the infamous raid on Pickawillany in June 1752, reflected the numerous ways the Odawas at the straits "profoundly shaped European imperialism in North America" (17). From the seventeenth century to the nineteenth century, the Odawas consistently required French, British, and American outsiders to reckon with the framework they had built to structure trade and diplomacy in the Great Lakes region.

In ten chapters, including the introduction and conclusion, McDonnell's narrative examines the events and peoples most commonly associated with the dynamic colonial era in the region. Readers already knowledgeable about this time and place might be tempted to move quickly through discussions of French diplomatic relations with the Huron and Iroquois, comfortable with the notion that the Odawas were simply middle men in the early fur trade. Yet the opening chapter, titled "Recentring Michilimackinac," makes clear that *Masters of Empire* alters the foundation of those common interpretations. Indeed, while crafting a relationship along the St. Lawrence River, both the French and the Iroquois had to take into account the actions and desires of the Odawas and their Anishinaabeg relatives farther west. From that point forward, French influence in particular rose and fell based on their relationship with the Odawas at the straits.

In positioning Michilimackinac at the center of events in this historical period, McDonnell not only displaces the European narrative but also frames the discussion within the Odawa cultural perspective. Kinship networks, instead of French or British desires, take on heightened importance, and paying attention to the different doodemags, or powerful family lines, forces readers to see the Odawa as more than a generalized tribal entity with a single perspective on events. And the kinship ties, fictive and otherwise, that the Odawas made with the French made the latter's position stronger than it would have been otherwise.

There are moments while McDonnell is examining the warfare of the mid- to late 1700s that the writing gets slightly bogged down in the play-by-play of events and the actors shaping those events. Nevertheless, that writing explains why, from the perspective of the Odawas at Michilimackinac, the Seven Years' War and Pontiac's War are better described as the First and Second Anglo-Indian Wars, respectively. And McDonnell deftly demonstrates how the Odawas managed to

influence British imperial policy in the aftermath of the French defeat in the 1760s. Although the book's final chapter carries the story forward into the nineteenth century and Odawa persistence in Michigan, the strength of the book rests in the earlier chapters. *Masters of Empire* is a strong contribution to an already rich field of study.

Empire by Collaboration: Indians, Colonists, and Governments in Colonial Illinois Country, by Robert Michael Morrissey. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015. x, 326 pp. Illustrations, maps, tables, notes, index. \$45.00 hardcover.

Reviewer Stephen Warren is associate professor of history at the University of Iowa. He is the author of *The Worlds the Shawnees Made: Migrations and Violence in Early America* (2014).

Collaboration, continuity, entrepreneurialism, and partnership: these are the watchwords that guide Robert Morrissey's important new book, *Empire by Collaboration*. The Illinois country has been studied by some of the most important historians of early America working today, including Richard White, Susan Sleeper-Smith, Tracy Leavelle, Brett Rushforth, and Kathleen DuVal. Morrissey showcases his command of this abundant historiography while, at the same time, offering the most comprehensive analysis of the Illinois country in the eighteenth century to date.

At least initially, Morrissey understands the Illinois country through the lens of the *longue durée*. That perspective on the past enables Morrissey to describe the Illinois Confederacy as continuously adaptive. Previous histories ascribe declension and decline to the indigenous peoples of the Illinois River valley. On the eve of contact, the Illinois moved westward onto the Prairie Peninsula, where they became full participants in a new bison economy. The protein-rich bounty enabled them to concentrate their settlements into the thousands. In the last decades of the seventeenth century, Grand Village of the Kaskaskia became a large multiethnic village, and the Illinois became a formidable military power.

Illinois women lost power as their people's economy shifted to long-distance expeditions for bison and slaves. The shift from seasonal migrations and intensive agriculture to slaving and hunting concentrated power in the hands of Illinois men, who began to see polygamy and slavery as the means to process the vast amounts of bison they killed throughout the year. The Illinois soon became merchants and middle men in a vast trading system based on collaborative partnerships rather than imperial directives.