The Annals of Iowa

Volume 53 | Number 3 (Summer 1994) pps. 273-275

The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815

Raymond E. Hauser

ISSN 0003-4827
Copyright © 1994 State Historical Society of Iowa. This article is posted here for personal use, not for redistribution.

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.9820

Hosted by Iowa Research Online
Smith develops his arguments based on more than strictly archaeological data. His use of electron microscopy and molecular biology provides additional support for his conclusions. Data presented on ecological studies, nutritional values, and cultural perspectives through paleoethnobotanical research about the nature of prehistoric farming adds credibility to the conclusions drawn. The use of radiocarbon dating provides strong evidence for the pre-maize development of domesticates, and osteological analysis shows the contribution of domesticates to ancient diets.

This collection of essays in one volume provides a valuable reference for anyone interested in agricultural origins and the role that this subsistence change played in human culture. As the product of a single author, there is continuity but also some redundancy. A combined bibliography would have made the volume more valuable as a reference book. Smith's work is impressive in dispelling the myth of the existence of agriculture based only on the traditional imported triad of "corn, beans, and squash." His presentation of detailed evidence, carefully braided together, is symbolic of the rivers forming the floodplain environments in which this early domestication took place. Similarly, the volume documents the currents of change that brought about a reliance on cultivated plants. Smith's discussion of the transition from hunting and gathering food production sheds valuable light on one of the most important ecological and cultural changes in the history of humankind.


REVIEWED BY RAYMOND E. HAUSER, WAUBONSEE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

This remarkable publication focuses on Indian-white relations in the Great Lakes area, including the upper Mississippi and Ohio valleys, from the Iroquois incursions of the mid-seventeenth century through the death of Tecumseh during the War of 1812. Richard White examines cultural change on "the middle ground" between Indian and white "cultures [and] peoples, and in between empires and the non-state world of villages" (x). This middle ground accommodation, this blend of Indian and white practices, was not unique to the pays d'en haut (upper country), but White argues persuasively that it certainly
did exist for the populations he loosely identifies as Algonquian and for those who invaded their lands.

White uses ethnohistorical methods to explore the now mature "new Indian history." This approach allows the scholar to place the emphasis on Indian peoples. Unlike many other ethnohistorians, however, White does not approve of "upstreaming," a technique that uses information available for a given period to illuminate an earlier era for which it is unavailable. Had he subscribed to upstreaming he might have examined more of Algonquian society during the late prehistoric (or protohistoric) period and thus developed his thesis even more effectively.

Iowa historians will appreciate this book because of its focus on midwestern history, and especially because of the roles played in it by the Illinois and Fox Indians. For example, White suggests that the Illinois were living in Iowa in 1673, when they first encountered the French, because they were part of the earlier Algonquian dispersal forced by the Iroquois. And the concentration on the Fox experience in the first several chapters should prove most interesting to Iowans even though this history predates the arrival of the Fox in Iowa.

White begins his analysis with an examination of the Iroquois invasions of the Midwest between the late 1640s and the mid-1680s. Initially, Indians and whites considered each other as barbarians ("as alien, as other, as virtually nonhuman" [ix]). White is especially convincing when he explores those circumstances that allowed the Indians to push the Europeans onto the middle ground, a common cultural arena that was neither Indian nor white. Here White attributes more power to the Algonquians and less to the whites than other scholars usually do. The fortunes of this accommodation fluctuated with the willingness of the participants to compromise. France, especially, and Britain joined the Algonquians on the common ground; however, the United States enjoyed power advantages that permitted it to force relationships into a new arena. With the death of Tecumseh, the deterioration of the Algonquian position once again permitted whites to identify Indians as barbarians; without the middle ground, the Algonquian position became untenable.

White employs the leadership position of "chief" as a theme to illustrate how Algonquians and whites moved toward accommodation. His analysis could have benefited from employing anthropologist Walter B. Miller's analysis of the Algonquian horizontal authority system ("Two Concepts of Authority," *American Anthropologist* 57 [1955], 271–89). The French saw "Algonquian society as a place of license without order" (58), but Miller explains that what the French saw was actually a different kind of order, order in a horizontal sys-
tem where every man who had survived the rigors of the hunt and
war considered himself the equal of other men, including any chief.
The Algonquians disappointed the French, who "envisioned chiefs
who would command and thus reject consensual politics and non-
coercive power" (145). This problem required a middle ground solu-
tion: the Indians moved toward the coercive leadership system of the
Europeans (symbolized by medals and cemented by gifts), and whites
adjusted when they "lost their . . . attributes of power: the ability to
command" (39). Even though they may not have realized it at the
time, this adjustment explains how the Europeans could be most
successful when they thought they were weakest: compromise instead
of force could achieve results.

Brilliant insights developed through exhaustive research in French
and English sources make The Middle Ground superb ethnohistory.
White offers so many stimulating conclusions that other scholars will,
of course, challenge him. When he denies that the Algonquians became
dependent on whites, for example, he emphasizes material (especially
economic) factors, as well as political, social, and environmental de-
pendency. Even those dependency theorists who accept his analysis,
however, may continue to make their point by emphasizing other
kinds of dependency, such as military, religious, and psychological
dependence. The Middle Ground presents a refreshingly original inter-
pretive framework for analyzing Indian-white relations in the Great
Lakes area. Although readers will be more than satisfied with White's
exceptionally thorough footnotes, they would also have appreciated
a brief bibliographical essay. This excellent publication will prove
rewarding for the general reading public and indispensable for special-
ists. It should be acquired by public, college, and university libraries.

Visions of the People: A Pictorial History of Plains Indian Life, edited by
Evan M. Maurer. Minneapolis: Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 1992;
distributed by the University of Washington Press. 298 pp. Illustra-
tions, maps, notes, bibliography. $35.00 paper.

REVIEWED BY JANET C. BERLO, UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI–ST. LOUIS

Throughout 1992 and 1993 the fine exhibit, "Visions of the People,"
toured the Midwest. It featured a wide range of objects, all concerned
with biographical and spiritual representations in art. This catalog of
that exhibit draws together many significant works of Plains Indian
art (both the northern and southern Plains) from more than seventy