

REVIEWS

Peoples of the Inland Sea: Native Americans and Newcomers in the Great Lakes Region, 1600–1870

By David Andrew Nichols

(Athens: Ohio University Press, 2018. Pp. xiii, 271. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. Cloth, \$45.00; paper, \$29.95.)

In *Peoples of the Inland Sea*, David Andrew Nichols surveys the histories of Indigenous groups whose homelands beside the Great Lakes encompass the modern states of Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, Wisconsin, Illinois, and—most relevant for this publication’s readers—Indiana. The book focuses predominantly on encounters between Native Americans and Euro-Americans from the seventeenth through the mid-nineteenth century. Nichols argues that “in their dealings with Euro-American empires, the Lakes Indians often had the upper hand” (p. 3). Moreover, his accessible and engaging text convincingly asserts that continuity existed between the survival strategies American Indians employed over several centuries in their struggles against newcomers to what would become the American Midwest.

The book follows a chronological trajectory. Its first chapter uses archaeological sources to describe the Great Lakes region before 1600, and from there Nichols delves into how multifarious aboriginal nations responded to the Euro-American “invasion of the Midwest” (p. 23). Some newcomers met with violent resistance while others were integrated into Indigenous kinship and trade networks. Since Nichols synthesizes ample existing scholarship, many of his points will surely sound familiar to those who have studied the region. He notes, for instance, that French claims to the Great Lakes were dubious, because the French “needed their Native American allies more than the Indians needed them” (p. 62). Indigenous peoples could claim similarly strong positions over British interlopers, while American incursions required

Indigenous peoples to adopt innovative survival strategies.

The book makes its most striking contribution in its final chapter analyzing how Indian removal policies in the 1830s and 40s affected Lakes Indians. Far too many works on the Great Lakes region terminate in 1815, perpetuating the myth that American Indians simply “vanished” following the War of 1812. Building upon works of Indigenous Studies scholars shattering that myth, Nichols shows how Native Americans continually fought for their homelands. Of Americans’ expulsion efforts, he observes that “The US government’s resort to irregular treaty negotiations and outright fraud demonstrated not its strength but the ongoing limits on its financial and military resources” (p. 190). Many groups like the Miami and Potawatomi in Indiana faced violent removal, but some exploited American weaknesses, selectively adopting Euro-American practices and leveraging support from kin across the Canadian border. In 1855, Odawa in Michigan combined such strategies with long-standing negotiation tactics to fight for more beneficial treaty rights.

There is much more about Nichols’s work to commend. He weaves several engrossing subthemes throughout his narrative, including one of Euro-American fear that germinated from

the seeds of anti-Indian literature during the French and Indian War and grew as the British used threats of aboriginal violence against their opponents. A minor error is present in one chapter, though, where the author attributes the success of Ojibwe warriors’ attack on Fort Michilimackinac during Pontiac’s War to “the guns that their female relatives had cached there” (p. 76). Every account of that attack that this reader has encountered has only mentioned the presence of bladed weapons. Additionally, Nichols could have enhanced the complexity of his narrative further using a more transnational approach, simultaneously analyzing Indigenous struggles against Americans and Canadians during the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, this succinct work already covers a considerable geographic scope, and Nichols demonstrates deftness in balancing the stories of so many aboriginal nations and historical agents. *Peoples of the Inland Sea* is a worthwhile contribution to the growing field of studies on the American Midwest and stands out as a valuable primer on the Great Lakes region that could serve as an effective teaching tool.

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doi: 10.2979/indimagahist.115.2.04

