

Masters of Empire: Great Lakes Indians and the Making of America. By Michael A. McDonnell. (New York: Hill and Wang, 2015. 402 pp., maps, notes, acknowledgments, index. \$35.00 cloth, \$7.99 e-book.)

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Toward the beginning of *Masters of Empire*, Michael A. McDonnell states, “We cannot understand the history of early America without comprehending Indian country on its own terms” (19). In the pages that follow, McDonnell untangles the threads of the intersecting and overlapping social and political worlds of the Great Lakes from before the colonial era through the early 1800s, and with that knowledge, he offers new insights into familiar events. McDonnell reorients early American history by centering the story on the Odawas of Michilimackinac and demonstrating their role in shaping colonial America. At their village at the straits between Lakes Huron and Michigan, Odawas controlled “one of the few strategic entry points into and out of continental North America” (12). From this position of power, Odawas extended kinship networks throughout the Great Lakes, building webs of political, economic, and military allies and exploiting those relations to accumulate influence over Europeans and Indians alike.

Well before the arrival of French colonists in the 1600s, Odawas used their skills as open-water canoeists to travel throughout the region, and they built far-flung alliances and trade networks. Odawas capitalized on the arrival of Europeans and absorbed them into well-established patterns of exchange and interaction. *Masters of Empire* makes a strong case for French—and, later, British—dependence on the Michilimackinac Odawas. On a local level, Europeans relied on Odawas for food, beaver pelts, and military support. Even their continued presence at the straits depended on Odawa permission and desires. More broadly, as McDonnell states, Native peoples “helped trigger and profoundly shape the contests that would define the geopolitical landscape of North America” (273). In noting Indian dominance in the Great Lakes, McDonnell builds—as his footnotes attest—on a growing literature that highlights Native power throughout early America.

However, *Masters of Empire* establishes European weakness as a foundation for the equally important story of the complex, Native-centered networks of alliance and rivalry that defined politics in the *pays d'en haut*. McDonnell imbeds the Michilimackinac Odawas in a diverse landscape of

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families, villages, nations, and empires. He demonstrates that Odawas weighed their relations with other Native peoples just as heavily as their dealings with Europeans. For example, in examining the lead-up to the Fox Wars of the early eighteenth century, McDonnell details Odawa relations with a host of Indian nations—Miamis, Hurons, Iroquois, Sauks, and Foxes, among others—as well as the French and the British. McDonnell also highlights the significance of intra-Indian politics in his discussions of the Seven Years' War and Pontiac's War, which he situates in long-standing conflicts over power in the region. To broadly outline McDonnell's narrative of these events would do a disservice to his meticulous and intricate account of the negotiations and fights, fears and ambitions that affected the history of the continent.

Masters of Empire tells a powerful story of Odawa “strength and expansion in the midst of empire” that will serve as a model for future work by early Americanists (15). If the book has a shortcoming, it is the abbreviated discussion of events following the American Revolution. As McDonnell notes, Odawa historian Andrew Blackbird considered the decades following the War of 1812 a “golden age” in his nation's history, as Odawas profited from rising fur prices (320). Many Odawas also resisted Indian Removal and secured property rights in northern Michigan. McDonnell recognizes the significance of this era but limits his discussion to a few pages in the conclusion. A fuller consideration of these years would provide a more satisfying close to a book that exemplifies attention to detail, rich analysis, and gripping storytelling.