

Lecture #6: Selling Animals

Suggested Readings:

Calvin Martin, *Keepers of the Game*, 1978; Shepard Krech, *Indians, Animals & Fur Trade*, 1981
Eleanor Leacock, "The Montaignais 'Hunting Territory' and the Fur Trade," *Memoirs Am Anthro Assoc*, 1954
Lynn Ceci, *Effect of European Contact & Trade on Settlement Patterns of NY Indians*, 1977
Arthur Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade*, 1974; Shepard Krech, *The Ecological Indian*, 1999

Outline:

I. Epidemics and Historical Causation

problem of tracing out cultural consequences of epidemics: possible links to fur trade?
across continent, most hunting Indians became involved in fur trade, eventually helped destroy own animal subsistence base: why?
historians as storytellers: stories and substories linked to trace causal chains
classic story of fur trade: Europeans brought superior technology (gun as epitome); Indians recognized instantly, hurried into trade at once; killed off own subsistence base. Moral: primitive encounter with advanced civilization doomed.
lots of problems, as ethnohistorians of 1960s & 70s pointed out: technology only superior in limited ways; Indians adopted it quite easily as their own; trade not instant

II. Epidemics and Holy War

Calvin Martin's spiritual argument in 1978 book: keepers of game linked to disease
Indians saw hunt as gift relationship governed by sanctions of animal death/human disease (plausible link in shared diseases: 1803 tularemia epizootic described by trader John Tanner)
so: European diseases could be perceived as attack by keepers of game, so fur trade became a religious holy war against creatures who had broken sacred compact with humans
despite elegance, major problems of evidence: few documents, most 19th & 20th c, not 16th

III. Indians and the Coming of Capitalism

alternate story: Eleanor Leacock's Marxist portrayal of Montaignais in 1954 thesis: Indians originally primitive communists, no market, no private property.
fur trade motives essentially materialist in face of superior technology & war competition (cf Iroquois wars of 17th c, competition over hunting areas & access to European traders)
Leacock's chief intent: explain emergence of hunting territories, division of collective tribal space so individual families would own animal resources
market partitioning communal space, result may or may not have conserved resources
thesis now appears too simplistic: property divisions and trade certainly predate Europeans, but fur trade surely amplified earlier patterns--in complex ways
important to compare Adrian Tanner's Bringing Home Animals here: intricate integration of Cree market labor, Hudson's Bay Co. post residence during summer with spiritualized subsistence hunt in winter: market, spiritual universe manage to coexist into 1960s

IV. Commodities of the Hunt

dilemma of *Changes in the Land*: diseases seemed important, but not so directly as Martin suggested; European goods did exercise attraction, but not so directly as Leacock thought; market expansion somehow connected to this, but Indians not primitive communists: how to locate a middle ground?
solution: start with epidemics, massive disruption of social life, especially hierarchies
European goods not just attractive technologically, but as status goods; note role of wampum in this as Indian good that also functioned as status item, expanded in trade
European merchants as marketers of status goods, shuttle between wampum makers & hunters
so: trade had own attractions, but disease amplified search for status, helped proliferate market along existing trade networks. argument as middle of road position
but note problems: materialism, obscures Indian spiritual universe (few sources), Indians portrayed primarily in economic terms; documents weak on wampum, social hierarchies

V. Consequences

another strand of stories: consequences of fur trade: most obvious was death of fur-bearers. in southern New England, beavers, otters, foxes, martens, minks, muskrats, turkeys, gone by end of 18th c.
Jeremy Belknap beaver loss consequences: clearing land, accumulating soil, perfect grazing circle of Indian dependency: need trade goods, but no longer have animals to buy them with
in north, persistence of trade across boreal forest/edge/grassland between Cree, Assiniboin, Plains tribes: goods move well in advance of Europeans; Indians adapt well, integrate trade with other cultural practices
complexity of stories of disease>trade>depopulation: how do we test their truth value?