

# Nothing But Firing

by ReadWorks



David De Vries was never sure what to make of his boss, William Kieft. The man's fiery red hair and thick, long moustache, which he was constantly twirling, stood out like a flaming torch wherever he went and made De Vries want to run in the other direction. Still, he knew his place in this new land. He was under Kieft's authority and had to obey his instructions as they set up New Netherland on this land so far away from home, all the way across the Atlantic. De Vries had agreed to this expedition not realizing what was expected of him. Others back home had spoken of America as a land full of promise, rich with green fields, crops that never spoiled, flowing rivers, and the whitest and most pointed of mountains. Who could refuse a land like that? But De Vries had been mistaken. Well before he stepped off the boat onto the new land, he could smell the sewage and rot of a country that wasn't under any kind of proper rule and regulation. Nothing like the Netherlands. No matter, he thought. He knew William Kieft's reputation and his ability to whip people into shape. There were rumors of people already living in the new land. Back home they called them savages, and when De Vries first laid eyes on the Native Americans, he wasn't surprised at all. Their skin was much darker, the color of mud. They wore strange garments, not at all civilized or uniform, and treated the land like it was a person, not material to be controlled and forced to yield life.

De Vries had come to the new land hearing about New Netherland that Kieft was busily, ruthlessly developing. From the window of his small cabin, he could see all the development that Kieft had put into place. The natives stood off to the side, watching, staying on their territory but obviously unhappy with how Kieft was overrunning the land. De Vries thought to speak up about it, but no one else in the crew seemed to care, and Kieft was his employer, after all; he had come to the new land because Kieft needed more men.

And so, on February 25, 1643, when Kieft invited some men and women over for a dinner party, De Vries did not think anything of it. At Kieft's spacious home, De Vries didn't notice that Kieft was being more restless than usual. He snapped at his servants and seemed impatient with the women, even Adrienne, the wife of one of the other men. Dinner was long and delicious. But soon De Vries could tell that something was on Kieft's mind. He wrote later in his diary, "I remained that night at the Governor's sitting up."

The night deepened, De Vries became tired, but then a lot of noise, bursts of sound, screaming, and shots assaulted his ears at midnight, and he snapped back into focus. He saw, from the edges of the fort where Kieft lived, "nothing but firing, and heard the shrieks of savages murdered in their sleep." Before he knew it, 120 Native Americans in Pavonia, across the Hudson River in modern day New Jersey, had been killed. A plot hatched by Kieft that had taken the Indians-and him, De Vries-completely by surprise. It was a day he, and history, would not forget.

# French-Native American Relations in the Great Lakes Region

by Edward I. Maxwell



The Great Lakes region of the Louisiana territory, referred to as the *Pays den Haut* in French, has a particularly remarkable history, considering the prevailing nature of European-Native American relations. While the conquistadors of Spain, who toppled the Inca and Aztec empires, were ruthlessly pursuing gold, the French settlers of the *Pays den Haut* were compelled to take a more diplomatic approach. Richard White is an American historian who has made the most significant contribution to the study of this specific time and place in history. White's book, *The Middle Ground*, sought to oust previous ideas about how the French and Native Americans interacted.

To begin, French-Native American relations in the *Pays den Haut* were so different from European-Native American interaction in general across North and South America because of extensive cultural exchange. French fur-trappers and traders populated the Great Lakes region and funneled countless pelts to forts and outposts as a way of earning their livelihood. In the course of his activities, a fur-trapper would become acquainted with countless Native American tribes and communities across the region. This acquaintance tended to result in greater cooperation. There was a very romantic idea, previous to Richard White's work, that the French were more naturally inclined to form bonds of brotherhood with Native Americans than the English or Spanish. White argues that this theory ignores the important circumstances that are particular to the *Pays den Haut*.

Power is one of the most important things to consider when studying the French-Native American relations in the Great Lakes region. French settlers were not able to dominate their exchanges with the Native Americans of the *Pays den Haut* in the way the English and Spanish were able to overrun the Native American populations they encountered. French fur-trappers and traders were forced to deal with the Native Americans on equal terms. This parity, or sameness, forced Native Americans and French

settlers to make certain deals and compromises, and become more accustomed to each other. This led to a level of cultural exchange that was unparalleled in North America at the time.

White details instances in which French fur-trappers and traders would use marriage as a way to solidify an alliance or business partnership with certain tribes. A French trader might marry a chief's daughter or, if the tribe had a female leader, the Frenchman would marry the chief herself. Connecting himself firmly to a particular tribe through marriage, the fur-trapper would gain access to new supply lines and perhaps more game-rich portions of the wilderness. White also points out that Native Americans would seek out the Frenchmen as well, seeking to make alliances that suited their needs. The demand for furs in France was tremendous, and there was much wealth to be made by those who delivered quality pelts. Different Native American tribes and communities of the *Pays den Haut* viewed this as an opportunity to increase their wealth and power in the region and, therefore, sought out ways to strengthen alliances with the traders who exported, or shipped out, pelts to France. The main point of the matter is that neither side (French or Native American) was able to fully exploit the other. Both had goals specific to the time and region and saw ways to achieve those goals through cooperation.

One of the main points in White's argument is that over time, through greater intermingling on equal footing, the cultural exchange between Frenchmen and Native Americans resulted in the growth of an entirely new culture and political economy unique to the *Pays den Haut*. White argued against the idea that there was a tit-for-tat bartering of traditions and customs. Instead, through the natural progression of relations-riddled with small misunderstandings, different expectations, and shared goals-new customs and traditions arose. White viewed these moments of compromise as moments of creation. Rather than mourn for the traditions and customs that were lost, White stressed the new world that was built within the Great Lakes region.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Use the article "French-Native American Relations in the Great Lakes Region" to answer questions 1 to 2.

1. What are French-Native American relations in the Pays d'en Haut region contrasted with in the article?

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2. Why did Native Americans and French settlers have to deal with each other on equal terms? Use evidence from the article to support your answer.

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Use the article "Nothing But Firing" to answer questions 3 to 4.

3. What did William Kieft do to the Native Americans in Pavonia?

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4. How can the treatment of the Native Americans by Kieft be described? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

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Use the articles "French-Native American Relations in the Great Lakes Region" and "Nothing But Firing" to answer question 5.

**5.** One text describes the interaction between William Kieft and Native Americans in New Netherland. The other text describes the interaction between the French and Native Americans in the Pays d'en Haut region. Contrast these two interactions. Use evidence from both texts to support your answer.

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