

"Nassaney draws together an amazing amount of information about the fur trades that once existed in North America and includes illuminating and imaginative interpretations of archaeological data by researchers from across the continent."

—**Gregory A. Waselkov**, author of *A Conquering Spirit: Fort Mims and the Redstick War of 1813–1814*

"*The Archaeology of the North American Fur Trade* demonstrates how an amazing number of issues constellate around the subject: the mutual effects of cultural interaction, colonialism, world-systems theory, questions about dependence and local autonomy, consumer motivations, substantivism and formalism, creolization, underwater archaeology, gender, the politics of heritage and commemoration, indigenous perspectives, and present-day ramifications."—**Kurt A. Jordan**, author of *The Seneca Restoration, 1715–1754*

"Provides new means to interpret and enhance existing fur trade sites and parks and to discover and evaluate sites that should be preserved."—**Douglas C. Wilson**, historical archaeologist for the National Park Service

The North American fur trade left an enduring material legacy of the complex interactions between natives and Europeans. From the sixteenth through nineteenth centuries, the demand for pelts and skins transformed America, helping to fuel the Age of Discovery and, later, manifest destiny.

By synthesizing its social, economic, and ideological effects, Michael Nassaney reveals how this extractive economy impacted the settlement and exploitation of North America. Examinations of the objects made, used, and discarded in the course of the fur trade provide insight into the relationships between participants and their lifeways. Furthermore, Nassaney shows how the ways in which exchange was conducted, resisted, and transformed to suit various needs left an indelible imprint upon the American psyche, particularly in the way the fur trade has been remembered and commemorated.

Including research from historical archaeologists and a case study of the Fort St. Joseph trading post in Michigan, this innovative work highlights the fur trade's role in the settlement of the continent, its impact on social relations, and how its study can lead to a better understanding of the American experience.

Michael S. Nassaney, professor of anthropology at Western Michigan University, is coeditor of *Interpretations of Native North American Life*.

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Cover: Tourist stop fashioned after old trading post, 20 miles southwest of Grand Portage, Minnesota, on State Road 61. Photo by author.

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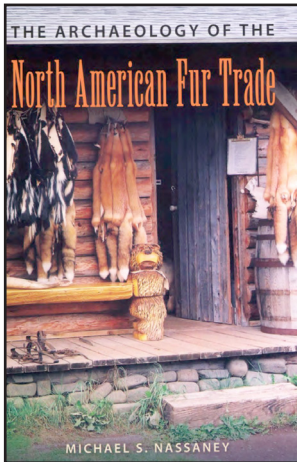
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The Archaeology of the North American Fur Trade

Michael S. Nassaney. (2015). University Press of Florida, Gainesville, Florida. 280 pp., 30 figures, 3 tables, 1 text-box. \$69.95 (hardback).

Reviewed by Douglas C. Wilson, Department of Anthropology, Portland State University.

Michael Nassaney's exploration of the archaeology of the fur trade is impressive and ambitious, covering centuries of time and much of the North American continent. Nassaney admirably balances the enormous numbers of sites, peoples, historical events, and colonial enterprises with some of the important research directions that have defined

and are defining the field of fur trade studies in archaeology. Nassaney ultimately examines the legacy of the fur trade on the American experience. Specifically, he explores its memorialization, synthesizing the evolution of theoretical and methodological approaches, material culture themes, and detailed comparison of selected regions.

In exploring the interpretive frameworks that investigators have used to address the significance of the fur trade, Nassaney emphasizes critical theory as a contrast to earlier acculturation theory and world-systems models. Further, he suggests that current archaeological work recognizes the complexity of economic, political and social interactions and entanglements between indigenous peoples and European fur traders. His straw-dog is Western nationalist (and capitalist) approaches to the past, many of which unfortunately are still with us today, in the form of popular narrations of "wilderness" exploration and the legacy of colonial interpretation of heritage sites. Nassaney stresses the importance and legitimacy of indigenous communities as prominent actors in the fur trade. He employs the concept of "glocalization," the transformation of global products by local consumers, as a key concept in exploring how diverse peoples used European artifacts in different cultural milieu and periods across the fur trade. This approach to regional variability in the expression and legacy of the fur trade is a recurrent theme.

Nassaney's concise interpretation of fur trade history explores most of the impacted regions, periods, products and groups, a very ambitious undertaking. In this, Nassaney by necessity uses Western colonial powers as his frame of reference. He highlights the complexity of the temporal and spatial subject matter, and commendably attempts to address the plethora of indigenous cultures and their related products (animal and otherwise) associated with the trade. Notably, Nassaney provides a basic, effective framework for categorizing the periods, places, and materiality across this huge subject matter.

Nassaney adeptly addresses the principal material categories of the fur trade including landscapes, sites, architecture, manufacturing and domestic features, and artifacts. He navigates between material culture and explorations of its economic, ideological, and social functions based on archaeological and ethnohistoric cases. His summaries of transporta-

tion-related artifacts, faunal remains, technology, and clothing build a basis for exploring chronological and social questions, including ethnicity, status, and gender.

Nassaney compares regional expressions of the fur trade including southern New England, the Old Northwest Territory, the 19th Century expansion of the Hudson's Bay Company, the southeastern deer-skin trade, and the maritime fur trade of the Pacific Coast and the Missouri River Valley. In this, he places archaeological research results in indigenous contexts that contrast with the better-known historical narratives. While such an overview does not allow a comprehensive look at archaeology in any one region, Nassaney adroitly focuses on studies that explore regional variability in material and social contexts. In framing the theoretical directions with descriptions of fur trade sites and material culture across the continent, Nassaney challenges fur trade researchers to explore how regional materialist expressions compare across the continent.

This comparative discussion culminates in a detailed look at Fort St. Joseph, exploring some of Nassaney's personal explorations in the fur trade in southern Michigan. Fort St. Joseph was a strategic 18th Century French and British fort, mission, and fur trade post on a portage that linked the Great Lakes and the Mississippi drainages. Nassaney continues the approach of addressing indigenous contexts and colonial entanglements in the exploration of the fur trade. Discussions of architecture, fur trade features (e.g., smudge pits), animal bones, wampum, cloth and cloth seals, clothing items, and tinkling-cone manufacturing, among other things, assess the materiality of the post and the relationships between its occupants. His conclusion—that the lines between colonized and colonizers, particularly of the fur traders, are blurred—highlights the notion that the fur trade yielded diverse cultural agents with many voices.

Nassaney ultimately explores the relationship between the public and fur-trade archaeology. He highlights his nearly two decades of public archaeology work with the City of Niles, Michigan, the non-profit Support the Fort, Inc., and Western Michigan University. This innovative program includes field schools, summer-camp programs, lecture series, archaeology open houses, and participation in the Niles French Market. Nassaney's students and colleagues communicate the archaeological project in a variety of public forums, engaging the scientific research results with local community interests in heritage and commemoration. It would be interesting to see this program expanded to engage modern Potawatomi and Miami descendant communities.

Nassaney also addresses the legacy of the fur trade in the American psyche, challenging simple trajectories of animal depletion and cultural demise, and the singular focus of popular culture on European and American colonial archetypes. Nassaney challenges us to move beyond simplistic narratives of voyageur and mountain man, with their nationalistic and colonialist undertones, to examine fully from a materialist perspective, the different local expressions of the fur trade. His emphasis on integrating modern, indigenous, and descendant communities into fur trade scholarship and academic practice is timely. The recent popularity of the commercial film entitled *The Renegade*, with its fictionalized portrayal of the fur-trade French Canadians, demonstrates that the mythology of the fur trade is alive and well. Nassaney suggests that exploration

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of the fur trade from the perspective of historical archaeology can be cathartic, forcing us away from “dehumanizing narratives” to explore new understandings about the meaning of the past and how a modern interpretation and understanding of this dynamic period of history will provide relevance and positively impact the future. In this, Nassaney’s absorbing book provides a basis for future work by scholars, students, and the engaged public on the archaeology of the fur trade and its enduring legacy on the American experience.

Book Review