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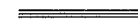
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AN INFINITY OF NATIONS



How the Native New World
Shaped Early North America

MICHAEL WITGEN

PENN

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PROLOGUE

The Long Invisibility of the Native New World

Eshkibagikoonzhe felt anger, betrayal, and a deep sense of disappointment. He sat behind a table in his home at Gaazagaskwaajimekaag (Leech Lake), an immense lake with nearly two hundred miles of shoreline. Five medals, several war clubs, tomahawks, spears, all splashed with red paint, lay on the table before him. Eshkibagikoonzhe painted his face black for this council session. The Bwaanag (Dakota) had recently killed his son and he mourned his loss. All of the people, the Anishinaabeg (Ojibweg), felt the pain of this death, the loss of a future leader. Eshkibagikoonzhe summoned the man he held responsible for his son's death to join him at council in his home. Now he waited.

The man he waited for came from a new power that had risen in the east. It had been a little over three decades since Eshkibagikoonzhe (Bird with the Leaf-Green Bill) began to hear about this new people. They were called Gichi-mookomaanag (the Long Knives/Americans), and they had a reputation as ruthless killers with a hunger for Native land. The Long Knives had been part of the Zhaaganaashag (British), but they shape-shifted, and now the Gichi-mookomaanag and the Zhaaganaashag formed two rival peoples.

The new people, the Gichi-mookomaanag, began to travel into Anishinaabewaki, the lands of the Anishinaabeg. Shortly after they had separated from the Zhaaganaashag, a young warrior from the Gichi-mookomaanag named Zebulon Pike visited Eshkibagikoonzhe at Gaazaskwaajimekaag. The young man came to find the source of the Gichi-ziibi (Mississippi), the massive river that flowed from the heartland of the continent all the way to its southern shore. He also wanted to establish a relationship between his people and the Anishinaabeg in this region. He sat at council with Eshkibagikoonzhe and gave him a Gichi-mookomaanag flag.¹ Shortly after Pike's visit, a few of the Long Knives managed to insert themselves into the fur trade that was

an integral part of Anishinaabe life. These Long Knife traders wanted what the Zhaaganaash and the Wemitigoozhig (French) before them wanted—to claim a place in the villages of Anishinaabewaki where they might forge relationships and live among the hunters and traders who brought pelts out of the western interior. In spite of their fierce reputation only a few of the Gichi-mookomaanag moved through Anishinaabewaki, and they brought valuable trade goods that sparked a healthy competition with the Zhaaganaash traders who manned posts in the north.

Along with their trade, however, the Gichi-mookomaanag made demands, insisting the Anishinaabeg end their conflict with the Bwaanag. They promised to be the arbiters of this new peaceful relationship, which they promised would improve hunting and trade for both the Anishinaabeg and the Dakota. The man summoned to council by Eshkibagikoonzhe had been chosen to live among the Anishinaabeg. He was to be the voice of the Gichi-mookomaanag. The Americans called Eshkibagikoonzhe Flat Mouth, a translation of Gueule Platte, the name by which he was known among the French-speaking traders. Flat Mouth had been waiting patiently as the American Indian agent for the Anishinaabeg slowly made his way west.

The agent, Nawadaha (Henry Rowe Schoolcraft), finally arrived at Flat Mouth's village on July 17, 1832, after an arduous journey. He departed from his post at Bow-e-ting (Sault Sainte Marie), an important Anishinaabe village at the eastern end of Gichigamiing (Lake Superior), the greatest body of water in Anishinaabewaki. He traveled along the southern shore of the great lake for approximately five weeks, and then made his way inland by a series of river systems. Schoolcraft traveled with a small party of ten American soldiers, Methodist missionary William Boutwell, and a mixed-blood fur trader. The trader, named George Johnston, operated out of the American post at La Pointe on the southwestern end of Gichigamiing. The son of a British-born Canadian fur trader and a prominent Anishinaabe woman, Johnston acted as guide and interpreter for the Americans. He was also the brother-in-law of Schoolcraft, who had married his sister. It was rare for any American official, even an Indian agent, to make his way this far into the west. It was even rarer for American soldiers to travel this far into the northwest interior of the continent. American missionaries, similarly, were unheard of among the Anishinaabeg in the west.

The violence between the Anishinaabeg and the Dakota that took the life of Flat Mouth's son prompted Schoolcraft's 1832 expedition. He had made a similar journey the year before to promote peace. And he along with the

governor of Michigan Territory had held two treaty councils—one in 1825 at Prairie du Chien on the Gichi-ziibi and another at La Pointe in 1826. When the treaties and the 1831 expedition failed to stem the violence between the Anishinaabeg and Dakota, Schoolcraft wrote to the secretary of the U.S. Office of Indian Affairs proposing the second expedition. "Events growing out of the political condition of the Indian tribes on the headwaters of the Mississippi," he argued, "call for the continued interposition of the friendly influence of the government on that remote part of our northwestern frontier."² The secretary responded favorably, informing Schoolcraft that "it is no less the dictate of humanity than of policy . . . to establish permanent peace among these tribes."³ These expeditions, along with knowledge appropriated from his wife and her Native relatives, provided Schoolcraft with a literary career. He published accounts of his travels in Indian country and wrote several historical and ethnological studies focused on the Anishinaabeg.

Schoolcraft's publications described the United States' exploration and claims of discovery in the Great Lakes and upper Mississippi valley. They also revealed the existence of an intact, and unconquered, Indian social world in the heartland of North America. Though it was claimed by the United States as the Michigan Territory, Flat Mouth and his people controlled this space that they knew as Anishinaabewaki. When Schoolcraft left La Pointe—short for La Pointe du Chequamegon (Shagwaamikong), a hybrid French-Anishinaabe designation—he made his way west across a landscape dominated by Native place-names, Native people, and Native politics. He passed through Anishinaabe villages at places he could only identify by their Native designations: Ga-mitaawaa-ga-gum (Sandy Lake), O-Mush-ko-zo-sag-aii-gum (Elk Lake), Miskwaawaak-zaaga'igan (Red Cedar Lake). As the Americans traveled they met with ambivalence, even though they dispensed gifts from the U.S. government. They also learned that the people of Red Cedar Lake were raising a war party to raid the Dakota in retaliation for the death of one their warriors. In an attempt to stop this war party and fulfill his mission, Schoolcraft made his way to Leech Lake—the seat of Anishinaabe political and military power in the west.

The Americans arrived at nightfall, and at first light they received a summons from Flat Mouth. The Anishinaabeg of Leech Lake were known as the Pillagers because of their habit of looting the traders who came among them. Lieutenant John Allen, the man in charge of the American soldiers who traveled with Schoolcraft, described Flat Mouth in his journal as "the principal chief of his band, and perhaps one of the most powerful and influential men

of his whole nation.”⁴ Flat Mouth lived in a large frame house with a stone chimney, more substantial than the building occupied by the resident traders. When the Americans entered they took note of the décor. Flat Mouth greeted them from behind a table covered with the paint-spattered weapons. The walls of his house were lined with warriors wearing red war paint staring fiercely at the Americans. The missionary William Boutwell wrote in his diary that “their countenances were full of a wildness such as I never saw before. They look some of them as fierce as the tiger, and as bold as the lion, and may be well denominated ‘Pillagers.’”⁵ On the wall behind Flat Mouth there were two flags, one British and one American. The flags, the war paint, the weapons, and simulated blood were meant to send a not-so-subtle message to Nawadaha.

Flat Mouth rose and addressed his visitors; he complained about the stinginess of the American traders, and the American government’s failure to restrain the Dakota as they had promised. Then following the protocols of the council meeting Schoolcraft gave the Pillagers presents, which were immediately distributed by the civil chiefs under Flat Mouth. “I called their attention to the subjects named in my instructions,” Schoolcraft later wrote, “the desire of the government for the restoration of peace, and its paternal character, feelings, and wishes in relation, particularly to them.” He also “reminded them of their solemn treaty of peace and limits with the Sioux, at Prairie du Chien in 1825.”⁶ The Americans and Europeans considered warfare endemic to the savage state of being, rather than strategic or political in nature, and Schoolcraft called for an end to a conflict that he believed derived from the Indians’ inherent aggression.

In addition to ending hostilities with the Dakota, Schoolcraft sought to promote America’s “civilizing mission” among the Anishinaabeg. Broadly speaking this facet of U.S. Indian policy aimed to alter both the culture and the political economy of Native peoples. In addition to ending intertribal conflict Schoolcraft was charged with helping the Anishinaabeg convert to Christianity and adapt to commercial agriculture. After reminding Flat Mouth and his people of their treaty obligations with the Dakota, Schoolcraft asked them to listen to the word of the gospel, delivered by Reverend Boutwell, on behalf of the United States. The missionary spoke about the work of his fellow Christians among other Indian tribes in North America and expressed a desire to provide similar instruction to the Anishinaabeg.

Flat Mouth called on his warriors to listen to his response to the Gichimookomaanag. He began, the missionary noted in his diary, by announcing

“that he was sorry that Mr. S considered them as children, and not as men.” The diplomatic language of the Anishinaabeg relied on the use of kinship terminology to signal the nature of a relationship between two peoples, and indicated the relative power and responsibility that animated any such connection. In making his opening statement, Flat Mouth rejected American paternalism. He also asserted that the Anishinaabeg stood in relation to the Americans as brothers, that is, as equals—not as children seeking the protection of a more powerful father.

Flat Mouth proceeded to harangue Schoolcraft about the failure of the United States to meet its treaty obligations. According to Boutwell’s diary the leader of the Pillagers not only ignored the missionary’s message about Christianity but spoke with a sense of bitter disappointment about the failure of the American government and its traders to adequately provide gifts and trade goods to relieve the poverty of their country, and alleviate the pitiful condition of the Anishinaabe people. Pity and a poverty of resources demanded relief from those with power. Once again, using ritual language, Flat Mouth evoked the failure of the United States. To point to your own pitiful condition in council was a demand for generosity, for gift giving. The Americans compounded this failure to provide for the Anishinaabeg by failing to constrain the Bwaanag, the Dakota. Staring at Nawadaha with a blackened face, Flat Mouth expressed contempt for the Americans’ call for peace: “He had before heard the Americans say peace, peace!” In response, Flat Mouth said, “he thought their advice resembled a rushing wind. It was strong and went soon. It did not abide long enough to choke up the road.” Every year since 1825, when his people signed a treaty with the United States pledging to end their war with the Dakota, they had been attacked. They kept their word while the Americans failed to keep their promises. According to Schoolcraft, “He then lifted up four silver medals attached by a string of wampum, and smeared with Vermillion. Take notice, he said, they are bloody. I wish you to wipe off the blood.” Flat Mouth recalled the scalps they had taken and declared that he was not satisfied, nor were his warriors. “Both they and I,” he declared, “had heretofore looked for help where we did not find it.” He gestured to the American flag. “We are determined to revenge ourselves. If the United States does not aid us, I have in mind to apply for aid elsewhere.” Flat Mouth gestured to the British flag. He concluded by telling Schoolcraft that when the Dakota killed his son, “I resolved never to lay down the war club.”⁷

Lieutenant Allen noted in the journal he kept during this expedition that the Pillagers exhibited a disturbing independence. They traded with both the

American Fur Company and the British at the Hudson's Bay Company post to their north at Rainy Lake. He also complained about their "impudence," and "total disregard of, and disrespect for the power and government of the United States." Allen lamented the fact that the nature of their territory, its remoteness and inaccessibility, made the Anishinaabeg impossible to punish. "The traders have, in vain, to threaten with the power of the government to check their excesses," he wrote, and then noted, "their reply is, that they have not yet seen that power." Allen concluded in his report that "It is probable, however, that our visiting them with such apparent ease may have the effect of lowering their ideas of their inaccessible position."⁸ The day after this council the Americans began the long journey back to Bow-e-ting. On this leg of their journey they were again dependent on Native guides. They would not move unaided and on their own power until they reached the American post at La Pointe on Lake Superior.

Perhaps Lieutenant Allen felt compelled to express confidence in the power of his country, but he must have realized that sending ten soldiers into the west under the command of a junior officer was not that intimidating. These men literally could not travel without a Native escort, and in truth they could not have mounted an independent military campaign in the western interior. The Americans were tolerated, even welcomed in some places. American traders introduced an element of competition that gave the Anishinaabeg an edge in dealing with their British rivals, and vice versa. There were, however, only two powerful social formations of any consequence in the northwest interior and both were Native. The Dakota and the Anishinaabeg were the dominant military and economic powers in this region.

Flat Mouth addressed the American Indian agent as a prominent leader of one of those powers, the Anishinaabeg. At council he forcefully informed Schoolcraft of America's failure to meet the obligations of its conditional relationship with his people. In doing so, Flat Mouth operated within a political tradition that had shaped Anishinaabe councils for nearly two hundred years. Violence with the Dakota, as well as peace and alliance with them and with European empires (France and England) and now the United States, structured the political relationships that shaped the social world of the Anishinaabeg. Flat Mouth was particularly adept at negotiating the boundaries and obligations of these relationships. This made him a great leader, and a leading political figure in early nineteenth-century North America. His possession of three names—Eshkibagikoonzhe, Gueule Platte, Flat Mouth—spoke to his political sophistication and the cosmopolitan nature of the Anishinaabe

social world. His people controlled a vast territory and a transcontinental trading system that circulated significant resources between the indigenous west, the settler colonies in the east, and the larger world market economy. Flat Mouth was not a simple son of the forest. Neither was he a conquered Indian chief, nor the leader of a dying people dependent on American hand-outs. And yet, in 1832 this was exactly what most Americans, including Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, John Allen, and William Boutwell imagined when they thought of Native peoples.

In his official reports and his published books Schoolcraft asserted a paternalism and sense of cultural superiority over Native peoples that was commonplace in nineteenth-century America. He held onto this view in spite of the fact that through the strategic use of military confrontation, trade, and diplomacy Flat Mouth managed to shape the nature of his relationship with the Gichi-mookomaanag in a way that was largely beyond his country's control. Flat Mouth created an ongoing relationship with the Americans that required the republic to treat with him on a regular basis, and forced its representatives to continually promise to work harder to provide for the political and material needs of the Anishinaabeg. The truth of Anishinaabe power and independence is revealed in various Anishinaabe encounters with officials and missionaries recorded by men such as Schoolcraft, Allen, and Boutwell. These men, however, could not comprehend the Native New World that the Anishinaabeg had created for themselves in the two centuries since their first encounter with the peoples of the Old World.

For the Americans the New World was a place of European discovery, conquest, and national reinvention. Schoolcraft, Allen, and Boutwell simply could not imagine that there were Native peoples in the interior of the continent who had made the same transition and transformation, and in the process created a distinctly Native New World. Perhaps the deepest irony stemming from this cognitive dissonance would come from the role these men played in creating an inverted, literary version of Flat Mouth and his world. The encounter between Flat Mouth, Boutwell, and Schoolcraft would become the template for Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's *The Song of Hiawatha*, an epic poem about vanishing Indians and the fantasy of a wild and unpeopled continent.

From the brow of Hiawatha
Gone was every trace of sorrow,
As the fog from off the water,

As the mist from off the meadow,
 With a smile of joy and triumph,
 With a look of exultation,
 As of one who in a vision,
 Sees what is to be, but is not
 Stood and waited Hiawatha⁹

Hiawatha, the protagonist of *The Song of Hiawatha*, woke up from a dream. He had seen the future, and it was a new world—a world without Indians. He stood at the threshold of his wigwam on the shore of “Gitche Gumee,” or more accurately Gichigamiing (Lake Superior), and waited. He felt joy, relief, even exultation. He could see the object of his dream moving across the lake toward his village, but he could not yet make it out. At last he saw the flash of paddles, and spied a birch bark canoe. “And within it came a people / from the distant land of Wabun.” From waaban, or dawn, from the land of dawn, “Came the Black-Robe Chief, the Prophet, / He the Priest of Prayer, the pale-face, / With his guides and companions.” Hiawatha stood on the beach, his hand held aloft in a gesture of welcome, waiting until he heard the crunch of the canoe sliding onto the pebbles of the beach.¹⁰ There would be no place for Indians, no place for simple children of the forest in this new world. The future belonged to the people from the land of dawn, “the land of light and Morning!”

Hiawatha saw this future even before he heard the words of the Black-Robe chief, the prophet. He did not turn away from his destiny. He embraced it. The world he had known and ruled over was about to change. He did not resist this change, because it meant progress, and it was inevitable. The people from “the land of light and morning” were a people of progress. There was still hope for his own people left behind to face the coming of a new day. They could heed the wisdom and learn the ways of the Black-Robe and his companions, or they would share a darker version of his destiny. Another character in the poem, Iagoo, a bit of a trickster figure, also dreamt of the future. He too saw the “shining land of wabun.” A marvelous place, “All the land was full of people, / Restless, toiling, struggling, striving, / Speaking many tongues, yet feeling / But one heart in their bosoms.” And he saw a dark future for Native people, if they fell upon savage ways, “Weakened, Warring with each other; / Saw the remnants of our people, / Sweeping westward, wild and woful.”¹¹ A true Indian, noble and proud, Hiawatha would not succumb to this fate, but then neither would he give up the ways of the forest. Instead Hi-

awatha would share the fate of the setting sun. He would fade away, a blaze of red on the horizon of America’s past, a reminder of the noble race of men who solemnly bequeathed their continent to the new peoples of North America.

This was the American fantasy at the midpoint of the nineteenth century. The two faces of savagery—brutality and nobility—explained the disappearance of the Native peoples of North America, and the triumphant rise of the United States. The brutal savages who haunted the backcountry during the French and Indian War, and during the Revolution, sowed the seeds of their own demise. To the Europeans, these Indians were mean, low people, who would turn on themselves like vicious dogs, because that was their nature. These savages could only destroy themselves.¹² They would find no place in the industrious, teeming, and dynamic America that called on its many peoples to abandon their old ways, and embrace one another in their new life together. They were people from a darker time in North America’s history. Fortunately, with the arrival of Europeans in North America a new day had dawned.

The real point of *The Song of Hiawatha*, however, was to give expression to the other face of Indian savagery, the noble savage. This Indian forefather was all that was good and beautiful about America, and Hiawatha was the noble savage personified. He turns over possession of his lands to the new Native peoples of North America, the people of the future, the citizens of the United States. In this version of the fantasy the land itself shares a destiny with the American people. The United States of America, a new form of civilization, can be called into existence only when its people are able to transform the land, to improve it, by making it into farms and cities, and converting the wealth of nature into property. This is the true legacy of *The Song of Hiawatha*, read by generation after generation of schoolchildren. The poem gave concrete expression to an understanding about the meaning of America so familiar it was almost invisible.

The Song of Hiawatha made Longfellow a famous man. To be fair, in some circles, it also made him an object of ridicule. Even though many literary critics found this poem to be nothing more than romantic trifle, it was wildly popular. What are we to make of this success? Longfellow’s poem clearly resonated with the American public. The most likely explanation for its popularity is that the epic poem articulated a story about the fate of Indian peoples that easily tracked onto what most Americans thought they knew about their history. Ruthless savage or noble savage, Indians were literally fading away in the face of American progress and civilization.¹³ Their fate, their history,

would be an act of disappearance not unlike the disappearing act performed by Hiawatha at the end of the poem. In this sense, *The Song of Hiawatha* provided Americans with an ideological justification for the dispossession of the Native peoples of North America.

If the peoples of the United States regarded themselves as the newest, most dynamic form of civilization, many also harbored doubt that a country so new could match the artistic and intellectual greatness of the Old World. Thomas Jefferson had published a vigorous defense of all things American in his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, including the power and beauty of the continent's Native orators. In a similar fashion, Longfellow hoped to draw from the oral traditions of Native peoples to create a distinctly American vernacular, a Native folk tradition. He constructed the template of his epic poem from the publications of Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, amateur ethnographer as well as Indian agent at Sault Sainte Marie, the village in the upper peninsula of Michigan Territory that his wife's people called Bow-e-ting. The poet and Indian agent corresponded with one another, and Schoolcraft advocated the idea that incorporating Native legends and oral tradition could provide something unique to American literature.¹⁴

Longfellow shared this belief in the idea of using Native storytelling to create a uniquely American folk tradition. In this manner, Americans would inherit the storied landscape of North America, and make it their own. The literary critic Christoph Irmscher describes Longfellow's adaptation of Schoolcraft as "a carefully contrived performance," and "an elaborate play on the notions of authorship and authenticity." Longfellow, Irmscher argues convincingly,¹⁵ had so completely internalized the idea of Noble savagery that he became convinced that these stories were not products of Native culture, but were the literary artifacts of the landscape itself. *The Song of Hiawatha* was the story of the American wilderness. Longfellow was not alone in conflating Native storytelling and culture with the natural world, and a sort of universal primitive humanity. Schoolcraft echoed these same sentiments in his publications. In a book titled *Oneota; or, The Characteristics of the Red Race*, he wrote, "The poetry of the Indians is the poetry of naked thought." And he suggested that "tales occupy the place of books with the red race. They make a kind of oral literature, which is resorted to, on winter evenings, for the amusement of the lodge."¹⁶ Stories like *Hiawatha* simply reflected the "naked thought" of natural man, and in this sense were universally accessible, and universally available for production and consumption.

Longfellow acknowledges Schoolcraft's influence on his work, albeit in

veiled fashion, when he tells the reader he learned Hiawatha's story "from the lips of Nawadaha." Few readers would realize that this was the Indian agent's Ojibwe name. Longfellow asserts that Nawadaha had merely repeated these stories, not unlike himself, and not unlike an Indian sitting in his lodge on long winter nights telling stories to amuse the children. The fact that Schoolcraft gave voice to this fantasy, however, is more puzzling. Not only did he live in Michigan Territory at a time when Native peoples still outnumbered American citizens, but he was also married into a prominent Native family. Schoolcraft had married Jane Johnston, the sister of George, his interpreter on the 1832 expedition to the Mississippi. George and Jane were the children of the educated and aristocratic fur trader John Johnston and an Ojibwe woman named Ozhaawshkodewikwe (Green Prairie Woman). Their grandfather was an Ojibwe chief, or ogimaa, named Waabojiig (the White Fisher), who had been a war leader in his youth and became a civil chief as an elder in his community.

Jane Johnston Schoolcraft was a product of the world created by the ancestors of her parents. Theirs was a polyglot, cosmopolitan social world that emerged during the course of nearly three centuries of ongoing encounter and interaction between the agents of European empires and North American nation-states and the Native peoples of the Great Lakes and western interior. The focus of much of this interaction was the fur trade, which had evolved into a complex combination of diplomacy, politics, and economic transactions. People, manufactured material goods, processed natural resources, information, and ideas had long flowed freely between the centers of this trade in Paris, London, Montreal, and New York, and the principal villages of the Great Lakes and western interior. The two primary sources of wealth for Europeans who came to North America during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had been the profits made from this vast inland trade, and land. Access to both of these things required interactions with the Native peoples. As a result, imperial politics and the politics within Native social formations had become deeply entangled.

Succeeding in the Native social world of the Great Lakes and western interior, a world created by this long history of cultural encounter, required a great deal of political and cultural sophistication. Men like John Johnston spoke French, English, and Ojibwe, the lingua franca of the fur trade in the Great Lakes. And they understood Native culture and politics through the families they created within the Native social worlds where they worked and lived. This was the world that Jane Johnston Schoolcraft had been born into,

and her husband had profited by her knowledge of this place that seemed so foreign to most Americans. Certainly, what Henry Schoolcraft knew of Native peoples came from her, and his scholarship relied heavily on the appropriation of her knowledge and literary talent.¹⁷

What made Schoolcraft's collaboration with Longfellow so strange was not merely that he ought to have known better, but that he had actually made a voyage into Ojibwe country that paralleled *The Song of Hiawatha*. His 1832 expedition to the Ojibwe villages at the west end of Lake Superior, and out west in the headwaters region of the upper Mississippi valley, oddly mirrored the arrival of the Black-Robe prophet in Longfellow's poem published in 1855. In the poem the "Priest of Prayer" arrives at a Native village on the shores of Gichigamiing "with his guides and companions." In 1832, however, when Schoolcraft accompanied the first American missionary into the territory of the people depicted in the poem, the Anishinaabeg were not a people on the verge of disappearing. In fact, they were expanding from the Great Lakes into the prairie west. Schoolcraft identified twenty-seven Anishinaabe villages in the upper Mississippi valley in a report prepared for the American secretary of Indian affairs in 1831. "The population is enterprising and warlike," he wrote. And he concluded that "they have the means of subsistence in comparative abundance. They are increasing in numbers."¹⁸ In short, the experiences of Schoolcraft and Boutwell ought to have been a revelation. Indian peoples were not vanishing, and they were not eager to adopt American culture and social practices.

Schoolcraft's 1831 and 1832 expeditions reflected the reality of the autonomy and political power of Anishinaabewaki as a social formation. The expeditions, in effect, represented an attempt by the United States to establish its authority in a territory it claimed, but where it did not and could not actually exercise sovereignty. Flat Mouth's rebuke of Schoolcraft demonstrated this reality. If Flat Mouth was unintimidated and uninspired by his encounter with American officials, perhaps it was because he and his people had been dealing with Black-Robes, traders, and various other peoples from "the land of light and Morning" for the better part of three centuries. He disregarded Boutwell because the missionary had nothing new to say. There had been missionaries among his people preaching Christianity as a pathway to "civilization" since the first days of contact with the peoples of Europe. More to the point, from Flat Mouth's perspective, it was the American who needed instruction. The republic had failed to meet its treaty obligations, and their failure cost the ogimaa the life of his son.

If Longfellow appropriated from Schoolcraft, who in turn appropriated from his wife's heritage and the culture of the Ojibwe people at his agency, the New England poet also took liberties with his story that stripped it of any historical or cultural accuracy. The story of Hiawatha did not come from Ojibwe tradition as the poem suggests. Hiawatha was in actuality the culture hero of the Iroquois confederacy. The Iroquois, who called themselves the Haudenosaunee (People of the Longhouse), consisted of five (and later six) linguistically related peoples who came together as a confederation to bring an end to chronic warfare. Hiawatha was the advocate of the Prophet Deganawida, who brought the Great Law of Peace to the Iroquois during a time when they were tearing themselves apart. They re-created their collective identity as a people around the law given to them by Deganawida, and disseminated among them by Hiawatha, actual historical figures.¹⁹

The true culture hero of the Ojibwe peoples was a shape-shifting hare called Nanabozho, a trickster figure. Apparently, Longfellow found both the name and the character of Nanabozho to be out of sync with the protagonist he imagined at the center of his epic Indian poem. Nanabozho was a mischievous persona, not prone to self-sacrifice, whose misbehavior frequently landed him in trouble. Once, for example, in seeking revenge for the death of his wolf-brother he killed a creature whose death flooded the world. Selfish acts, revenge killings, and world destruction were not the qualities of a noble savage. Clearly, Longfellow's Hiawatha was not a product of the Ojibwe imagination. Neither was it a genuine adaptation of the Iroquois story, or even an accurate reflection of Schoolcraft's ethnographic description of Native peoples. In the end, Hiawatha was simply a literary cultural production that captured the European fantasy about the discovery of North America. This was a story about people who found a wilderness continent, and made it their own, benignly transforming people and place into a New World, and creating a new form of civilization—the United States of America.

The story of the Ojibweg, who also called themselves Anishinaabeg, like the story of Nanabozho, involved a lot of shape-shifting. *Ojibweg* is the plural form of the word *Ojibwe*, a name that nineteenth-century Americans mispronounced as *Chippewa*. This was, however, only their most recent appellation. The Ojibweg entered the historical record in the midseventeenth century as the Sauteurs, the French word for "people of the waterfalls" used to describe the people resident at the village they called Sault Sainte Marie, or the falls of Saint Mary (Bow-e-ting). The term *Anishinaabeg* could be translated as first or original human beings, but by the nineteenth century speakers of

Ojibwe translated this word more simply as Indian.²⁰ The Ojibwe language, or Anishinaabemowin, was spoken with mutually intelligible dialect variation across the Great Lakes and its hinterlands. Anishinaabeg was a collective identity shared by a number of peoples, speakers of Anishinaabemowinan, who inhabited the Great Lakes and upper Mississippi valley including the Odawa, Boodewaadamii, and Mississagua, as well as numerous smaller groups living in the interior north of Lake Superior and west of Hudson's Bay. The French referred to these linguistically related peoples collectively by the designation *Algonquian*.

The history of these changing names unfolded through the evolution of a complex indigenous social world in the Great Lakes and western interior of North America. The history of the Anishinaabeg was, in fact, an epic story in its own right, and one that had as much power and drama as Longfellow's poem. It was a history that saw the emergence of a Native New World in the heartland of North America. This was the real history of discovery. It was a process of encounter and mutual transformation where the outcome was not always one sided or unidirectional. Native peoples did not go the way of Longfellow's *Hiawatha*. Some people, like the influential Anishinaabe leader Flat Mouth, not only survived, they thrived in this new world of their own making. The one thing that Longfellow got right was that the story of the Anishinaabe people and the landscape they created was epic, and it needs to be told because it is an important part of the history of North America.

Nineteenth-century Americans believed without question that Indians were destined to fade from history while the United States advanced across the continent it was destined to occupy. This is the certainty of an ideology that equated American expansion with the idea of human progress. The funny thing about the misplaced certainty of nineteenth-century Americans, other than the certainty itself, is that it has blinded us to the history of the Native New World. Until the middle of the nineteenth century autonomous Native peoples occupied the vast majority of North America. The continent's settler colonies possessed very little influence in much of this Indian-occupied territory. The United States, for example, possessed a very limited influence in the region it claimed as the Michigan Territory. Moreover, this limited power derived from the fur trade, which was largely detached from the colonial ambitions of the American nation-state. This does not mean that this Native space was void of political struggle. Attempts to control the fur trade encompassed European imperial politics as well as a complicated social world where Native peoples vied for the power that came from dominating the exchange networks of the in-

land trade. The combination of violence and diplomacy that shaped this power struggle was anything but the tit-for-tat raiding between "traditional enemies" that Schoolcraft and many other American officials imagined. The Anishinaabeg and the Dakota were two of the largest, most successful, and politically diverse Native social formations to dominate the western interior. And yet for the most part Flat Mouth is a little-known historical figure, and not generally regarded as a political leader who was at least as important as his contemporaries in British Canada and the American republic.

The evidence capturing the Native perspective of this ongoing colonial encounter, however, is often readily available. This is not necessarily a matter of reading European texts against the grain. It is, rather, more simply a matter of reading texts written by Europeans without privileging the fantasies of discovery. *Hiawatha*, of course, is all fantasy, even though it borrows elements of the ethnography of Henry Rowe Schoolcraft. But Schoolcraft's ethnographic work, and the texts of people like Reverend Boutwell, actually described the distinctly Native social space of the northwest interior of North America as it existed. These men recorded their encounter with an autonomous and evolving Native world where only a handful of non-Native peoples lived as interlopers, and where the institutions of North America's settler colonies were nonexistent. The descriptions of this world produced by Schoolcraft and Boutwell were laced with biases and misplaced certainty. And yet the story of Flat Mouth and his world is also present in these texts. He speaks to us through word and gesture, and with his refusal to meet American expectations about what it meant to be an Indian.

The key to reading these texts, and others like them, is figuring out how to disentangle expectation from reality. The ghosts of Flat Mouth and *Hiawatha* fight for your attention, struggling to assert their opposing perspectives. Reading Boutwell's diary, for example, it is important to understand both his expectations about Native North America, and the world he actually encountered once he arrived in that place. The missionary expected to find a Native world very much like the one Longfellow imagined. That is, he expected to find the noble savages of the northern forests, people who awaited instruction from the people from the land of morning and light. At the very least he seemed to anticipate finding people who understood they were wards of the American state. What America's first missionary to Anishinaabewaki found instead was another world altogether. More to the point, this was a dynamic and evolving world with a very long history—a history that has been rendered largely invisible because of the mythology of discovery and conquest.

Thinking about the New World as a place created by European discovery and conquest has resulted in a very particular, and peculiar, Indian history. There are some Native leaders who figure prominently in this history. Witness the popularity of American Indian warriors such as Metacomb (King Phillip), Pontiac, and Tecumseh, who battled English and American settler colonists to preserve the independence of their people. In the late nineteenth century when the United States and Canada fought for control of the Great Plains, Sitting Bull and Geronimo emerged as iconic figures in the popular culture due to their heroic resistance and tragic defeat. Louis Riel, leader of the Red River Rebellion in 1870 and an emblematic figure in Manitoba, similarly became a founding father, although he never quite reached the status of his nineteenth-century counterparts in American popular culture. All of these warrior figures proved themselves ready to fight to the death to preserve their autonomy, marking them as capable of the sort of virtuous behavior required by the freedom-loving citizens of republican government. Once they were vanquished they could enter civil society, at least in iconic form if not as actual citizens. In other words, once conquered they could become the symbol of the new nation's indigenous national heritage.

Most early American college-level survey courses would include some discussion of Metacomb, Pontiac, and Tecumseh, but Flat Mouth and his contemporaries among the Anishinaabeg and Dakota remain conspicuously absent. They reached the height of their power during the era of removal in the United States, when Indians were conveniently taken out of the national narrative, even when they managed to refuse actual physical removal. There are, of course, many excellent histories of Native peoples in the nineteenth century. There are too few histories of nineteenth-century North America that tell the story of the numerically significant and politically independent Native peoples who controlled the majority of continent's territory, and who helped to shape the historical development of the modern American, Canadian, and Mexican nations.²¹

This book is divided into four parts, each with two chapters. Part I, titled "Discovery," focuses on the ideology behind the notion of a European discovery of the New World. These chapters examine this concept, but also seek to provide a Native counternarrative to the idea of European discovery, which was a largely discursive process. Part II, titled "The New World," examines the social worlds created by the arrival of people from Eurasia and Africa in the Americas. These chapters seek to uncover the emergent social worlds formed

by this encounter, specifically focusing on the Atlantic World of settler colonies and the Native New World that formed in the interior of North America. Part III, titled "The Illusion of Empire," explores the political reality created by the existence of two emergent social worlds in North America rather than a singular New World. These chapters outline the limits of imperial influence in the Native New World, and trace the collapse of French influence in the indigenous west in the period leading up to the Seven Years' War. Finally, Part IV, titled "Sovereignty: The Making of North America's New Nations," offers an examination of how acknowledging the existence of a Native New World changes our understanding of the encounter between the American nation-state and the autonomous Native peoples who occupied territory claimed by the republic in the west. This part also explores how the collision of the Native New World and the American republic affected the relationship between Native peoples and British Canada.

Infinity of Nations begins with an exploration of the idea of discovery. The concept of discovery functioned as the expression of an ideology by which Europeans divided the world between civilized and savage peoples. Civilized peoples lived within sovereign societies of their own making. Savage peoples lived as part of the natural world rather than as members of a society. Virtually all Europeans who produced a written record of their encounters with the Native peoples of North America understood their contact with the indigenous Other through the lens of discovery.

Of course, in reality discovery unfolded as a mutual process where the peoples of the Eastern and Western Hemispheres came to know each other. The teleology of the European idea of discovery was fraught with fear of the savage, but ultimately ended with the idea of conquest—the triumph and expansion of the civilized world.

On the ground, however, the reality of European conquest varied. The French created an empire in North America where their colony remained deeply intertwined with and mutually dependent on Native peoples. The Spanish conquered some Native peoples, but found others unconquerable. They also treated some Native peoples as political vassals, and intermarried widely with the indigenous populations in the territory they controlled politically. The English similarly conquered some Native peoples, but also formed political alliances with others for the purposes of trade and warfare. In each of these empires the monarchy imagined that at least some of the Native peoples living in or near their New World settler colonies had become subjects of the Crown. And in spite of this more nuanced reality, each monarch claimed sov-

ereignty over these colonies, their hinterlands, and the Native peoples who resided in both by right of discovery and conquest.

The existence of Flat Mouth and his world stand in stark contrast to the false history created by the idea of European discovery. If Europeans began to discover Anishinaabewaki in the mid-seventeenth century, and then came to possess this people and place in the decades that followed, then there would have been no need for Indian agents and treaties when American officials made their way onto this same territory two centuries later. Only by recovering the story of the process of mutual discovery and encounter that created Flat Mouth's world can we begin to know the true history of North America. The simultaneous existence of Anishinaabewaki and the imagined world of European discovery and conquest that created the political fiction of empire and cultural production like *The Song of Hiawatha* make sense only if we recover the still largely invisible history of Native North America. My exploration of the idea of European discovery in this book proceeds with a simultaneous telling of the Native history of encounter with the peoples and things of the Atlantic World.

After narrating the history of Anishinaabewaki during the era of discovery, this book explores the world that emerged in the indigenous western interior of North America. Encounter created an Atlantic New World that brought together the peoples of Eurasia, Africa, and the Americas, but this New World had its limits. It did not extend into the indigenous west, although its peoples, ideas, and things circulated between the interior and the settler colonies at the coast. Historian James Merrell wrote that "we should set aside the maps and think instead of a 'world' as the physical and cultural milieu within which people live and a 'new world' as a dramatically different milieu demanding basic changes in ways of life."²²

Merrell's work explored the ways in which Native peoples were forced to reimagine their social place and identity in the New World created by the expansion of Atlantic World empires onto North American soil. But what about all of those indigenous peoples in the vast interior of the continent where the institutions and peoples of empire were largely absent, or arrived only in disembodied form such as disease, metal, cloth, or ideas about racial, cultural, and social differences? In the Great Lakes, the northern Great Plains, and the northern boreal forests that swept inland from the great bay Europeans named after Henry Hudson, another New World emerged when the two hemispheres collided. This other "new world" was a Native New World. It was the transregional space at the heart of the North American fur trade. This

inland trade would connect Native peoples with little or no direct contact with Europeans to an emerging world market economy. This connection demanded change. It brought both opportunity and tragedy. And it demanded that Native peoples, like the peoples of empire, reimagine their social identity in the wake of the epic encounter that brought their two old worlds into contact.

Anishinaabewaki, the social formation of the Anishinaabe peoples, emerged at the heart of this Native New World. Unlike the Great Lakes Indian world imagined by Longfellow, Anishinaabewaki was not an ahistoric and pristine wilderness that could only fade away when exposed to civilization. The story embedded in the poem reflected the logic of the ideology of European discovery. In reality, the Anishinaabe people suffered from the effects of encounter, but they also figured out how to benefit from this experience. During the course of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries the Anishinaabe peoples evolved as a multipolar social formation. The social organization of European empires centered on the nation, which provided a unified and hierarchical structure for organizing collective social identity and mobilizing political power. The Anishinaabeg, in contrast, mobilized political power through a variety of social structures formed according to a seasonal cycle linked to their political economy and ritual calendar.

Political power and social identity took on multiple forms among the Anishinaabeg. This capacity for change and adaptation mirrored an ability to shape-shift, a concept that was pivotal to the worldview of Anishinaabe peoples, and reflected in the behavior of their trickster figure Nanabozho. This fluidity allowed the Anishinaabeg to function as part of a transregional collective social formation, or to detach from this larger formation and mobilize political power and identity on a microlevel as members of a doodem, or clan with claims to particular hunting territories, watersheds, rice beds, and so on. This flexibility allowed the Anishinaabeg to weather the vicissitudes of a fur trade that was at once a function of their political economy, essential to intergroup diplomacy, a means of connecting to European empires, and the product of an evolving global market economy.

The expansive and diffuse nature of Anishinaabewaki as a social formation also allowed the Anishinaabe doodemag (clans) to bridge the Atlantic and Native New Worlds. As they moved between these distinct social worlds, their ability to form relationships (peaceful and violent) with both the peoples of empire and the peoples of the indigenous west like the Dakota made the Anishinaabeg a powerful political force in North America. Similarly, their

connection to the numerous bands of Ojibwe, Cree, and Ojibwe-Cree speaking peoples that the chief financial officer for the colony of New France would identify with great trepidation as “an infinity of undiscovered nations” in the heartland of the continent made the Anishinaabeg indispensable to the fur trade.²³

The French official’s fear stemmed from the ideology of discovery, and the corresponding belief that the heartland of the continent was dominated by an infinity of Indian nations whose allegiance and territory might be discovered and claimed by a rival empire. While this fear involved the meaningless political fiction of European discovery as a form of conquest, it also demonstrates the truth of the existence of a Native New World. In effect, the continent was not an unsettled wilderness inhabited by savages. It was instead an autonomous Native social world, “an infinity of nations,” and it would survive as such into the lifetime of Flat Mouth in the early nineteenth century. Of course, this was not actually a world of indigenous nations, but rather a world of bands, clans, villages, and peoples. In the Native New World land was not the exclusive dominion of a single individual or nation. It was instead a shared resource where use rights were claimed, negotiated, and exercised as part of the lived relationships that people forged with one another in the process of creating landscape and social identity.

After describing the formation and function of the Native New world, and the evolution of Anishinaabewaki within this space, *Infinity of Nations* returns to a consideration of the claims of empire. By the middle of the eighteenth century the chain of outposts that sustained the political interests of European empire in the Native New World would become increasingly ineffective. The evolving power of the British and French Empires, and the changing interests of Native peoples, produced a fundamental change in the way that the peoples of the Native and Atlantic New Worlds related to one another. Europe would lose much of its fragile political influence in the indigenous west. The fur trade would continue, and even thrive, but it became divorced from imperial politics. The Anishinaabeg and the Dakota would become increasingly oriented to life in the west, and they would become largely disengaged from the world of empires.

This historical trajectory, explored in Part IV of the book, helps to shed a new light on the nature of the relationship between the United States and the peoples of the Native New World. The cognitive dissonance experienced by Reverend Boutwell and the confrontation between Flat Mouth and Schoolcraft occurred because the United States believed that the republic was the

inheritor of a legacy of European discovery and conquest that had, in fact, never happened. As a result of this disconnect the United States would be forced to work hard as an expanding settler colony. The illusion of American expansion as a dynamic and natural process would give way to reality in the region that the United States labeled the Northwest Territory. It would take serious political work to plant the institutions of the American nation-state in Anishinaabewaki. American officials would be forced to undergo constant negotiation over fundamental categories that defined the republic such as the meaning of race, nation, and sovereignty. It was this long history of encounter between the two emergent and constantly evolving social worlds in North America that produced the modern world of the nation-state on this continent. *An Infinity of Nations* attempts to tell the story of the parallel development and eventual convergence of these two emergent social worlds—the Atlantic New World and the Native New World.