

# UCLA

## American Indian Culture and Research Journal

### Title

The Fox Wars: The Mesquakie Challenge to New France. By R. David Edmunds and Joseph L. Peyser.

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4sp0f4g9>

### Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 19(1)

### ISSN

0161-6463

### Author

Danziger, Edmund J., Jr.

### Publication Date

1995

### DOI

10.17953

### Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

radically several times between 1823 and 1873, but he fails to penetrate the surface of the Jesuit's mind, experience, or personality (pp. 305–306). Perhaps one should not expect more of a biography that completely ignores the childhood, culture, family, and vocation of its subject. And if De Smet remains hollow, we certainly should not expect to meet Red Cloud, Spotted Tail, Eagle Woman, and Red Feather as real human beings.

*"Come, Blackrobe"* tells us once again that disaster happened to Indians in North America between 1840 and 1870 and gives us a fair idea of why it happened. Pierre-Jean De Smet stood square in the middle of those events. Yet, despite John Killoren's extensive research and labor of love, we learn little more about De Smet himself than we had known from the earlier work of Hiram M. Chittenden, Eugene Laveille, and John Terrell.

Robert H. Keller  
Fairhaven College

**The Fox Wars: The Mesquakie Challenge to New France.** By R. David Edmunds and Joseph L. Peyser. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993. 282 pages. \$24.95 cloth.

Compared to their European rivals in North America, the French created many more military alliances and profitable fur trading partnerships with native nations. The so-called French and Indian Wars against the British between 1689 and 1763 attested to France's ability to work effectively with aboriginal partners. Less well known were the detrimental effects of these relationships. France's Indian allies frequently suffered from depopulation due to disease and warfare, alcohol addiction, economic dependence on European trade goods, and dislocation from their homelands. Even more obscure was the fate of aboriginal nations that refused to do France's bidding and against whom this mighty European nation unleashed destructive forces. *The Fox Wars: The Mesquakie Challenge to New France* is thus an important addition to our knowledge of New France's fur trade and the historical influence of one Indian nation determined to preserve its identity and independence.

*The Fox Wars* is a superb example of the "new Indian history." The Fox (or Mesquakie) people are not merely flotsam amidst the swirling events of Great Lakes history; Edmunds, a professor of history at Indiana University, and Peyser, a professor of French at

Indiana University South Bend, give them, rather than the French, "center stage" throughout the volume. We are shown how tribal leaders such as Noro, Pemoussa, and Ouchala creatively and forcefully promoted their people's welfare and control of their homeland. Fox relationships with other native nations are just as important to the story as trade and diplomatic maneuverings with European powers. To write this sort of history, Edmunds and Peyser listened to Fox oral traditions, searched through a myriad of manuscript sources, and strived to present events "as much as possible from the Fox perspective" (p. xvii).

The historical importance of the Fox-French encounter during the 1600s and 1700s, a topic previously neglected by historians, further adds to the book's value. The Fox struggle to maintain their identity and independence in the face of French military and economic might is a tale of "epic proportions" (p. xviii). Fox villages in Wisconsin were at the heart of France's fur trading empire in the western Great Lakes. Whenever Fox relationships with their Indian neighbors (Chippewa, Ottawa, and Potawatomi to the north, east, and south; Sioux to the west; and the Illinois Confederacy to the south) became hostile, trade arteries shut down, and the economic pain was felt clear across the Atlantic. To keep New France's lifeblood flowing and preserve her hegemony in the western Great Lakes and the upper Mississippi country, officials at Versailles and Quebec devoted an unusual amount of attention to the Fox problem during the early 1700s. This the authors document in great detail. Finally, the disruptive effects of the Fox wars with France and her Indian allies highlight important themes in native history: intertribal warfare, the determination of aboriginal nations as well as Europeans to pursue their interests, the strategies devised by Indian societies to halt aggressive neighbors like the French, and the great cost to all parties of establishing fur-trading partnerships.

Edmund's and Peyser's book is also a well-told tale. After presenting some cultural background, the authors trace two centuries of Fox history with an emphasis on their relationships with French and Indian neighbors. Mostly, the Fox were on the defensive, caught between the French and other Indian nations jockeying for position in the lucrative fur trade. New France eventually tried to destroy the Fox nation because it refused to do Quebec's bidding. *The Fox Wars* chronicles this genocidal crusade during the first half of the eighteenth century. The final chapter analyzes the factors that contributed to the Fox-French confronta-

tion and explains why and how the Fox were able to survive so many knockout blows. Maps and illustrations placed throughout the book make these complex military and diplomatic maneuverings more understandable.

The authors make much of Fox survival and their "regensis." By the time France abandoned its annihilation campaign against them, the Fox had been reduced to about fifty warriors and their families. They found sanctuary among the Sac Indians and have been associated with them ever since. Most of the Sac and Fox Indians withdrew across the Mississippi River to Iowa following the American Revolution. Edmunds and Peyser also discuss their later involvement in the War of 1812 and the 1832 Black Hawk War. Eventually, the Sac and Fox nations found two permanent homes: in Oklahoma and near modern Tama, Iowa. The authors clearly admire—and readers will, too—the Fox people, who "possessed a tough resilience, a heartwood of inner strength that enabled them to cling to their sense of identity. In the face of insurmountable odds, they persisted" (p. 221). The Fox still have a strong sense of identity and a steely determination admired by neighbors. This is part of the Fox heritage and that of all Americans. President Richard Nixon reminded Congress in July 1970 that "the story of the Indian in America is something more than the record of the white man's frequent aggression, broken agreements, intermittent remorse, and prolonged failure. It is a record also of endurance, of survival, of adaptation and creativity in the face of overwhelming obstacles."

*Edmund J. Danziger, Jr.*  
Bowling Green State University

**The Jumanos: Hunters and Traders of the South Plains.** By Nancy Parrott Hickerson. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994. 270 pages. \$40.00 cloth; \$17.95 paper.

My curiosity about the Jumanos was aroused long ago in Dr. Herbert E. Bolton's seminar, when he mentioned their unexplained disappearance after 1700. Many writers have discussed the "Jumano mystery" without attempting to explain it. Ethnohistorian and linguist Nancy Parrott Hickerson of Texas Tech University has made an extensive study of Spanish colonial documents in order to resolve the matter.