

are very minor concerns. *The People's Car* is an important and welcome addition to the canon of automotive history writing, and will remain so for quite some time.

Dimitry Anastakis

Trent University

doi:10.1093/es/kht089

Advance Access publication October 25, 2013

Ann M. Carlos and Frank D. Lewis. *Commerce by a Frozen Sea: Native Americans and the European Fur Trade*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010. 264 pp. ISBN 978-0-8122-4231-7, \$49.95 (cloth).

On first glance, the fur trade in colonial North America seems a fairly straightforward business. Europeans wanted furs, especially beaver, and so they partnered with Native peoples, who hunted the animals in the woods and then brought them to European traders, who offered goods that Natives either did not or could not fashion for themselves. Participants on each side thought they were getting the better end of the deal. But incessant European demand for pelts and Native willingness to overhunt the population of beaver undermined the commerce in one locale after another. Ann M. Carlos and Frank D. Lewis have used the extensive records of the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) to demonstrate more carefully than any previous scholars how this intercultural system came to flourish in the eighteenth century and then collapse soon after, a victim of its own success.

The trade's origins were simple enough. Europeans loved felt, especially for hats, but they had depleted the population of Old World beaver (*Castor fiber*) by the dawn of the colonial era. So when early travelers to North America wrote about the abundance of beaver (*Castor canadensis*), the French and English eagerly sought to establish commercial operations in the Western Hemisphere (even Puritans who went to New England in the early seventeenth century in search of religious freedom understood that shipping beaver pelts to England might be the best way to pay off the debts for their travels). Native Americans too saw the benefits of this commerce, which they utilized as a mechanism for gaining new goods.

But the business had underlying problems. Beavers, like few other mammals, limit the size of their population. Further, since they modify their neighborhoods by building dams and then live in lodges in the resulting ponds, they were easier to find than many other

fur-bearing animals. Native Americans could have eliminated beaver before Europeans arrived; they did not need guns or sharpened spears or metal traps to kill their prey. But they chose not to wipe them out for reasons that made perfect economic sense: a valuable renewable resource could only survive if the rate of capture or killing remained below a tipping point that would have triggered population collapse (as other scholars have emphasized, some indigenous Americans also associated spiritual forces with beaver, which might have acted as an additional impediment to overhunting). Yet when Europeans offered novel trade goods, Natives hunted beaver as never before, and in many places drove the numbers of these mammals below a sustainable point. In southern New England, beaver were likely gone by the middle of the seventeenth century—a mere generation since the establishment of permanent European colonies in the region.

Carlos and Lewis describe how the trade worked in the greater Hudson Bay region from the HBC's founding in 1670 into the nineteenth century. HBC accounts record the purchase of 2.75 million pelts from 1700 to 1763, the decades when the commerce flourished. Carlos and Lewis provide extensive tables, including a superb record of the goods Natives purchased at York factory, on the western shore of Hudson Bay, from 1716 to 1770. They reveal the wide range of material objects that moved into and through Assiniboine, Cree, and Chipewyan communities in bargains negotiated not in English or French but in Cree, which became the *lingua franca* for regional trade.

Carlos and Lewis organize trade goods into four categories—producer goods, used to hunt more efficiently; household goods such as kettles and blankets; alcohol and tobacco; and other “luxury” items including buttons and lace. By volume, the most important trade items were things relating to guns (including powder), cloth, tobacco, and alcohol. But the real find here is that Indians and Europeans agreed on a set price (so-called “made beaver”), which each side understood and used as a basis for their transactions. They describe the popularity of alcohol and other nonessential goods, including a strong preference for Brazilian tobacco over the sot weed from the Chesapeake. Such buying practices signal that participation in the fur trade did not lead to indigenous dependence on European traders when the trade flourished. Only in the nineteenth century, when the stock of beaver had essentially plummeted (along with the population of other mammals), did some Natives seek food from Euro-American traders, a sign that the commerce and political rivalries that it helped spawn had undermined traditional sources of sustenance.

Carlos and Lewis argue that Natives defined the extent of their participation in the business. That is, *pace* European claims of Natives' lack of economic sophistication, Indians involved in the fur trade

proved to be careful customers and canny negotiators. Natives were “industrious,” a stark contrast to earlier observers who frequently complained that Indians were “indolent.” They understood concepts of prices and property rights, though their ideas sometimes differed from those of European traders.

It can be difficult to know how far to extrapolate the findings here. After all, this is a region with relatively small indigenous groups working in a place that was for much of the active fur trade period beyond the interest of European settlers, who preferred more temperate climates. Trade was also seasonal here, limited by the times of the year that ships could make it through Hudson Strait—primarily mid-summer into early autumn. Further, in other parts of North America, the trade relied less on beaver than on other hides, such as the deerskins that dominated commerce in the modern southeast of the United States.

But whether the evidence from the HBC can explain behavior elsewhere is not what matters. Carlos and Lewis, culturally aware and careful scholars, have written the best history yet of the fur trade in Canada. In mining the HBC’s archive, they have given us a vision of the business that provides as much agency and control to Natives as it does to Europeans, a long overdue corrective to generations of observers who have, for various reasons, viewed indigenous peoples as dupes or simple victims of European aggressors. They have done so in clear language, with equations tucked into appendices written for specialists, so that all scholars of early America can understand the implications of their meticulous work.

Peter C. Mancall

University of Southern California

doi:10.1093/es/kht099

Advance Access publication December 11, 2013

Catherine Higgs. *Chocolate Islands: Cocoa, Slavery, and Colonial Africa*. Columbus, OH: Ohio University Press, 2012. 236 pp. ISBN 9780821420065, \$26.95 (cloth), ISBN 9780821420744, \$22.95 (paper).

Catherine Higgs has written a compelling book that is at the crossroads of three traditions of historiography, namely, the abolition of the African slave trade and slavery, the labor-recruitment policies of the colonial powers, and the rise of “legitimate” commerce. It is also, tangentially, a history of the rise of the great chocolate