Contested Futures: Anishinaabeg and American Societies in the Great Lakes, 1790-1840

Murder in Sault Ste. Marie

On July 5, 1846, the small Northern Michigan town of Sault Ste. Marie awoke to a murder. No one claimed to have witnessed the event, but the sound of gunfire drew the town's residents to the house of James Schoolcraft, where they found Schoolcraft dead in his vegetable garden. Residents immediately designated the culprit as John Tanner, known to them as the "white Indian." Compounding their suspicions, someone had set fire to Tanner's house the night before, and planted gunpowder around its periphery to keep onlookers at bay. In the morning, when the fire had burned out and the gunpowder ceased to explode, the ruins showed no sign of Tanner's remains. Dead or alive, Tanner had vanished. No one in Sault Ste. Marie would ever know his fate.[1]

Even before the mysterious murder, Americans had struggled to make sense of John Tanner. Captured by Shawnee warriors as a child in 1790, Tanner had lived for thirty years as a captive, and after the Shawnee sold him to the Ottawa (a branch of the Anishinaabeg peoples) in 1792, he identified himself as an Anishinaabe hunter. Yet in the 1810s, the Anishinaabeg responded to the pressures of American settler colonialism by adopting an increasingly racially exclusive identity, which mirrored an American mode of thinking. As a white captive who sought full standing in Anishinaabeg kinship networks, Tanner had no place in this changing and racializing world. By 1818, Tanner

[1] Murder accounts drawn from Joseph H. Steere, "Sketch of John Tanner, Known as the "White Indian." *Historical Collections: Collections and Researches made by the Michigan Pioneer and Historical Society.* Vol. XXII. (Lansing: Robert Smith & Co., 1894). 246-254, and Angie Bingham Gilbert, "The Story of John Tanner." *Historical Collections: Collections and Researches made by the Michigan Pioneer and Historical Society*. Vol. XXXVII. (Lansing, MI: Wynkoop Hallenbeck Crawford Co., 1912). 196-204.

found himself forced from his Ojibwa band, and into the American society of his birth, where his skin color—but not his culture—matched that of the people around him.[2]

In 1830, Tanner took up residence in Sault Ste. Marie, one of the northernmost towns of the Michigan Territory. Located between Lake Superior and Lake Huron, Sault Ste. Marie owed its origins to the fur trade. In the 1820s-1840s, the town remained a regional hub for Native peoples, white traders, and Métis inhabitants (individuals of combined Native and French or Anglo ancestry). Bereft of his family, and isolated because of his Anishinaabe cultural identity, Tanner became increasingly bitter and feared during his thirty years living among whites. Half a century after Tanner's disappearance, Sault Ste. Marie resident Angie Gilbert would recall Tanner for his peculiarly long hair and "spells of rage."[3]

Sault Ste. Marie's inhabitants had another reason to suspect John Tanner of the murder: his well-known enmity with James's brother, Henry Rowe Schoolcraft. Henry Schoolcraft arrived in Sault Ste. Marie in 1822, a newly-appointed Indian Agent working for the War Department of the United States. Schoolcraft sought to become a key actor in the story of "the Anglo-Saxon race occupying the sites of the Indian wigwams," transforming Native barbarism into Anglo civilization. For the next twenty years, Schoolcraft would live and work in the Michigan Territory, where he aided Americans' efforts to dispossess the Anishinaabeg of their lands, and to transform the Anishinaabeg into Christian farmers.[4]

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[2] John Tanner, *A Narrative of the Captivity and Adventures of John Tanner, during Thirty Years Residence Among the Indians in the Interior of North America*. Ed. Edwin James. (New-York: G. & C. & H. Carvill, 1830). "Anishinaabe" identifies the Anishinaabemowin-speaking peoples of the Great Lakes region, and includes the Ottawa and Ojibwa.
[3] Gilbert, "The Story of John Tanner," 198.
[4] Henry R. Schoolcraft, *Personal Memoirs of a Residence of Thirty Years with the Indian Tribes on the American Frontiers.* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo and Co., 1851), "story," viii.

A white man who chose to live as an Indian, John Tanner threatened Schoolcraft's teleological belief that a superior American civilization inevitably would conquer allegedly inferior Native societies. An advocate of American expansion and superiority, Schoolcraft had contributed to Tanner's alienation from the Anishinaabeg. Schoolcraft employed Tanner as an interpreter for "a short time," but soon decided that Tanner was "so inveterately savage that he could not tolerate civilization." Schoolcraft portrayed "the notorious John Tanner" as a "lawless vagabond." Schoolcraft lamented, "Every attempt to meliorate [Tanner's] manners and Indian notions, has failed."

Tanner found his own means of recording his "long Sufferings by the hand of Mr. Henry Schoolcraft." In 1837, Tanner appealed to President Martin Van Buren, accusing Schoolcraft of kidnapping his American wife and daughter from his house, and asking Van Buren to help him restore his family. Tanner opposed Schoolcraft's efforts to malign him and destroy his family, and sought to preserve control over his life.[5]

By 1846, Henry Schoolcraft had left the Michigan Territory, and taken up residence in Washington D.C, but his brother James remained at the Sault, employed as a sutler for the town's garrison. When James Schoolcraft died, and John Tanner disappeared, Tanner seemed a natural suspect. His well-known hatred of James's brother Henry, as well as his reputation as a vengeful savage, provided a plausible explanation for Schoolcraft's murder. As a marginal figure, rejected from American as well as Anishinaabe society, everyone mistrusted Tanner. Blaming him for the murder reaffirmed

[5] Schoolcraft, *Personal Memoirs*, "inveterately," 316; "notorious," 601. "long Suffering," John Tanner, Letter to Martin Van Buren, Nov. 10 1837. Reprinted in John T. Fierst, "Return to 'Civilization': John Tanner's Troubled Years at Sault Ste. Marie." *Minnesota History*, Vol. 50, No. 1 (Spring, 1986), pp. 23-36.

order and community boundaries. Guilty or innocent, Tanner likely knew that he would bear the blame, so he had to flee.[6]

Richard White has argued that, by the 1820s, Americans believed that Indians of the Great Lakes belonged to a "nearly vanished past." For the preceding two hundred years, the Great Lakes region had been a middle ground: a space of intercultural accommodation between Indians and European traders and officials. Yet the end of the War of 1812 solidified the once-porous boundaries between European and American empires, and the middle ground fractured. Accommodation gave way to opposition between American and Native societies, and all individuals faced a choice "between assimilation and otherness."

Classifying Indians' race, Americans located "red" people above blacks, but below whites, in an imagined racial hierarchy. Yet many white American reformers and policymakers, among them Henry Schoolcraft, believed that noble savages might assimilate into American society, through a combination of intermarriage with whites, and cultural indoctrination. Defining Indians' race as fluid, these Americans cited culture as the most significant difference between themselves and Natives. They argued that Natives should adopt American culture to assimilate into the United States.

Responding to Americans' colonial ambitions, Native peoples embraced binaries as well. The Anishinaabeg articulated a binary identity based on race, and cast themselves as a "red" people who opposed the settler colonialism of America's "whites."

[6] For Schoolcraft's travels, see Richard G. Bremer, *Indian Agent and Wilderness Scholar: The Life of Henry Rowe Schoolcraft.* (Mt. Pleasant, MI: Clarke Historical Library, Central Michigan University, 1987). It is also possible that the other murder suspect, Lieutenant Bryant Tilden, scapegoated Tanner for the murder, and possibly murdered Tanner himself. Joseph H. Steere suggests this theory in Steere, "Sketch of John Tanner."

Culturally Anishinaabe, yet identified by Natives and Americans alike as white, John Tanner had fit in the middle ground. When Native and settler cultures polarized, Tanner lived on, excluded by both the Ojibwa (for his light complexion) and Americans (for his Anishinaabe culture). His once-acceptable hybrid identity had become proscribed on both sides of the culturally hardened frontier.[7]

I use John Tanner and Henry Schoolcraft to examine the fracturing of the middle ground in the Great Lakes. I begin by establishing the hybridity of Native culture, by tracing John Tanner's journey from captive to kin among the Ojibwa, 1790-1818. Next I turn to Henry Schoolcraft and the Anishinaabeg, to examine the new, binary world that sustained rival but parallel visions for the region's future. Schoolcraft believed that Americans would conquer Native lands, and that Indians must assimilate into American culture or face extinction. The Anishinaabeg envisioned a future in which their society would endure and retain its integrity by rejecting the influence of whites. To that end, they framed a new identity for themselves as a unified race of "red people." Finally, I return to Tanner, to understand how he situated himself within this polarizing world.

As a more traditional Anishinaabe, Tanner believed that Native societies could survive and flourish. To do so, Tanner believed that Native peoples must separate from the corrosive influences of American society. But unlike the Anishinaabeg, Tanner did not predicate Native survival on racial exclusion. Instead, he based his exclusionary future on a traditional culture of inclusion. A man who had transformed from the son of

[7] Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815.* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), "Epilogue: Assimilation and otherness." "vanished," 519; "assimilation," 518. Native racial ideologies, see Nancy Shoemaker, "How Indians got to be Red." *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 102, No. 3 (June, 1997), pp. 625-644.

American settlers into an Ojibwa hunter, Tanner still believed that culture, rather than race, defined an individual's identity. Unfortunately for John Tanner, his argument fell on deaf ears. Just as his early life proved the vitality of the late eighteenth century middle ground, his tragic exclusion from both societies in his later years proved that conflict over Anishinaabe lands had destroyed his middle ground.

John Tanner, 1790-1818

In 1789, six Shawnee men captured nine-year-old John Tanner from his father's farm, near the Miami River in present-day Ohio. Tanner's captor, Manito-o-geehik, brought Tanner home to his wife to replace a dead son. Tanner recalled the first two years of his captivity with great bitterness. Underfed and badly clothed, Tanner was "treated with great harshness" by Manito-o-geezhik, who beat Tanner almost every day. Around 1791, Manito-o-geezhik brought Tanner the hat of his brother, and told Tanner that he "had killed all my father's family," and had brought the hat "that I might see he spoke the truth." During the 1810s, Tanner would learn that Manito-o-geezhik had lied, for Tanner's brother had escaped capture, in the process losing his hat. But for the moment, Manito-o-geezhik's story had the desired effect. Tanner believed himself cut off from his family, and "was, on that account, the less anxious to return" to Ohio.[8]

Shortly after forsaking his hopes of escape, Tanner took his first step toward kinship with the Anishinaabeg, a society composed of Ojibwa, Mississauga, and Ottawa peoples. In 1792, Manito-o-geezhik sold Tanner to his Ottawa kinswoman, Net-no-kwa, during a

[8] Multiple, contradictory accounts of Tanner's age exist; for this initial stage of my research, I rely on the Dictionary of Canadian Biography for Tanner's age and the date of his capture, as these dates seem appropriate for the details of Tanner's narrative. For Tanner's ill treatment, see Tanner, *Narrative of Captivity*, 32; murder of Tanner's American family, 34.

council with the British at Mackinac Island, a hub of diplomacy and trade located in Lake Huron. Net-no-kwa would become the most important and cherished person in Tanner's life. Under her guidance, Tanner would develop his identity as an Ojibwa hunter, and would come to expect full incorporation into Ojibwa society as kin, not captive.[9]

Net-no-kwa brought Tanner into Anishinaabe society. The Anishinaabeg spoke Anishinaabemowin languages of the Algonquian language family, and used nindoodemag, or kinship networks, as their primary form of social and political organization. Anishinaabe individuals inherited their nindoodem identities through their fathers, and signified their nindoodem through a pictograph, typically of a non-human animal. Kinship organized the Anishinaabeg world. Marriages and extended kinship connections built alliances and established networks of reciprocity that could benefit those who claimed membership. Those who lacked kinship ties were captives, and had no standing in Anishinaabeg societies independent of their captors. If spared a quick death, captives initially remained in a degraded position within their adoptive families, performing the work of women. At the discretion of their captors, women and children could transition from captive to kin, if they adopted their captors' language and culture, and learned skills crucial to their adoptive kin's survival. As he grew to adulthood, Tanner lost his command of English, and became an accomplished hunter. With Net-no-kwa's approval, he would come to adopt the Anishinaabeg's identity as his own.[10]

[9] Tanner, *Narrative of Captivity*, 36.
[10] For Anishinaabeg, see Michael Witgen, *An Infinity of Nations: How the Native New World Shaped Early North America.* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012). For nindoodem, see Heidi Bohaker, "*Nindoodemag:* The Significance of Algonquian Kinship Networks in the Eastern Great Lakes Region, 1600-1701." *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, Vol. 63, No. 1 (Jan. 2006), 23-52. For captivity and slavery in the eighteenth-century Great Lakes, see Brett Rushforth, *Bonds of Alliance: Indigenous & Atlantic Slaveries in New France*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

Tanner made the transition from white captive to Ojibwa hunter over the following decade, approximately 1792 to 1801. During the first years of Tanner's captivity with Net-no-kwa, she kept Tanner in a subordinate role. He cut wood, carried water and game, and "perform[ed] other services not commonly required of boys of my age," but rather required of women. Fearing that Tanner would escape, Net-no-kwa kept him away from white traders, leaving him with relatives when she traveled to Mackinac to trade. Yet Tanner described himself as "happy and content" with his new family, and he emphasized his familial affection for his adoptive parents. Taw-ge-we-ninne, Net-no-kwa's husband, hunted for his wife and children, though he "was but of secondary importance to the family," which Net-no-kwa managed. Tanner recalled Taw-ga-we-ninne with fondness, noting that he "always called me his son." But Tanner reserved his deepest affection for Net-no-kwa. The two developed a bond so strong that fur trader Daniel Harmon remarked on it after encountering them on the upper Assiniboine River in 1801, finding the pair "mutually as fond of each other, as if they were actually mother and son."[11]

Success in hunting granted Tanner a status close to kinship within Net-no-kwa's family. After Taw-ga-we-ninne and one of his sons died during a drunken brawl, their absence created a need for a new hunter to provide food and to trap for marketable pelts. As he "became more and more expert and successful in hunting and trapping," Tanner was "no longer required to do the work of the women about the lodge." His success in hunting exceeded that of Net-no-kwa's biological son, Wa-me-gon-a-biew, whom Net-no-kwa once mocked. Referring to Tanner, she told Wa-me-gon-a-biew that her "little

[11] Tanner, *Narrative of Captivity*, chores, "son," "secondary," 37. Daniel Williams Harmon, *A Journal of Voyages and Travels in the Interiour of North America…* (Andover: Flagg and Gould, 1820), 80.

son, who is much weaker and less experienced," procured the beaver skins that provided for the family.[12]

Other Anishinaabe also appear to have recognized Tanner as a member of Net-no-kwa's family, treating him as kin. When an individual committed a social infraction among the Anishinaabe, such as murder or property destruction, the perpetrator and his kin could expect an act of retribution that re-enacted the original crime. After Tanner had established his reputation as a successful hunter, other Anishinaabe held him to account for the misdeeds of Wa-me-gon-a-biew, his adoptive brother. Wa-me-gon-a-biew had killed his father-in-law's horse, so the family killed Tanner's horse in retribution.[13]

Kinship came with opportunities for alliance as well as revenge. Shortly after Tanner became a hunter, O-zhusk-koo-koon, a chief among the Metai, offered Net-no-kwa two of his granddaughters for marriage to Tanner. Tanner found both young woman attractive, and described the second as "one of the most desirable [wives] in the band." But Net-no-kwa refused both in turn, the first for reasons that Tanner did not explain, and the second because she feared that the woman was ill. Instead, Tanner courted another woman in his band, Mis-kwa-bun-o-kwa. Net-no-kwa approved of Tanner's interest in Mis-kwa-bun-o-kwa, and brought the young woman to her lodge, upon which she became Tanner's wife.[14]

By 1801, as Tanner began to participate in Anishinaabe society as kin, not captive, he rejected opportunities to rejoin European and American society. At a trading post on the Elk River, Tanner met "a gentleman" who "tried to persuade me to accompany him to England." Tanner declined, stating that he "felt attached to hunting, as

[12] Tanner, *Narrative of Captivity*, "expert," 40; "little son," 86.
[13] Tanner, *Narrative of Captivity*, retribution, 94.
[14] Tanner, *Narrative of Captivity*, "desirable," 116.

a business and an amusement." Trader Daniel Harmon remarked that Tanner "dislike[d] to hear people speak to him, respecting his white relations," spoke no English, and "in every respect except his colour…resembles the savages, with whom he resides." Brought into Anishinaabe society as a captive, Tanner had realized the transformative potential of establishing a position within Anishinaabe kinship networks.[15]

Kinship enabled Tanner to develop his own family. With Mis-kwa-bun-o-kwa, Tanner had at least four children. Two died of disease, but two others, Martha and James, survived to adulthood. At some point, likely around 1810, Mis-kwa-bun-o-kwa left Tanner, and he married another, unnamed Anishinaabe woman, with whom he had two daughters and a son. Tanner chose not to discuss the details of his contentious relationships with his wives, but their kin's hostility toward him contributed to Tanner's later loss of kinship standing with the Anishinaabeg.[16]

To validate his claim to belong among the Anishinaabe, Tanner stressed his formidable reputation as a hunter, as well as his generosity. When Mis-kwa-bun-o-kwa's relatives learned that Tanner "was a white man," they "supposed that I could not hunt." Tanner quickly proved them wrong. He provided Mis-kwa-bun-o-kwa's uncle with the skin of an elk so that he could make new moccasins, and over the coming weeks, gave "game to all my wife's relatives." By demonstrating his success and generosity as a hunter who could provide for his wife and her kin, Tanner undermined Mis-kwa-bun-o-

[15] Tanner, *Narrative of Captivity*, "England," 93; Harmon, *Journal of Voyages and Travels*, 80.
[16] Tanner, *Narrative of Captivity*. Context suggests that Martha and James were the children of Mis-kwa-bun-o-kwa, but I have not established this evidence definitively. Tanner's children likely had Anishinaabe names as well as their American names of Martha and James. Tanner also possessed two names; his first adoptive family named him Shaw-shaw-wa ne-be-sa, and he retained this name throughout his life among the Anishinaabeg. Martha and James would eventually join their father in American society, and likely acquired their American names at this time. Narrating his story for an American audience, John Tanner likely chose to use the names that would identify his children to the society in which they lived.

kwa's relatives' fears that she had made a worthless white man into kin. Tanner "soon heard no more of their ridicule."[17]

As Tanner's troubles with his wife's family indicate, some Anishinaabeg still questioned Tanner's claim to full kinship. The middle ground began to fracture during the 1810s, the decade when Tanner began to identify fully as Ojibwa. In the Upper Great Lakes, the potential profits of the fur trade brought divisive conflicts to Native communities, while traders' supplies of alcohol debilitated Native men and women, leaving them vulnerable to the predatory practices of fur traders. White settlers pressed into the Ohio Valley and then north toward the Great Lakes. After the War of 1812, Americans' claims to the land became more secure from British interference.[18]

In response, Nativist religious revivals began to sweep through the Great Lakes' Native communities during the 1810s, appearing among the Ojibwa, Ottawa, and Shawnee. Nativist religious revivals deployed appeals to tradition to make innovative claims. Among Tanner's band, messengers from a Shawnee prophet, perhaps Tenskwatawa, demanded that Indians light fires without flint and steel, the latter being a European trade good upon which Indians had come to depend. The same prophet forbid alcohol consumption in an effort to remove the most damaging of white traders' goods. He also banned violence against other Natives to foster unity among "red" peoples, so that they could better resist American attempts to conquer Indian lands. But after centuries of trade on the middle ground, the Anishinaabeg had incorporated alcohol,

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[17] Mis-kwa-bun-o-kwa's relatives, see Tanner, *Narrative of Captivity*, 133-134. For an example of Tanner's hunting stories, see Tanner, *Narrative of Captivity*, 131. Tanner told so many hunting stories that his Edwin James, chose to "omit many details hunting adventures," finding them redundant and uninteresting. For James's culling of hunting stories, see James, "Introductory Chapter," in Tanner, *Narrative of Captivity*, 5.
[18] White, *The Middle Ground*, Ch. 15, "The politics of benevolence." Traders' use of alcohol to secure furs at low prices, see Tanner, *Narrative of Captivity*, 266.

steel, and other trade goods, especially guns, into their societies. Asking Indians to abandon these goods, the prophet called for a new order among Indians, not a return to a past that any of them had known.[19]

Appeals to tradition made change seem like continuity, but John Tanner doubted the prophets and their messengers from his first contact with them. A white man who had become Anishinaabe, Tanner knew that prophets, by calling for a rejection of all white influence, called for a new world in which he might lose his place as kin.[20]

The prophet attached to Tanner's band, Ais-kaw-ba-wis, "prejudiced the Indians so much against" Tanner that he had to leave his community for several months, traveling west to the distant Red River to escape persecution. When Tanner returned to the Great Lakes, he found his former community had embraced Ais-kaw-ba-wis's preaching. A believer named Wa-bebe-nais-sa attempted to kill Tanner, calling him "a stranger," and stating that he had "no right among us." Around this same time, Net-no-kwa apparently died, although Tanner chose not to mention this devastating event when he later related his life story to Edwin James, a revealing omission of its painful importance to him. Without the protection of Net-no-kwa, and facing increasing hostility from the Ojibwa, Tanner left the Upper Great Lakes in 1818, and traveled south to seek his American family.[21]

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[19] For revivals, see White, *The Middle Ground*, and Gregory Evans Dowd, *A Spirited Resistance: The North American Indian Struggle for Unity, 1745-1815*. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

[20] Tanner, *Narrative of Captivity*, 158.

[21] Tanner, *Narrative of Captivity*, "prejudiced," 199; "a stranger," 232. When Tanner described his marriage to Mis-kwa-bun-o-kwa, he reflected on his relationship with Net-no-kwa, stating that "though Net-no-kwa was now decrepid [sic] and infirm, I felt the strongest regard for her, and continued to do so while she lived," indicating that Net-no-kwa died, and suggesting (through his description of Net-no-kwa as "decrepid [sic] and infirm") that her death occurred at some point proximate to Tanner's marriage.

Henry Schoolcraft

While John Tanner struggled to define his relationship to a changing Anishinaabe world, Henry Rowe Schoolcraft reinvented himself as an agent of westward American expansion. After a failed career in glass manufacturing, Schoolcraft traveled to Missouri in 1818 to investigate lead mines, hoping to secure future employment in the growing business of resource extraction in the West. His work attracted the attention of John Calhoun, then the Secretary of War, who appointed Schoolcraft as a mineralogist on an 1820 expedition led by Lewis Cass, Territorial Governor of Michigan, to locate the source of the Mississippi River. Schoolcraft's efforts to ingratiate himself to the political elite had succeeded, and in 1821, Calhoun appointed Schoolcraft an Indian Agent at the new military post of Sault Ste. Marie, near the northernmost boundary of the Michigan Territory on Lake Superior.[22]

Henry Schoolcraft sought to deny and erase the middle ground, as if it had never existed. Contradicting two hundred years of cultural interactions in the Great Lakes region, Schoolcraft perceived a "perpetual conflict between civilized and barbaric life," in which the wilderness of savage Indian hunters could never co-exist with the advancing agriculture and industry of settled Americans. Race made the conflict visible, with "red" men living in "Indian wigwams," while "white men" worked at "settling the wilderness." Operating from this binary vision of opposing worlds, Schoolcraft regarded his arrival in Sault Ste. Marie on July 6, 1822, as an overdue death-knell of Anishinaabeg autonomy. Disembarking at the Sault in the company of Colonel Hugh Brady and his soldiers, Schoolcraft imagined that Indians "viewing the spectacle" of the arriving American

[22] Schoolcraft, *Personal Memoirs*, Chapters IV-VI.

military garrison must have reflected that their "reign in the North-West, that old hive of Indian hostility, was done."[23]

Three days after his arrival in Sault Ste. Marie, Schoolcraft set about his appointed task: to facilitate American westward expansion. He called together leaders of the nindoodemag who had come to the Sault for the summer season, when Anishinaabeg gathered to fish and trade. Displaying American troops in full dress, and bearing an American flag, Schoolcraft believed that "everything was well arranged to have the best effect upon the minds of the Indians." Schoolcraft informed the assembled Anishinaabe "that respect was due me" as a representative of the "their great father the President." Although one man, Sassaba, "made use of some intemperate…expressions," which Schoolcraft's interpreter opted not to translate, Schoolcraft believed that the Anishnaabeg recognized that American power would compel them to submit.[24]

Conquest also required knowledge of Native culture. To acquire it, Henry Schoolcraft married the metis daughter of the most prominent family in Sault Ste. Marie, Jane Johnston. Her mother, Ozhaguscodaywayquay, also known as Susan Johnston, was the daughter of an Ojibwa chief, Waubojeeg. Ozhaguscodaywayquay had married an Irish trader, John Johnston, during the 1790s, and together the two had run a successful business in the fur trade. The War of 1812, and the decline of the fur trade, however, damaged the family fortunes. The family may have allied with Henry Schoolcraft to stabilize their influential position in Sault Ste. Marie as their half of the town came under American influence after 1815. In return, they offered Schoolcraft access into metis and Ojibwa cultures. All of their metis children spoke Ojibwa, and remained deeply rooted in

[23] Schoolcraft, *Personal Memoirs*, "red" and "white," vii; "perpetual conflict," v; "viewing, 90.
[24] Schoolcraft, *Personal Memoirs*, 97.

that culture. Henry's wife Jane spoke English as well, and acted as his interpreter of Ojibwa language and culture. Recognizing his good fortune, Henry remarked that he had "stumbled….on the only family in North West America who could, in Indian lore, have acted as my 'guide, philosopher, and friend.'"[25]

Schoolcraft saw Native peoples as remnants of a primitive, natural world that would soon belong to America's past. Approaching Sault Ste. Marie from Lake Huron, Schoolcraft wrote that the islands and waterways "looked so perfectly in the state of nature" that "it could not be told that the foot of man had ever trod" the landscape. When Schoolcraft spotted the occasional "feather-plumed Indian" canoeing on the lake, he categorized them with birds and trees, all of which "cast a kind of fairy spell" over the "perfect panorama" of untouched wilderness. In Schoolcraft's eyes, Indians lived on "the outer verge of civilization," beyond the progress sweeping the world around them. Schoolcraft believed that the Anishinaabe shared his understanding. When he arrived in Sault Ste. Marie, Schoolcraft supposed that the Indians dreaded Americans' arrival, as if it "boded some evil to their long supremacy in the land."[26]

Schoolcraft hoped to remake the region's forests and their "savage" people to promote American expansion. "The West" possessed "fertility and resources [which] must render it, at no distant day, the home of future millions." To increase the nation's productivity and population, settlers would clear forests, kill wild animals, and push Native peoples from the land. Schoolcraft believed himself the perfect man for the job. As a mineralogist, he could locate copper deposits and other valuable natural resources that Americans could extract from the Great Lakes. As an Indian Agent, he would

[25] Schoolcraft, *Personal Memoirs*, 107-108.
[26] Schoolcraft, *Personal Memoirs*, 90-92.

negotiate cessions of Native lands to provide American settlers with legal protection for their migrations. And as a self-styled ethnographer, Schoolcraft would collect and preserve knowledge of the Anishinaabe people, whose culture and society he believed would soon vanish from the land. In *The Middle Ground*, Richard White has argued that Americans in the early nineteenth century abandoned the centuries-old practice of intercultural exchange on the middle ground, and instead turned Indians into "object[s] of study." Through his ethnographies of the Anishinaabeg, Schoolcraft made himself a key actor in this process.[27]

In the first decade of the nineteenth century, Henry Schoolcraft had set out to make his career from facilitating American expansion. At first, he hoped to profit by selling manufactured glass to American consumers. When his business failed, he hoped to apply his training as a mineralogist in mining, where he could identify lead deposits that could provide a raw material for American economic growth. But he again faltered, and belatedly found his most promising career prospect in ethnography. Schoolcraft settled on a profession distant from the material process of manufacturing that he had pursued at the start. Yet with each step of his career, Schoolcraft made himself increasingly crucial to the expansion of American manufacturing that he had sought as a younger man. To exploit mineral deposits, American officials first needed to acquire Native knowledge of mineral deposits, river routes, and good fishing locations, and Native lands—the two most fundamental sources of potential wealth for the young nation.

Ethnography further profited Schoolcraft because it fed into an emerging American market for stories of Indians. By working as an ethnographer, Schoolcraft

[27] Schoolcraft, *Personal Memoirs*, 98-99. White, *The Middle Ground,"* object," 523.

reaped far greater rewards than he had as a glass manufacturer, or as a mineralogist. He laid the groundwork for these professions by acquiring Native knowledge of the land and its resources, and by negotiating treaties that brought this wealth into American hands.

In addition to his official duties negotiating with Indians as an Indian Agent, Schoolcraft aspired to become America's leading expert on the Anishinaabeg and the "Indian mind." During Sault Ste. Marie's brutal winters, when the town became barely accessible to the outside world, Schoolcraft patiently worked on a grammar of the Ojibwa language. He also wiled away the winters by gathering Ojibwa oral traditions from the Johnstons, which he labeled Indian "myths." These stories so caught Schoolcraft's fancy that he initiated a family literary magazine, in which he and the Johnstons published stories and poems based on Ojibwa traditions. And throughout his tenure as an Indian Agent, Schoolcraft made ethnographic notes on Anishinaabeg practices and beliefs about death, burial, healing, hunting, and whatever else happened to catch his eye.[28]

In his ethnographies, Schoolcraft interpreted Indians as unfit for the modern world. In one of his many works, Schoolcraft related a story of Potawatomi warriors who, upon receiving a certificate for thirty dollars for capturing a deserted American soldier, assessed the value of their prize by "reducing it to the standard of skins." Knowing that one dollar equaled five raccoon skins, they determined that their certificate was worth 150 raccoons. They then sold their certificate to a trader for the value of 150 skins. This careful calculation did not impress Schoolcraft. Rather than interpret the story as evidence that the Potawatomi sought to protect their interests and receive the full value of their goods from untrustworthy traders, Schoolcraft refused to accept that the Potawatomi

[28] For an example of Schoolcraft's haphazard ethnographic work see Schoolcraft, *Personal Memoirs.* See Schoolcraft, *Personal Memoirs* also for "Indian mind," 109; "myth," 109. Family literary magazine, *The literary voyager; or, Muzzeniegun*. Undated and unpublished.

used animal skins rather than American dollars to assess value. He took the story as damning proof that "The Indian mind appears to lack a mathematical element."[29]

Schoolcraft's ethnographic work enabled Americans to appropriate and romanticize Native culture. In the late nineteenth century, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow would use Schoolcraft's collection of Ojibwa oral traditions as the foundation of his immensely popular poem, "The Song of Hiawatha." Cornelius Matthews would rework the stories for consumption by children in *The Indian Fairy Book*, later printed as *The Enchanted Moccasins*.[30]

Schoolcraft thought that Anishinaabe survival depended on their conversion from superstitious, roaming savages to settled Christian farmers. As Anishinaabe lands within the United States shrank, the Anishinaabeg would lose their abilities to hunt game over vast expanses, and would need to turn to agriculture to survive. Settling Indians would bring the additional benefit of making them accessible to missionaries, who could transform "superstitious" religious beliefs into Christian ones. Biological assimilation through racial intermarriage would expedite Indians' cultural assimilation. Writing to his wife Jane, Henry informed her, "I think more of my children than I should, were they simply of unmixed blood," for their education and civility made them exemplary proof of Indians' potential for assimilation. Schoolcraft upheld his mission in his personal life, as well as in his profession. Once Americans had obliterated Anishinaabe culture, as well as deprived the Anishinaabe of their preferred means of sustenance, Schoolcraft's

[29] Schoolcraft, *Personal Memoirs*, 158.
[30] Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, "The Song of Hiawatha." (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1857). Cornelius Matthews, editor, *The Indian Fairy Book. From the original legends.* (New York: Mason Brothers, 1856). Cornelius Matthews, editor, *The Enchanted Moccasins and Other Legends of the American Indians*. (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1877).

ethnographies alone would remain as a memorial to a primitive people subsumed into American expansion, and as a trophy of that victory.[31]

Anishinaabeg

The Anishinaabeg had a different vision for their future: one in which they retained their culture and lands. As Schoolcraft made his initial forays into diplomacy and ethnography, Anishinaabeg men visited Schoolcraft to study him. A few weeks after Schoolcraft arrived in Sault Ste. Marie, Shingwalkonee crossed over from the British to the American side of the St. Mary's River with several men from the Crane band, "to see what the Chemoquemon [American] was about." The arrival of American military presence had attracted Shingwalkonee's attention. Schoolcraft guessed that the erection of Fort Brady had drawn Shingwalkonee to seek presents. Just as likely, Shingwalkonee and his men wanted to learn Americans' intentions for building the fort.[32]

Eager to gather information on Schoolcraft, the Anishinaabeg also worked to conceal knowledge of their lands from Americans. After a young Anishinaabe man, Wabish-ke-pe-nace, guided the 1820 Cass Expedition when it became lost, his nindoodem banished him for showing "the Americans their wealth," telling him that "the Great Spirit did not approve." The Expedition had sought to map the western Michigan Territory, and to gather information on the region's Indians, plants, and animals. After two hundred years of intercultural and economic exchange on the Great Lakes' middle ground, the Anishinaabeg understood that American newcomers had no intentions of

[31] Richard G. Bremer, *Indian Agent and Wilderness Scholar: The Life of Henry Rowe Schoolcraft*. (Mount Pleasant: Clarke Historical Library, Central Michigan University, 1987), 187; letter to Jane, May 27 1839, 219.
[32] Schoolcraft, *Personal Memoirs*, Shingwalkonee, 110.

continuing the region's long history of hybridity and accommodation. Americans meant to conquer and subsume. But the Anishinaabeg meant to retain their autonomy and their lands. Just as Henry Schoolcraft was seeking information to dispossess the Anishinaabeg, the Anishinaabeg were learning to become more secretive. This development contradicted the previous need for Europeans and Natives to understand one another on the middle ground.[33]

The Anishinaabeg had begun to use race to define themselves in new, exclusionary terms. Scholars have found evidence that Native peoples in the Southeast identified themselves as a "red" people by the early eighteenth century, before Europeans began to speak of Natives as "red." The language of redness defined Natives as a people, in terms intelligible to Europeans who self-identified as whites. In the early nineteenth century, the Anishinaabeg likewise adopted the language of race.[34]

Conceptions of race spread among the Anishinaabeg through nativist religious revivals. In the last decades of the eighteenth century, nativist prophets had emerged across the Ohio Valley, north to the Great Lakes, and east to Haudenosaunee lands. Between 1800 and 1810, prophets gained prominence in the Great Lakes. The Shawnee prophet Tenskwatawa and Ottawa prophet Trout urged Indians to withdraw from the fur trade, which had depleted game and distributed alcohol. Intercultural and economic exchange in the middle ground had yielded dangerous consequences for Native societies, and American settlers sought to take advantage of weakened Native peoples by taking their lands. Prophets used race to construct a unified red people who could oppose the

[33] Schoolcraft, *Personal Memoirs*, Wabish-ke-pe-nace, 110.
[34] Nancy Shoemaker, "How Indians got to be Red." *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 102, No. 3 (June, 1997), pp. 625-644. For an instance of Native uses of "red" to describe themselves in the early nineteenth century Ohio Valley and Great Lakes regions, see White, *The Middle Ground*, 501-502.

depredations of land-hungry whites. By uniting the Anishinaabe through religious revivals, prophets worked to protect Anishinaabe culture and lands.[35]

John Tanner, 1818-1846

The Anishinaabeg and American shift to exclusionary identities meant trouble for John Tanner, who still believed in the capacity of Anishinaabe culture to remake individuals into Anishinaabeg, without regard to race. His own life experience bore his argument out. Although born to American parents, Tanner had become culturally Anishinaabe. He spoke an Ottawa dialect of Anishinaabemowin, and by 1818 had lost his command of English. His hunting skills exceeded those of many other Anishinaabeg men, and he dressed and acted in accordance with Anishnaabe customs. Tanner also participated in traditional Anishinaabe religious practices. When game was scarce, Tanner turned to ritual medicine hunts, and in moments of distress, he prayed to the Great Spirit. Tanner chose to remain with the Anishinaabeg because, he said, "my attachments were among the Indians, and my home was in the Indian country."[36]

But when a Native prophet, Ais-kaw-ba-wis, rose to power among Tanner's band, Tanner no longer felt welcome. Tanner rejected Ais-kaw-ba-wis as a fraud, and Tanner "soon betrayed my want of credulity" to others in his band. He explained to other Indians that Ais-kaw-ba-wis was "a poor hunter" and a "rather insignificant person" who depended on other men to provide him with food. Through his self-professed identity as a prophet, Ais-kaw-ba-wis could acquire meat as tribute from skilled hunters, and become the head of the band despite his marked lack of requisite hunting skills for Anishinaabe

[35] White, *The Middle Ground,* Chapter 15, "The politics of benevolence."
[36] Tanner, *Narrative of Captivity,* "attachment," 227; medicine hunt, 174; Great Spirit, 273.

men. In retaliation for Tanner's dissent, Ais-kaw-ba-wis assembled Tanner's band, and informed Tanner that he had "turned aside from the right path," and that in punishment the Great Spirit would cut short Tanner's life.[37]

When Ais-kaw-ba-wis cast Tanner as a white man and an outsider, Tanner reversed the argument by claiming that he represented true Anishinaabe culture. Tanner faulted the "many…Indians who throw away and neglect their old people," while describing his own willingness to obey Net-no-kwa's advice even when she had become "decrepit and infirm." Again subsuming his own desires to cultural traditions and the common good, Tanner hunted for "the Indians [who] were hungry," even though he knew that Ais-kaw-ba-wis would portray Tanner's act as one of "deference" to the self-proclaimed prophet, and that Ais-kaw-ba-wis would claim that his ceremonial sacrifices had brought meat to the band. Tanner further accused Ais-kaw-ba-wis of being "a man who, once in his life, had eaten his own wife for hunger." The Anishinaabeg expected to face periodic starvation, and therefore held cannibalism in utmost disdain. Tanner reflected, "the Indians would…have killed [Ais-kaw-ba-wis] as one unwilling to live," had they known of Ais-kaw-ba-wis's alleged crime. By presenting Ais-kaw-ba-wis as a cannibal, Tanner contrasted himself and his nemesis in the most extreme terms possible. Tanner provided food for the Anishinaabeg even when others robbed him of the credit he deserved as a hunter, the ultimate mark of generosity. Ais-kaw-ba-wis, by contrast, was not only a poor hunter and a "great glutton" who lived off of others' generosity, but also a cannibal, willing to eat his kin to save himself.[38]

[37] Tanner, *Narrative of Captivity*, "poor hunter," 193. "soon betrayed," 194; "right path," 197.
[38] Tanner, *Narrative of Captivity*, "neglect," 117; "hungry," 195; cannibalism, 195; "glutton," 198.

Despite Tanner's effort to reverse Ais-kaw-ba-wis's paradigm, by casting Ais-kaw-ba-wis as the outsider, Tanner occupied the losing side of cultural change. The Anishinaabeg began to identify Tanner as "white," and called him a "Long Knife," the Anishinaabe name for Americans. Nativist revivals throughout the region, with their emerging ideology of race, enabled Ais-kaw-ba-wis to poison Tanner's community against him. Waw-bebe-nais-sa became especially incensed against Tanner. A poor hunter who had depended on Tanner for meat, Waw-bebe-nais-sa repeatedly tried to kill Tanner, at one point announcing his intention to "go and kill this white man." Tanner mocked Waw-bebe-nais-sa for lacking the courage to follow through with his threats, but Tanner feared for his family, so Tanner separated from his band. His fears proved well-founded, as the kin of Tanner's wife arranged for Waw-bebe-nais-sa to ambush Tanner and fracture his skull with a tomahawk. One man of another nindoodem, Oto-pun-ne-be, came to Tanner's aid, and informed Waw-bebe-nais-sa that Tanner was "as one of us," and "my brother." But the rest of Tanner's band disagreed. All abandoned him to Oto-pun-ne-be's care. Tanner's wife took their children and traveled away with Tanner's former kin.[39]

Cast out of Ojibwa kinship networks and into American society, Tanner struggled to make the transition into an unfamiliar culture. He decided to seek his American kin in Kentucky, but soon scorned American society for its lack of generosity.

En route to Kentucky, Tanner reached Detroit in 1818. Upon arriving, Tanner spoke no English, and he sought out Indians who could direct him to Governor Lewis

[39] Tanner, *Narrative of Captivity*, "Long Knife," 275; "white man," "persecutions," 233; "one of us," 237. At some point between c.1800 and 1818, Mis-kwa-bun-o-kwa, Tanner's first wife, left him, and he remarried an unnamed woman. Tanner is not forthcoming about his relationships. Currently, I suspect that the wife described here is Tanner's second wife, but this assessment is preliminary.

Cass's residence in the city. Cass helped to arrange Tanner's travels to Kentucky, but when Cass delayed the journey, Tanner grew impatient. Without waiting for Cass, he set out with nine Indians also traveling south to attend a council arranged by Cass at St. Mary's, on the Miami River. The men struggled to feed themselves as they passed through privately-owned farmland devoid of game. During a period of hunger, Tanner's companions urged him to ask American farmers, his "relations," if they would offer the men "any thing to eat," a practice that would have made sense among the Anishinaabeg. Tanner obliged, but the Americans promptly drove him away. Upon his empty-handed return, Tanner's companions laughed at him for falling for their practical joke. Americans privileged private ownership over generosity, individualism over community and kinship.[40]

From St. Mary's, Tanner continued South. Tanner reflected with bitterness that he "met with little sympathy or attention from the people among whom I passed." Americans drove him from their homes when he sought food, so Tanner suffered through hunger and sickness "alone." By contrast, Tanner valued "the custom of the Indians remote from the whites," to provide generous hospitality, without expecting repayment from their guests.[41]

Tanner's arrival in Kentucky caused a sensation. His relatives had long since abandoned any expectation of Tanner's reappearance, and they welcomed him home with great enthusiasm. During Tanner's absence, his father had died, and left no provision in his will for his kidnapped son. Tanner's siblings, and their neighbors and friends, donated money to Tanner to help him transition back into American life. Tanner's brother Edward

[40] Tanner, *Narrative of Captivity*, 240.
[41] Tanner, *Narrative of Captivity*," "little sympathy," 249.

"cut off" John's long hair, and clothed him in "the dress of a white man." But Tanner's three decades among the Anishinaabeg had changed him. His American kin discovered that their brother was "unable to speak" with them, "except through an interpreter." Repeated illnesses befell Tanner, and lowered his morale. After a few months in Kentucky, Tanner traveled north again to reunite with the children of his first marriage, Martha, James, and an unnamed third child. A fourth child died of measles shortly after Tanner reached them. Tanner brought his remaining children to live among his Kentucky relatives for four years, between 1819 and 1822.[42]

In 1822, Tanner decided that he was "not…content among my friends in Kentucky," so he traveled to north to Michigan. He hoped to reclaim the children of his second marriage from his wife, and to start a new life at Mackinac, where he could live on the periphery of Anishinaabe lands. In 1823, Tanner left Martha, James, and their sibling at Mackinac, and set off to the Red River to recover his remaining daughters.[43]

While his Anishinaabeg band rejected Tanner as kin, they continued to recognize Tanner's children as Anishinaabe through their mother. Indians at Red River warned Tanner that "those of the band with whom my children were" had "determined to kill me, if I should attempt to take my children from them." Just as excluding Tanner affirmed the Anishinaabeg's new, racially exclusive identity, so too did keeping Anishinaabeg children within their racial community preserve the integrity of the new Anishinnabeg society.[44]

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[42] Tanner, *Narrative of Captivity*, Tanner's return to his American relatives, 240; dress, hair, and language, 251-2.
[43] Tanner, *Narrative of Captivity*, "not…content," 261.
[44] Tanner, *Narrative of Captivity*, 267.

Tanner found his daughters, and began his return journey to Mackinac with them, but his estranged wife tagged along, for she refused to leave her children. At the Sturgeon River, en route to Rainy Lake, Tanner's wife arranged for a man, Ome-zhut-gwut-oons, to shoot Tanner, while she fled with their children. Badly wounded, Tanner nearly died, but traders found him and brought him to a trading post. The traders also detained his wife and children at the North West Company post on Rainy Lake. The night before Tanner planned to depart for Mackinac with a party of American geographers, he permitted his daughters to visit a metis woman at the traders' fort. His daughters never returned, and Tanner concluded that his wife's kin had kidnapped them, and brought them back to his former band.[45]

Tanner never regained custody of his daughters. William Keating, a geologist who witnessed the aftermath of the girls' disappearance, described Tanner's grief as "among the most heart-rending scenes which we have ever witnessed." Failing in subsequent efforts to recover his daughters, Tanner concluded his 1830 narrative with the hope that he might "make another effort to bring away my daughters," for he still believed that they wished to rejoin him. His remaining son, meanwhile, lived among the Anishinaabeg in the Upper Great Lakes, and was "attached to the life he has so long led as a hunter." Incorporated into kinship networks by birth, Tanner's unnamed son possessed the now-requisite maternal tie to the Anishinaabe. He achieved the full incorporation into Anishinaabe society that his father longed for but had been denied by the racialization of Anishinaabeg culture.[46]

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[45] Tanner, *Narrative of Captivity*, 267.

[46] William H. Keating, *Narrative of an Expedition to the Source of St. Peter's River, Lake Winnepeek, Lake of the Woods, &c. &c. Performed in the year 1823, by order of the Hon. J.C. Calhoun, Secretary of War, under the command of Stephen H. Long, Major U.S.T.E. Compiled from the notes of Major Long, Messrs.*

Forced to seek a place in the American society that he despised, Tanner relived aspects of his initial captivity among the Shawnee and Anishinaabe in the1820s. Based at Mackinac, Tanner resented working for the American Fur Company, whose traders he distrusted as cheats. As an Anishinaabe hunter, Tanner took pride in his ownership of the animals that he killed for meat and fur. As an employee of the American Fur Company, Tanner was "surprised" and "displeased" to learn that the muskrat skins he had prepared "did not belong to me." His employers also expected Tanner to transport rice and engage in "various other laborious employments" which Tanner performed "reluctantly." Among the Anishinaabeg, Tanner had valued his standing as a hunter who owned the animals that he killed. As a male Anishinaabe, he no longer performed the menial labor of women and slaves. The American Fur Company had assigned Tanner tasks as if he was a common American man. But Tanner interpreted his work from an Anishinaabe understanding of labor, and felt demeaned and powerless when obliged once again to perform women's work, and give the proceeds of his labor to others. In 1823, Tanner quit his job in frustration, and took up a position as an interpreter to Colonel Boyd, the federal Indian Agent posted at Mackinac. Tanner and his children remained at Mackinac until 1828, when Tanner became "dissatisfied with [Boyd's] treatment." In the summer of 1828, Tanner came up with a new strategy to regain control of his life in the United States. With the help of Dr. Edwin James, Tanner would record his life experiences in a published narrative.[47]

Edwin James sympathized with the grim plight of Native peoples in North America. In 1820, James had served as a geologist on the first Long Expedition to the

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Say, Keating, and Calhoun. Vol. II. (Philadelphia: H.C. Carey & I. Lea, 1824), 126. Tanner, *Narrative of Captivity*, 281.

[47] Tanner, *Narrative of Captivity*, "displeased," 263; "dissatisfied," 280.

Rocky Mountains. Tanner likely met James that year, when Tanner reported encountering members of the first Long Expedition in St. Louis. James opposed Indian removal policies, and criticized Europeans and Americans for causing the "rapid depression and deterioration of the Indians" through predatory trading and land dispossession. He hoped to save Indians from "speedy and utter extinction." In an ideal world, James thought that Americans should save Indians by allowing them to remain on their own lands, isolated from whites. But James doubted that Americans would agree to such a plan, as settlers' voracious appetite for land would undermine efforts to preserve Native territories. Instead, James proposed a "middle course" in which Americans would educate Indians, and transform them into "useful citizens of our republic." Assimilation could prevent the extinction of Indians as a race, at the price of extinguishing Native cultures. Because Tanner shared James's conviction that Native peoples had suffered from the presence of whites, James hoped that Tanner's narrative could bring attention to his reform agenda.[48]

Tanner may have told his story in bid for political patrons, or to make a profit. Tanner's story had served as currency for him before. Telling his story orally had gained Tanner donations from family and friends in Kentucky, as well as the support of powerful political patrons in the 1810s and early 1820s. Such patrons had included the Scottish Lord Selkirk, Michigan Territory Governor Lewis Cass, and Missouri's Territorial Governor, William Clark. Tanner apparently hoped that telling his story once more would again bring aid to him in his plight.[49]

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[48] Tanner, *Narrative of Captivity*, St. Louis, 260; James, "Introductory Chapter," in Tanner, *Narrative of Captivity*, "deterioration," 10, "speedy" 20; Indians' future, 18-19. Biography of Edwin James, see Maxine Benson, "Edwin James: Scientist, Linguist, Humanitarian." Dissertation: University of Colorado, 1968.
[49] Tanner, *Narrative of Captivity.*

In his *Narrative,* Tanner offered an alternative to Henry Schoolcraft's romantic depiction of Native life. Schoolcraft believed that Native societies were doomed, and that Native peoples must either convert to American "civilization" or perish. By contrast, in his *Narrative* Tanner presented the Native world as a set of vibrant societies with viable futures, threatened by American encroachment. Unlike Schoolcraft, Tanner neither scorned nor romanticized Anishinaabe ways of life. He recognized the "hardships" of life as a hunter, especially during harsh winters, but he accepted hardship as a matter of course.[50]

While Tanner disputed Schoolcraft's view of Native life, he also feared that Schoolcraft's future of American conquest might come to pass. Tanner believed that Natives should avoid contact with greedy Americans, for their contempt and alcohol rapidly eroded Native societies. Tanner noted that Indians who lived "near the settlements" had "learned to be like the whites, and to give only to those who can pay," weakening the bonds of generosity that held Native societies together. White traders further damaged Native societies by plying Indians with alcohol, to obtain furs at a lower price. Tanner described this practice as a "fraud and injustice" that led to poverty and violence. If Americans and Indians continued to interact, Tanner feared that Americans could dominate impoverished and weakened Natives.[51]

Tanner believed that the Anishinaabe could persist if they separated their culture from that of Americans, and restored their traditional kinship networks and ways of life. Yet after nearly three centuries of cultural interaction, the middle ground had transformed both European and Native societies, and neither could extract itself from mutual

[50] Tanner, *Narrative of Captivity*, "hardships," 253; "little sympathy," 249.
[51] Tanner, *Narrative of Captivity*, "be like the whites," 45; "fraud," 266.

influences. Some European men had adopted new identities as the husbands of Native wives, and produced new metis communities. For the Anishinaabeg, change had been even more profound. Guns and trade led the Anishinaabeg to adopt new strategies for survival, and enmeshed the Anishinaabeg in trade relationships to obtain new weapons and items of consumption. Guns required bullets and powder, while manufactured cloth supplemented skins and furs, and iron and steel provided new tools for cooking, building, and hunting. Tanner depended on guns to develop his identity as an Anishinaabe hunter. Seeking a "return" to a life before European trade, Tanner called for a radically new Anishinaabe way of life that neither he, nor other Anishinaabeg, were prepared to follow.[52]

Tanner's argument contains another deep irony, for Tanner was a product of the middle ground. To transform from the American son of settlers into an Anishinaabe hunter, Tanner needed overlap between American and Anishinaabe worlds, and tolerance of hybridity. He spent years living among the Anishinaabe as a captive, and only gradually and tenuously became kin. By desiring an end to intercultural connections, Tanner called for a world in which he could not have become Anishinaabe.

But in the newly bifurcating culture of the Great Lakes, Tanner knew that he could not argue for cultural overlap. By the 1820s, American settlers and officials pressured Anishinaabe to give up lands along the Great Lakes. Searching for methods to counteract American expansion, the Anishinaabe redefined themselves as a distinctive race opposed to the United States and its rapacious settlers. Locked in conflict over land,

[52] See White, *The Middle Ground*, for transformations caused by the creation of the middle ground. In *The Middle Ground,* White argues that Indians did not become dependent on trade, but the evidence of Tanner's narrative contradicts his argument.

both societies abandoned their willingness to permit intercultural accommodation. Tanner knew that he could not alter the opposition between Americans and the Anishinaabeg.

Accepting the conflict between the two societies, Tanner sought to salvage the situation for himself. If the Anishinaabe defined themselves through race, Tanner could not be Anishinaabe. If the Anishinaabe defined themselves through an exclusive culture, Tanner believed that he *could* claim an Anishinaabe identity—even if this exclusivity would preclude other Americans from becoming Anishinaabe in the future. Desperate to belong among his adoptive kin, Tanner emphasized his cultural claim to an Anishinaabe identity, and disclaimed his American origins. By arguing that Anishinaabe and American cultures were irreconcilable, Tanner left a space for himself to persist as an Anishinaabe hunter untainted by his white skin, and a generous provider to the truly needy. Unfortunately for Tanner, he described his past rather than his future.

By collaborating with James on his narrative, Tanner made money to help his children, Martha and James. In addition to earning $150 for the book, Tanner hoped to improve his judgmental American neighbors' understanding of the Anishinaabeg. Edwin James expected that Tanner's published account would "aid this unfortunate individual in addressing his countrymen," noting that many Americans had given "harsh" accounts of Tanner as a "solitary savage." But Tanner came see his *Narrative* as a great mistake. In 1846, Tanner told a traveler that he "would give ten thousand dollars, if I had it, if I had never had anything to do with it."[53]

[53] "aid," James, "Introductory Chapter," in Tanner, *Narrative of Captivity*, 4. $150, Dr. Chas. Lee, "The Residence of Tanner, Or the Indian Whiteman." *Dwight's American Magazine, and Family Newspaper: with numerous illustrative and ornamental wood engravings, for the diffusion of useful knowledge, and*

Americans at Sault Ste. Marie misinterpreted Tanner's narrative as an elaborate and self-serving pack of lies. Upon reading it, they branded Tanner as an "old eternal liar." I have not located sources indicating what aspect of Tanner's narrative generated skepticism in Sault Ste. Marie. Moreover, evidence suggests that Tanner accurately related many events in his narrative. As with any memoir, Tanner's narrative is complex. Tanner obscured emotionally painful facets of his story, in particular the death of Net-no-kwa and Tanner's estrangement from his wives. He also tailored his account to convey his belief that Anishinaabe society could and should persist, and that he should retain an honored place within it. Yet of the events that Tanner chose to address, additional accounts agree with Tanner's *Narrative*.[54]

Traders who had known Tanner during his time among the Anishinaabe spoke of his integrity, and corroborated his story on key points. Fur trader Daniel Harmon met Tanner and Net-no-kwa in 1801 on the upper Assiniboine River, west of Lake Winnipeg. Harmon reported that Tanner was "an excellent hunter," "resemble[d] the savages," and did not wish to rejoin his American relatives. Harmon also noted Tanner's close relationship with Net-no-kwa. Tanner claimed Anishinaabe identity in precisely these terms. Another account confirms that Tanner related accurate descriptions of events. In 1818, North West Company fur trader John Allan wrote a letter describing a conflict between Tanner and a company trader by the name of Wells. Tanner's account and Allan's letter agree on remarkably precise details. Both emphasized Tanner's strong

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moral and religious principles. Theodore Dwight, editor. Volume II. (New York: No. 112 Broadway, 1846), 388.

[54]"liar," Lee, "The Residence of Tanner," 388. "aid," James, "Introductory Chapter," in Tanner, *Narrative of Captivity*, 4. $150, Dr. Chas. Lee, "The Residence of Tanner, Or the Indian Whiteman." *Dwight's American Magazine, and Family Newspaper: with numerous illustrative and ornamental wood engravings, for the diffusion of useful knowledge, and moral and religious principles.* Theodore Dwight, editor. Volume II. (New York: No. 112 Broadway, 1846), 388.

sense of justice and pride, which Wells offended when he tried to threaten Tanner into selling his furs to the North West Company rather than permit Tanner to submit the furs as payment for a debt with the North West's rival, the Hudson Bay Company. Both also note that Tanner insulted Wells as a "woman" because Wells failed to carry through with his threat to shoot Tanner. All available evidence, then, suggests that Tanner related his *Narrative* accurately.[55]

Henry Schoolcraft, however, helped to discredit Tanner's narrative. He wrote that he did "not believe in the narrative," and made his view sufficiently known that some references to Tanner's *Narrative* included Schoolcraft's skeptical remarks. Unable to manage his present or improve his future, Tanner also lost control over his past once his narrative appeared in print. Schoolcraft had a stake in destroying Tanner's reputation, because Tanner's account of Anishinaabe life undermined Schoolcraft's pose as an Indian expert. At the same time, Schoolcraft eagerly took advantage of Tanner's knowledge and linguistic skills to aid Schoolcraft's work as an ethnographer and Indian Agent. When Tanner moved to Sault Ste. Marie in 1830, Schoolcraft had hired Tanner as an interpreter.[56]

That year marked a turn for the worse for John Tanner and the remnants of his family. Within months of Tanner's arrival in Sault Ste. Marie, the legislative council of

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[55]Harmon, *Journal of Voyages and Travels,* description of Tanner, 80. Keating, *Narrative of an Expedition,* John Allan letter, 125. Tanner's account of the North West Company incident, see Tanner, *Narrative of Captivity*, 181-186. It is also worth noting that prior to the 1846 murder, readers of Tanner's *Narrative* who lived outside of Sault Ste. Marie believed the account accurate. Alexis de Tocqueville wrote a reasonably accurate summary of Tanner's life and narrative (while also misinterpreting Tanner as a noble savage), and had Tanner's narrative translated into French and published. Dr. Lee, who visited Tanner to learn about Ojibwa uses of vegetables in June of 1846, a month before the murder, also believed Tanner's *Narrative*. Lee expressed shock when Tanner told him that everyone in Sault Ste. Marie believed the *Narrative* to be full of lies. See Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*. Translated by Henry Reeve. Fourth edition. (New York: J. & H.H. Langley, 1841), 377-378; Lee, "The Residence of Tanner," 388.

[56] Schoolcraft's opinion, Joseph Sabin, *A Dictionary of Books relating to America, from its discovery to the present time.* Vol. IX. (New York: J. Sabin & Sons, 1877).

the Michigan Territory ordered his daughter Martha removed from his house. The sheriff of Chippewa County took Martha to Mackinac, where she lived the rest of her life. Tanner married again, perhaps in 1831, but his third wife, alternately identified as a Native or white woman, left Tanner within a year, and took away Tanner's final child. Tanner's wife may have acted out of concern for her welfare. After years of mistreatment, first by the Shawnee and Anishinaabeg, and then by Americans, Tanner had developed a fierce temper. At times, in the words of Angie Gilbert, Tanner became "almost insane" with rage. Tanner also upheld Anishinaabe gender roles, as seen in his reluctance to perform the menial labor of Anishinaabeg women for the American Fur Company. Between his emotional instability and his Anishinaabe cultural expectations, Tanner alarmed his wife—especially if she was American by culture.[57]

Tanner's wife left him with the help (and perhaps at the insistence) of Henry Schoolcraft and other American officials at Sault Ste. Marie. Tanner blamed Schoolcraft for destroying his remaining family, and nurtured a deep, conspicuous, and enduring hatred of the man. In 1837, Tanner asked his daughter Martha to write to President Martin Van Buren. In that letter, Tanner accused Schoolcraft of mistreating him for the past seven years, and of taking away first his daughter, Martha, and then his wife and their child. Schoolcraft left the Michigan Territory altogether in 1842, but Tanner's bitterness persisted. Charles Lee met Tanner in 1846, and reported that the mere mention

[57] Removal of Tanner's children, Steere, "Sketch of John Tanner," 246. Steere notes that Martha Tanner appears to have remained on the island, attached to a mission, for the rest of her life. I do not yet know what happened to James Tanner, though in the 1850s James became a Unitarian missionary to the Anishinaabeg near Lake Winnipeg. See "James Tanner," *The Quarterly Journal of the American Unitarian Association.* Vol. 2. (Boston: The American Unitarian Association, 1855), 344-351. Tanner's third wife, Gilbert, "Story of John Tanner." Loss of Tanner's final child, John Tanner to Martin Van Buren, Nov. 10 1837. Tanner's third wife may have had the last name "Duncan," and Schoolcraft thought that she had worked at "Ben. Woodworth's hotel" in Detroit. Schoolcraft, *Personal Memoirs*, 601. Currently, I have no additional evidence with which to interpret her life, or that of Tanner's final child. Gilbert, "Story of John Tanner," 197, "almost insane."

of Schoolcraft's name sent Tanner into a rage, accusing Schoolcraft of taking away his wife, children, furniture, "every thing I had, and left me as you see me, without any thing."[58]

Four weeks after Lee met Tanner, someone murdered James Schoolcraft, and Tanner disappeared. Like most of the residents of Sault Ste. Marie, Lee blamed Tanner. His well-known hatred of James's brother Henry gave a plausible motive, and in the aftermath of the murder, local legend would recall that Tanner "had threatened to kill every one who had helped to get his wife away," and that Tanner had shot James because his primary target, Henry, had left the Sault.[59]

However, Lieutenant Bryant Tilden provided an alternative suspect, although Baptist missionary Abel Bingham discounted the possibility. At the scene of the murder, Bingham had found a page of his mission's hymn book, which the assassin had used as wadding in the gun. Bingham believed that "A United States soldier would not have [used] a leaf from a mission hymn book" for such a purpose. But the community also knew that Tilden "had had difficulty with Mr. James Schoolcraft," and local legend quoted Tilden as stating that "cold lead would fix" his troubles with James. During the Mexican-American War, the U.S. Army court martialed Tilden and charged him with the murder of James Schoolcraft. Tanner's daughter Martha blamed Tilden for the Schoolcraft murder, as, reportedly, did James Schoolcraft's wife, Anne Marie Johnston, the metis sister of Henry Schoolcraft's wife, Jane.[60]

[58] Loss of Tanner's child, John Tanner to Martin Van Buren, Nov. 10 1837. "without any thing," Lee, "The Residence of John Tanner," 388.
[59] Gilbert, "Story of John Tanner," 199.
[60] Gilbert, "Story of John Tanner," "hymn book," 201; "cold lead," 200.

Yet Tanner remained the popular culprit. Soldiers from Sault Ste. Marie's garrison scoured the town, led by Lieutenant Tilden. Their search stopped short of the woods, however, out of fear of Tanner. When Americans could keep an eye on him, Tanner had seemed eccentric and strange. Now that Tanner had vanished, he became a "bogie man" whose unknown whereabouts inspired terror. For years after the murder, Sault Ste. Marie would recall the "Tanner summer." "Whatever happened, John Tanner did it," one resident recalled. William Cullen Bryant remarked on the paranoid fear that pervaded the town when he visited that August. Rumors reported Tanner "skulking about," and locals blamed "old Tanner" for every unusual occurrence.[61]

Tanner's disappearance generated "a great many stories," but no satisfactory answers. In August of 1846, locals discovered a hollow in the woods where they believed Tanner had lived. A Native woman fled the forest in terror, convinced that she had seen Tanner camouflaged for hunting. In the following months, Indians reported seeing Tanner's campfire on the shores of Lake Superior, and heard him "singing Indian songs." Rumors floated in from the north that Tanner had returned to Hudson's Bay. Years later, a Frenchman found a skeleton and gun barrels in the woods near Sault Ste. Marie, but fire had erased any other clues as to the person's identity. Each story only added to the mystery of Tanner's fate.[62]

The residents of Sault Ste. Marie, like many Americans, wanted Indians to vanish. But when Tanner disappeared, they discovered that he had not vanished at all. Instead,

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[61] Steere, "Sketch of John Tanner," 249, for Tilden's involvement. "Tanner summer," see Gilbert, "Story of John Tanner," 200. "bogie man" and "skulking," William Cullen Bryant, *Letters of a Traveller, Or, Notes of Things Seen in Europe and America.* (New York: G.P. Putnam and Co., 1850, 285-286.

[62] Gilbert, "The Story of John Tanner," "many stories," 200. Bryant, *Letters of a Traveller*, camouflaged, 286. Steere, "Sketch of John Tanner," "Indian songs," Hudson's Bay, skeleton, 250.

his absence sparked more panic and interest than his marginal existence among Americans ever had.

When Americans imagined a future without Indians, they envisioned a process of removal carried out under American control. Most, like Henry Schoolcraft and Edwin James, hoped for assimilation. Under American tutelage, Indians would transform from nomadic savages into settled Christian farmers, who spoke English, forgot "their entire system of traditional feelings and opinions," and could then become "embodied with the whites." If Indians refused to assimilate, violence might still eradicate Native peoples from the land. In either case, Native peoples would transform, and Americans could look to Americanized or exterminated Native bodies to assure themselves that Indians no longer lurked in the woods.[63]

But Tanner left no body. During his known life, Tanner had blurred the clear boundaries between American and Anishinaabeg identities that both societies wanted to see. He embodied the potential for Americans to become Indians. Vanishing without a trace, Tanner loosed his hybridity into the unknown, and into Americans' fearful yet fascinated imaginations.

[63] James, "Introduction," in Tanner, *Narrative of Captivity*, "embodied," 21.