**The Middle Ground Era and Culture**

The “Era of the Middle Ground” was a very interesting period in the history of our country’s land. The clash of Native American and European cultures resulted in a plethora of unintended consequences and conflicts. The merging of the two cultures resulted in a constant power struggle. While both sought peace, there where clear signs that pointed toward efforts on the Europeans’ part to try and gain control over native groups like the Miami, although the native groups clearly acted in a similar manner. The Miami and other Native American groups who where in constant contact with the Europeans experienced noticeable cultural shifts. With the merging of the two peoples, many thoughts and ideas where identified by the natives and gave them ideas as to better express themselves to the European people. While these cultural shifts changed the way Indians worked and in some cases lived, they identified the need to keep their own alive. In order to keep their cultures alive the Indians did many things to preserve their core identities.

The “Era of the Middle Ground” is a term used to describe the merging of the European and Indian cultures, as well as almost a code of conduct, an appropriate way of treating each other. Throughout this period both sides tried to negotiate and have peaceful relations, thus resulting in a period of growth and benefits for both. Driving forces behind this relationship centered around Iroquois attacks on less powerful Indian tribes. With the French European alliances these tribes were able to survive these ruthless attacks. “This village world sustained, and in turn sustained by, the French empire.” (White 2).

During the Era of the Middle Ground the Miami Indians attempted to remain neutral in an ever evolving conflict between the British and Americans. Throughout the early part of this era, as stated previously, the Miami held exemplary trade relations between themselves and the French. However in the later part of this period starting around 1765, new leadership in the Miami tribe lent itself toward British interactions. The British however where having financial difficulties and because of this, and new sour British leaders, many Indian tribes rebelled against the British with the cautious Miami following suit a few years later. After two years of the Miami rebellion a new deputy commissioner of Indiana affairs was put into place. “In 1765 the Miami finally acquiesced to British authority, permitting George Croghan to travel from Bencennes to Detroit without interference. Croghan, who had always promoted trade with the “Twightwees,” was now promoted to deputy commissioner of Indian affairs” (Rafert 41). The new leadership acted to reinstate faith in the trading between the two groups, and even tried to prevent American leadership from crossing the Appalachians. The Miami had it better with the British and were often angered by the new American government and as such fought often with them or on their side. For example after an attack on one of the Miami’s villages, Kekionga, the Miami with Little Turtle’s leadership permanently removed the threat. “Little Turtle attacked the force, killing La Balme and thirty of his men and ending the threat. Little Turtle’s victory gave him the status of a leading war chief. He was to be a mojor force in Miami affairs for the next thirty years” (Rafert 44). After Maj. Gen. Cornwallis had surrendered to the American forces in 1781, the Miami continued to fight. Conflicting interests of the new American government kept war flowing and eventually lead to the defeat of the Miami at Fallen Timbers in 1794.

During this period many cultural changes occurred among the Native people. Most notable is the change that we see concerning the appropriation of village Chiefs. Before the cultural effects of the European nations started to emerge, most chiefs were appointed by vision or by ancestry. However by the early 1700’s, the culture of the Europeans began to take hold. Many village Chiefs began to be appointed by diplomatic power and abilities, allowing a better representation of the native Indians peoples.

The influence that the European nations had on the culture of the Indian tribes can be seen in the story of the Baron. While trying to secure peace among groups of Indian tribes, French commander Cadillac sought to introduce pro-French groups among the Ottawa. This would result in an end to peace among the Native groups. Baron in an attempt to stop the war parties held a meeting with Cadillac and tried to convince him to stop his actions though the use of a story. The story centers around an old man discovered who spoke a prophecy that was very much in line with the way European culture saw God. Baron presented the story as fact and afterwards presented Cadillac with a beaver in line with tradition, but was the gift was refused as Cadillac saw the story as completely false. “He had consciously tried to buttress the legitimacy of the old man’s message by filling it with fragments of Christian doctrine (the Trinity, exhortations to prayer, attentiveness to the missionaries) and with the commands to follow the will of Onotio, the French governor” (White 54). The interesting part of the story lies in the fact that the story Baron told was false. The story was told to appeal to the Europeans. He tried to use the European’s culture against him by using things such as prayer and the Trinity in his story. Had he been presenting this story to a group of Indians he would have used something like a dream or vision. Interestingly enough however, he mixed the story up a bit and introduced Indian aspects into his story like Scaffold burials and an 8th day of rest instead of the European 7th.

The “Era of the Middle Ground” was a not only a time of cultural identification, but also a period of war. The clash between the Native American and European cultures resulted in many strange occurrences and helped to define the beginnings of America’s history. The merging of cultures resulted in a constant power struggle between multiple groups of Indians, and later on with the occurrence of the American Revolution. While both sought peace, there where clear signs that pointed toward efforts on the Europeans’ part to try and gain control over native groups like the Miami, although the native groups clearly acted in a similar manner. The Miami and other Native American groups who where in constant contact with the Europeans experienced noticeable cultural shifts. With the merging of the two peoples, many thoughts and ideas where identified by the natives and gave them ideas as to better express themselves to the European people. While these cultural shifts changed the way Indians worked and in some cases lived, they identified the need to keep their own alive. In order to keep their cultures alive the Indians did many things to preserve their core identities.

**Bibliography**

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2. White, Richard. 1991. The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650–1815. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (Read pp. 1–93, on reserve)