Cultural Change and Resistance: 
Huron/Jesuit Relations in the Early-Mid Seventeenth Century

a senior honors thesis by

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Abstract

The Huron Confederacy was one of the many indigenous cultures of North America which was profoundly changed by European influence. The Hurons resisted some changes in the culture, but embraced many aspects of European economics. Despite resistance to religious and social change, the Hurons had lost much of their cultural identity by the onset of the Iroquois Beaver Wars. The relationships between the Hurons and Jesuit missionaries can be reconstructed from writings from the time period, including the Jesuit Relations. These relationships have been examined by later scholars to gain a better picture of the mechanisms of acculturation. This study will address the cultural changes the Hurons suffered in the early seventeenth century, and their reactions to those changes. In particular, it will focus on the role the Jesuit missionaries and French fur traders played in the changes to Huron culture, and the reactions of the Hurons to those changes.
Chapter 1: History and Historiography

Introduction

The field of ethnohistory is shared by historians and anthropologists. According to Axtell, ethnohistory is “the use of historical and ethnological methods to gain knowledge of the nature and causes of change in a culture defined by ethnological concepts and categories” (Axtell 1981:5). As a student of both history and anthropology, I feel that a study in ethnohistory represents the culmination of my undergraduate studies.

Changes in the cultures of the earliest inhabitants of North America have been well-documented, albeit usually by the very people who brought about the changes. This study will address the forces that caused the Huron Confederacy to suffer a dramatic cultural change in the early seventeenth century, and the Hurons’ reactions to those forces.

Historiography

Because the Hurons kept no written history, and much of their oral history was lost when their population was decimated, the writings of French explorers have proven very useful in reconstructing the Huron ethnography. The first French explorer in the Canadian area in the seventeenth century was Samuel de Champlain. He explored the St. Lawrence River and Great Lakes regions, areas already claimed for France by Jacques Cartier in the sixteenth century. Champlain carefully recorded his journeys for two reasons. He wanted to observe and record during his search for riches, so that if he were unsuccessful, others might follow. He also wished to note the inhabitants of the land, and some of their customs, so that he and others could make
trade alliances and proclaim Christianity to them.

Champlain was followed by fur traders and the Jesuit and Recollet missionaries who proselytized in the Great Lakes area from 1611 until the English takeover in 1629. The primary writer and recorder of this era was Gabriel Sagard-Theodat, a Recollet missionary. George Wrong, a scholar of Sagard’s works, got this impression from Sagard’s work:

“Devout Sagard fears that contact with civilization may corrupt the simple manners of the natives. Their society was socialistic in type. In misfortune they helped the distressed. Without money, for they had none, they were to him without the grasping selfishness of a capitalist society. They had no lawsuits. Compared with Europeans, each man was his own master. They lived hardy, natural lives, and had a fine physique” (Wrong xiii-xiv).

Sagard felt the semi-sedentary Hurons would be a good target for conversion. Their use of agriculture, despite the lack of European technology, indicated to Sagard that their culture was more developed than that of their neighbors. However, Sagard was also careful to note the “sins” of the Hurons, such as promiscuity, cruelty to prisoners, cannibalism, belief in false gods, and heathen rituals.

After the brief period of English control in 1629-1632, the Jesuits began their proselytizing in full force. One of the most important sources has been the Jesuit Relations, the faithful records kept by Jesuit missionaries of their successes and failures in converting the Native Americans to Christianity. The Jesuits noted conversions, those who resisted their teachings, and their martyrs. In the Relations, one can find hidden under European biases valuable ethnographic information on the Hurons, and many other Native American groups of the Great Lakes region. They also recorded the characteristics of the physical environment, as
well as happenings in the French settlements.

After the Beaver Wars\(^1\), the Hurons were scattered. Their history was passed on orally by the few survivors who were not adopted by the Iroquois. Later anthropologists used the recordings of explorers and the Huron oral history to reconstruct the culture of the Hurons, and their relationship to other groups in the area. Spurred on by the salvage anthropology promoted by Franz Boas (1858-1942), the anthropologists sought only to record what data they could find, leaving the task of processing and analyzing to the next generation. Boas, and his revolutionary idea that cultures should only be judged by their own standards, dominated the field of anthropology for the first three decades of the twentieth century, and nearly single-handedly trained an entire generation of anthropologists (Haviland 1997:709). For the anthropologists, the *Jesuit Relations* proved to be the most useful recordings, and were used very extensively in Elisabeth Tooker’s *An Ethnography of the Huron Indians*. Part of the Smithsonian Institution Bureau of American Ethnology, this ethnography was one of many attempts to reconstruct the past lifeways of the indigenous tribes of America. At the time it was written, 1964, it was a well-rounded piece of work. However, with the advent of Feminist Anthropology in the 1970s, a new interest grew among anthropologists in gender relations, a subject barely touched upon in Tooker’s ethnography.

The Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and the Counter Culture of the 1960s spurred a new interest in ethnic history in America. Data surrounding the Hurons and other Native American groups were reanalyzed by W. J. Eccles in *France in America*, and James Axtell in his many works, including *The European and the Indian: Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial*
North America, in the 1970s and 1980s. These writers sought to separate fact from myth in their writing, and inspired a new generation of writers, both historical and anthropological.

In 1992, the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus’ infamous voyage, a reexamination of the European role in the destruction and oppression of many Native American groups took place in many scholarly circles. Readers will notice that several of my sources are dated 1992 and later. The year 1992 marked a new interest in Native American/European relationships. Writers such as Carol Devens and Patricia Seed have produced works that look at the religious, political, social, and economic issues surrounding the history of colonialism and cultural contact. Devens’ work Countering Colonization: Native American Women and Great Lakes Missions, 1630-1900 looks at relationships between European missionaries and Native American women, and Patricia Seed’s work Ceremonies of Possession in Europe’s Conquest of the New World 1492-1640 examines the rationales used by the European colonial powers in justifying their conquests.

Ethnography

The Huron Confederacy, also known as the Wendot Confederacy, was once made up of several nations sharing a common language, yet maintaining slightly different traditions (Tooker 1964:9). The Hurons controlled the territory along the northeastern arm of Lake Huron, in modern day Canada. They were not isolated. Some trade relations existed with the Tobacco League and the Neutral League; however, the major trading partners were the Algonquins and the Iroquois. The Huron traded many objects, but especially corn, with the Algonquins, and
received mainly furs in return. The trade relations with the Iroquois were completely different, for the Huron and the Iroquois traded blows. Summer was the war season, and every summer the Huron and Iroquois would trade raids. Sometimes these raids resulted in the trade of persons, for both groups were in the habit of adopting captives into families to replace dead or captured kin (Tooker 1964:25-39) They also traded sacrifices, for captured warriors were sacrificed and eaten by both sides. Their semi-sedentary subsistence patterns included cultivation of corn, beans, and squash, and a seasonal migration pattern of hunting, gathering and fishing. They lived in villages consisting of longhouses, surrounded by wooden palisades so thick they required ladders to cross.

Village leaders were usually old, venerated men who gained their power through family ties or personal charisma. War chiefs were separate from peace chiefs, who were in charge of domestic issues (Tooker 1964). War chiefs met in council at the *otinontsiskiaj ondaon*, the “House of Cutting Off Heads,” to discuss what political scientists may call foreign relations. The peace chiefs met at the *endionrra ondaon*, the “House of Council,” where they discusses state affairs such as feasts, dances, and funerals. According to Tooker, “most of these chieftainships belonged to certain families, but there were certain chiefs whose influence was derived from their intellectual superiority, popularity, wealth, or other quality, or bravery” (1964:43). Because the Hurons were matrilineal, the lineage in family dominated chieftainships usually went from uncle to nephew.

In the Huron matrilineage, family or clan membership was determined by the mother’s membership. The mother’s brother, rather than the biological father, was responsible for the
emotional well-being of the child, and usually played a larger role in raising the children.\textsuperscript{2} The term for respect of one’s male elders was “my uncle,” and an elder would usually refer to someone younger than him as “my nephew” or “my niece” (Steckley 1992:500-501). The matrilineage of the Hurons posed a problem for the patrilineal Jesuits, as will be shown in the next chapter.

The Hurons had a definite gender division of labor. The women were responsible for running the village, organizing supplies, and gathering local resources for food and water. After the men cleared the fields of large trees, the women were largely responsible for tilling, planting the crops, and maintaining them until the harvest. When the men would kill an animal, the women were responsible for processing and distributing the meat and hides. The women were largely responsible for the care of younger children, although this duty was often passed to the elderly during the summer hunting and fishing season. Men on the other hand, were expected to train the older boys in the arts of hunting and warfare before they went on their vision quest. Men were also responsible for protection during raids, and were responsible for exacting retribution on their raiders. The men were generally responsible for important events and foreign relations, while the women were generally responsible for the day to day operations of the culture. There was a fundamental gender reciprocity, and neither men nor women saw themselves as having more status. Instead, status was assigned by age and exploits in hunting, farming, or warfare. Promiscuity was not frowned upon, monogamy was only expected in marriage; and divorce was easy and frequent (Devens 1992).

As for Huron spiritualism, the Hurons believed in the spirits of nature. Sky was the most
powerful spirit, “a power which controlled the seasons, held in check the winds and the waves of
the seas, and assisted them in time of need” (Tooker 1964:80-81). Another powerful spirit was
Thunder, which was portrayed as a bird. (Tooker 1964:82). They used the term oki to describe
the powerful spirits of nature (Tooker 1964:80-82). The spirits were oki, and the power they
controlled was oki. The Hurons called their shamans arendiowane, and they were considered to
be the best communicators with the spirits. The shamans were called oki, and they were said to
possess oki. Arendiowane often had the powers of weather control and prophecy, but their most
common power was healing. In particular, the arendiowane were called to heal those afflicted by
witchcraft (Tooker 1964:91-97).

The Hurons understood the difference between good and bad magic. Charms were good
magic and were protected and revered by their owners. They could be found, inherited, or given
as gifts. Charms were usually lucky, and were used in hunting, fishing and gambling. Sometimes the owner of a charm would even give a feast in its honor, especially if it was a very
lucky charm (Tooker 1964:120-122). Dreams and visions were seen as prophetic, or were
diagnostic of the deepest desires of the soul. Visions had to be played out, and any instructions
given in them had to be carried out exactly (Tooker 1964:86-91). The Huron were very
superstitious in regards to vision, often because of personal experience. One Huron man was
told in a vision not to allow a dog ceremony to be performed for him. Upon his conversion to
Christianity, he ignored the vision, feeling it was superstitious and meant nothing. Thus, he went
to a friend’s house, and allowed a dog ceremony to be performed. When he returned to his
home, his two children had taken ill (JR 21:161)
Spells could be used to bring rain or sunshine, and various rituals ensured success in love, hunting, or warfare. However, spells could also be used to cause harm. Bad spells were used by *oki ontatechiata*, “those who kill by spells” (JR 33:221). In one account, it was explained that the *oki ontatechiata* possessed the skin of the *angont*, a large monstrous mythological serpent. They would rub the spell, which would be some sort of small object, in this skin, which would then transport it into the victim’s body. The spell would then kill the victim unless it could be removed by the *arendiowane* in time (JR 33:217). Sometimes multiple spells would be used to confuse the *arendiowane*, even as many as ten or twenty (JR 33:201).

The *oki ontatechiata* were not accepted by the Hurons. An accusation of witchcraft was often tantamount to an instant death sentence. In one instance, an older man was accused of witchcraft, the evidence being that his accuser was dying and had seen the old man running around the village at night spitting fire. However, his son confronted the accusers, inviting them to take his life if they did not believe his father was innocent. The accusers let father and son live; however, they warned them that if any sign of witchcraft was seen, instant execution would result (JR 13:154-157).

Other accused witches were not so lucky. In the village of Ossassane, a woman was accused of witchcraft. On the pretext of holding a feast, her accusers invited her into one of the houses. When she arrived, her sentence was simply pronounced—she had no defense opportunity. She was struck in the face and burned all over her body, and finally her head was cut off by the executioner she had been forced to name at her sentencing. After her death, her body was burned in the middle of the village (JR 14:36). Witchcraft was a serious crime, one of
the few punishable by death among the Hurons. The Jesuits observed that “sans que pas un ose prendre leur cause en main, ou venger leur mort” (JR 33:217)—no one would defend an accused witch or avenge his or her death for fear of being associated with witchcraft.

The shamans who could cure disease by removing spells were highly regarded by the Hurons, who called them aretsan—shamans who cure by removing the spell (JR 17:213). They would extract spells through several different methods, such as giving an emetic, sucking the diseased part of the body, or making a mock incision (Tooker 1964:117). The method used depended on the object used to create the spell, and its placement in the victim’s body. In cases involving multiple spells, if the victim was not cured, the failure was blamed on a hidden spell not recovered (JR33:201). The arendiowane always required presents to exact their cures—if a cure failed, they often blamed it on a present not received. Thus, the shamans charged a fee for their services, much in the way that modern day doctors charge fees for their services.

The spiritual beliefs of the Hurons played an important role in their relations with the missionaries. The Jesuits in particular would use the strategy of relating Christianity in terms with which the Hurons could identify, using the current spiritual system and language of the Hurons. The Jesuits would live among the Hurons, observing their culture, although not always fully participating in it. They would make their activities as noticeable as possible, in hopes of gaining curious acolytes. Hurons, however, made the Jesuits and their activities a part of their spiritual system, in ways the Jesuits found inappropriate. Both of these strategies will be explored in the next chapter.
Missionary Activity in Nouvelle France

On July 24, 1534, Jacques Cartier planted a cross in North American soil, thus claiming the territory for France. After receiving permission from the local village elders to keep the cross in place, Cartier and France could claim official control over the territory. Thus, the symbol of Christianity became the French justification for taking control of the land, and foreshadowed the role Christianity would play in the French colonization of New France (Seed 1995:56). The French colonists wished to create a “Nouvelle France,” one which would contain the same (or better) religious, economic, social, and political institutions as did France. Therefore, it became important to send to Nouvelle France religious and economic leaders in the form of missionaries and traders.

In the early seventeenth century, a Catholic religious revival swept through France. According to Eccles, the three goals of this revival were “to combat heresy, raise the religious and moral tone of society, and convert the pagan in all parts of the world” (Eccles 1990:4). Thus, conversion was a necessary component of the colonization of Nouvelle France. Any native inhabitant of Nouvelle France who adopted Christianity would be given the full rights and privileges of French citizenship—if they so desired. Clearly, religion would play a major role in Nouvelle France society, as the conversion of the Canadian natives quickly became the top priority of many members of the Catholic community.

The first missions in Nouvelle France were made by the Jesuits and Recollets, both Catholic orders. In 1611, two Jesuit priests arrived to proselytize the Abnaki, but were captured by Virginians in 1613. From 1613 to 1625, the Recollets worked largely alone on the conversion
of the natives. In 1625, the Jesuits returned, only to be forced out in 1629 when the English captured Quebec and took over Nouvelle France (Devens 1992:9).

When the English left Canada in 1632, the Jesuits came in full force. They began the Jesuit Relations to garner support in France. The Jesuits were soon followed by the nuns of the Ursuline order, who came to form convents for both native and French women (Devens 1992:9). Following the advice of previous explorers and missionaries, the Jesuits quickly concentrated much of their effort on the Hurons. According to Eccles, “The Hurons, being a sedentary nation dependent largely on the raising of corn, beans, and squash, and on fishing for their food supply, offered a much better field for proselytization than did the nomadic, hunting Montagnais and Abenaquis on the lower St. Laurence” (Eccles 1990:43).

The advance of Christianity became intimately tied with the fur trade. According to Salisbury, all villages wishing to participate in the fur trade had to allow Jesuit missionaries to live in them (Salisbury 1992:503) “Accordingly, Huron traders who became Christians were given special treatment at French trading posts. They were separated from non-Christian Indians, accorded more honorable treatment, sold European goods at lower prices, and allowed to buy guns” (Salisbury 1992:503) The Hurons would quickly develop a dependence on the fur trade, as will be shown in later chapters.

The Hurons had already established trading rules and regulations before the French arrived in Huronia. The French and the Hurons had to compromise their respective rules of trade in order to create a working alliance. In order to gain an advantage, they admitted a threat to their spiritual system into their villages (traveling missionaries), or they moved to the French
enclaves, where the threat was more immediate (trading posts and missions). However, trade rules were not the only established rules in Huron society. Their daily lives had specific patterns, and specific crimes were punishable by death, in particular, murder, theft, and witchcraft. When the French arrived, they were careful to learn the trading rules and the religious system, but they were not careful to follow them, nor were they careful to learn the rest of the rules. Soon, the Jesuits found themselves accused of transgressions that they did not intentionally commit, and they would even argue did not even occur. In particular, as chapter three will reveal, the Jesuits were accused of practicing witchcraft.
Chapter Two: Cultural Change

The Missionary Strategy

The missionaries employed a rather personal strategy for conversion. They started by totally immersing themselves, although not always fully participating, in the culture of the Hurons. They lived among them, or they brought them to live with them. The Jesuits were more prone to live among the already established Huron villages, for the trade agreement allowed them access to these villages. It was not until some time later that they encouraged Hurons to move to the missions or trading posts so they could teach Christianity more effectively. The Ursulines, however, built convents to consolidate women and teach them Christianity, while the Huron women who lived there taught the Ursulines the language. Language was very important for both the Ursulines and Jesuits, for they needed to speak to the Hurons in terms they could understand. In fact, the Jesuits were so adept at mastering the language that they wrote texts in the Huron language called *De Religione* and *Instructions d'un infidel moribond*, designed to convert the Hurons and the Iroquois (Steckley 1992:479).

Once they learned the culture, the Jesuits began pointing out to the Hurons what was sin, and what was not. They frowned upon the sexual freedom of the Hurons, and began insisting that the men and women enter monogamous, everlasting marriages. They condemned the torture and cannibalism, although the actual warfare and death of captive warriors were not condemned (Steckley 1992:484). In fact, the Jesuits played on the ritual warfare complex of the Hurons to spread their message. The Christian deities and saints were equated to warriors, and the Hurons were instructed to behave themselves, or a great Christian warrior spirit would capture them and
torture them.

However, the Jesuits found it hard to instill the fear of Hell they hoped would entice the Hurons to convert. The Huron warriors had been trained from a young age to withstand pain, and that to be brave during torture would result in honor for oneself and one’s village. Some warriors actually looked forward to singing their death song in the fires of hell. The Jesuits had to convince the warriors that the fires of hell would not simply consume them, and that they would gain no honor by suffering them bravely (Steckley 1992:489-493). By the same token, they found it difficult to convince the Hurons that Heaven would be a much better place to go. The Hurons were unwilling to miss a chance to meet their ancestors in the Land of the Dead by going to Heaven, where they would not know anyone. The Jesuits used their love for their children to convince them to go, saying they would be unhappy in the Land of the Dead when their children were in Heaven (Steckley 1992:492-493). Finally, the Jesuits had to convince the Hurons that their dreams were not the commands of the spirit, as they believed. Although the Jesuits did believe in holy visions, they saw dreams as the desires of the body, which were to be denied and replaced with obedience to God (Irwin 1992). The Jesuits were never really able to convince the Hurons to ignore their dreams, and often dreams became a source of resistance, as the next chapter will reveal.

The Jesuits had difficulty in relating their patrilineal God to the matrilineage of the Hurons. They insisted on calling God “the Father,” when they might have gotten a better response if they had called Him “Mother’s Brother.” They also insisted on calling Huron elders “my brother” when addressed as “my nephew,” when the response “my uncle” would have been
a sign of respect. Perhaps the Jesuits were uncomfortable in using matrilineal terminology, or perhaps they were avoiding losing face to the elders (Steckley 1992:500-501). Patrilineal terminology was an integral part not just of the French culture, but of the Jesuit ideology. God was “the Father,” the Jesuits referred to superiors as “my father,” and addressed inferiors as “my son.” For the Jesuits, to be called “my nephew” was incomprehensible, and perhaps almost an insult. The use of the term “my brother” was actually a concession made by both sides (Steckley 1992).

Matrilineage and the gender reciprocity inherent in Huron culture were difficult concepts for the Jesuits to comprehend. The Jesuits had at first planned to concentrate on the Huron men, leaving the women to be taught by their new converts. This gender concentration was due in part by the fear of impropriety of a Jesuit inviting an indigenous woman into his residence. It was also in part due to a gender bias held by the Jesuits. Coming from a patriarchal, male-dominated culture, the Jesuits could not understand that the Huron women were, for the most part, equal to the men. They assumed that the men would teach the women, and they would simply obey the commands of the men, vastly underestimating the social power of elderly women. They also assumed that the women were emotional by nature, and would not be interested in religion. Finally, the perceived promiscuity of the Huron women biased the Jesuits against them, for the Jesuits believed that women should be sexual only towards their husbands, and remain faithful to them (Devens 1992:20-25).

It should be noted that the French were not the only European culture who had problems with gender reciprocity among indigenous groups. In Peru, the Spanish conquistadores found
themselves faced with a bilineal, parallel kinship system, in which women had political and social power equal to men in some cases. Among the Incas, female *curacas* held independent power over their villages, inheriting their power from their family. However, according to Spanish law, most women were considered minors, and could not inherit property. Also, the Incas had a sexual division of labor, similar to that of the Hurons. Incan women also had spiritual power, even more than the Hurons, in the form of *huacas* and worship of goddesses. As a *huaca*, a man or woman was considered powerful, and usually had healing capabilities, which the Spanish perceived as witchcraft. Some aspects of Incan religious life were somewhat similar to that of Spanish Catholics, such as the dedication of Incan virgins to gods and goddesses in temples, which the Spanish interpreted as nuns. However, the Spanish wished to make their religion the dominant religion of the Incas, and sought to do so in many disturbing ways, such as through forced conversions, burnings at the stake, and sexual abuse. They also sought to discredit Incan religion in anyway possible, by exposing healers and priests as frauds (Silverblatt 1987).

In order to make their religion the dominant religion of the Hurons, the Jesuits also had to discredit the existing religious authorities they found among the Hurons: the *arendiowane*. Before they could assert the authority of their God, they had to show that the *oki* were powerless before Him. They also had to convince the Hurons that the sort of witchcraft they believed in was nonsense compared to the miracles of God and the deceptions of Satan. The Jesuits were divided in their opinions of Huron spiritualism and witchcraft. Some felt Satan himself was in control of the land. Père François du Peron claimed that every action was dictated by the devil,
based on their reliance on dreams and visions (JR 15:176). He also claimed that there was a
diabolic religion involving abstaining from females and obeying everything the devil said,
perhaps referring to ceremonies undertaken by those wishing to become arendiowane (JR
15:180). Another priest entitled his relation “The reign of Satan in these lands, and the many
superstitions one finds introduced and established here” (JR 17:144).

In other cases, the Jesuits claimed the arendiowane were possessed by demons. One
shaman named Tonkhratacouan claimed he was oki--the Jesuit priests translated his words to say
he claimed he was a demon (JR 13:105). In another case, a woman named Angoutenc was
visited by a vision, which the Jesuits translated as “demon,” who gave her a set of red clothing
and a ceremony to perform (JR 17:165). “The Jesuits at first regarded the religious beliefs of all
the Indians as the work of Satan, and every setback was attributed to his efforts” (Eccles
1990:45).

Other Jesuits doubted the power of Satan over the Hurons. Père Paul Ragueneau said, “I
have not yet found any rational foundation to believe that there are any here who carry on this
trade of Hell” (JR 33:218). He felt that the Hurons were foolish to believe such objects as a tuft
of hair, a claw or fingernail, a pebble, or a piece of bone, leather, or other substance could
possibly have enough power to cause illness or death (JR 33:217-223).

However, Père Ragueneau’s European biases are clear in his logic. He claims that the
diseases the Hurons suffer from are “très naturelles et ordinaires” (JR 33:218), and should not
be attributed to witchcraft. However, these diseases were neither natural nor ordinary to the
Hurons, who had never encountered smallpox, measles, mumps, or tuberculosis before the arrival
of the French. Père Ragueneau also objects to the accusation and condemnation of innocents without any evidence except the rantings of sick persons--these innocents would be unable to defend themselves (JR 33:218-221). He fails to mention that in Europe, women were often punished as witches with only such evidence against them and little to no opportunity to defend themselves.6

The differing opinions of the Jesuits results from the fundamental Jesuit belief in the power and deception of Satan juxtaposed with the skepticism and caution in the seventeenth century regarding the accusation of demonic influence. Europe had just emerged from centuries of superstition and witchhunts, and they were not willing to start new hunts in their colonies as they tried to stop the witchhunts at home. However, most were convinced that the arendiowane and oki ontatechiata were all fraudulent, and that the devil was preying on the simple minds of the Hurons, rather than truly sending his demons to earth to wreak havoc. The devil was inhibiting their work through deception and fraud, rather than through true demonic activity (Goddard 1997).

Thus, the Jesuits concentrated much of their effort on discrediting the “charlatans” they found in Huronia. They discovered their slight of hand maneuvers, and either exposed them or copied them to prove they had the same power. They showed the powers of their technology, such as written words that could show one man another’s thoughts (Axtell 1987), or a magnet that could cause metal objects to spin and move (Goddard 1997:55). In 1637, Père LeJeune exposed the shaking-tent ceremony as a fraud (Goddard 1997:55). However, by discrediting the powers of the shamans, in the eyes of the Hurons, the Jesuits took on new powers, as will be seen
in the next chapter.

**Demographics**

Samuel de Champlain and the Jesuits both concurred that there were approximately 30,000 Hurons in the early seventeenth century (Tooker 1964:11). However, by 1640, there were only about 10,000 left alive—a sudden decrease of two-thirds (Tooker 1964:11). This sudden drop in population was largely due to the epidemics of smallpox, tuberculosis, influenza, and other highly contagious diseases. These diseases especially hit the elderly and the children. By wiping out the elderly, these diseases contributed to the loss of much of the Hurons’ cultural memory. By wiping out the next generation, the diseases left no one for the survivors to teach.

These diseases were most often in the form of epidemics, brought by trader and Jesuit carriers. Often whole villages were wiped out. The trading town were especially hard hit, for the traders were usually less careful with their health than the Jesuits. The Hurons were quick to notice that the diseases followed the French, but were careful not to accuse the traders, on whom they depended for goods. In one bourgade (small market town), the chief accused the Jesuit missionaries of witchcraft, rather than the traders, recognizing that the Jesuits had less value to the Hurons than the traders (JR 13:214).

**Trade Culture**

Although the Hurons were prone to resist the religious changes the Jesuits were trying to create, they did see the material advantages of the fur trade. Through a trade alliance with the
French, they gained some protection from their enemies and access to European technology. Despite the hard work of the Jesuits, I feel that it was the fur trade that led more converts to Christianity than anything else. The Huron traders quickly realized that being Christian gave them better access to goods, fairer prices, and access to the guns which could make trapping easier. The Hurons had already had an established trade network, and saw nothing wrong with extending it overseas. The traders and missionaries encouraged them to move closer to the trading posts, and they were asked to enter into Christian marriages with their wives.

However, the fur trade created vast social changes. The fundamental gender reciprocity was quickly eroded away, as the men traded furs for European food and goods. The role of women as providers and caretakers was switched to the processing of furs. Economic need and Jesuit influence resulted in a net gain of status for women, and the gender reciprocity was replaced by gender hierarchy (Devens 1992:29). The communal longhouse was replaced with the nuclear family, as the men and women were promised land if they entered into Christian marriages (Devens 1992:27-28). The introduction of alcohol and the stressful nature of the fur trade may have also resulted in the rise of domestic violence, a pattern rarely seen when the genders had been equal in status (Devens 1992:23).

The fur trade also resulted in the loss of the subsistence economy. Both men and women concentrated their efforts on the furs they were trapping and processing. The food, clothing, and tools they needed were received in exchange for the furs they brought to the trading post. Gradually, traditional industry declined, so that very few people still knew how to weave baskets, make projectile points, or create traditional clothing. The younger generation, raised in the fur
trade economy, found no advantage to learning traditional industries, so in many cases, the knowledge died with its bearers. The fur trade resulting in a vast change in material culture for the Hurons.

The cultural changes the Hurons endured can be placed in two categories by anthropologists: diffusion and acculturation. In diffusion, one culture borrows elements of another, and adopts them into the existing system (Haviland 1997:701). The Hurons, recognizing the economic advantages, willingly adopted the French fur trade and its related material culture into their own system. However, in acculturation, a major culture change is forced upon a group by a more dominant culture, using direct or indirect force (Haviland 1997:704). The Jesuits, once they had control over the Hurons at the trading posts and missions, often forced conversions. One young woman chose conversion over flogging after being sent to a Jesuit prison (Devens 1992:21).

In the face of vast social, demographic, and cultural changes, the Hurons found themselves losing power rapidly. As the population decreased rapidly, they found it harder to resist the Jesuits and traders. Women and arendiowane soon found themselves marginalized, and elders who remembered the lifeways before French influence were often unheard. However, the Hurons did not simply accept the sweeping cultural changes. Resistance to the cultural changes took many forms, as the next chapter will reveal.
Chapter 3: Reaction and Resistance

In general, the Hurons resisted the degradation of all they had previously held sacred in their world view. The Hurons found themselves resisting the idea of going to Heaven and leaving their previously departed ancestors in another place. Some Hurons had visions in which Heaven was actually a French realm where Hurons and other groups would be tortured by the fires the Jesuits had claimed was in Hell (Steckley 1992:493). However, in the face of vast cultural change, the two groups who stood to lose the most were women and shamans. Both groups found themselves losing status quickly. Although a few turned to Christianity as an escape, most resisted the cultural changes as best as they could.

There was a greater ratio of women to men in Huron society, which had not been a problem in the communal longhouses. However, as men turned to the monogamous, nuclear family in response to Christian fur trade pressure, the women found themselves in a difficult situation. According to Devens, “men’s acceptance of Christianity...removed the possibility of marriage for many women, consigning them to a life of social and economic uncertainty” (Devens 1992:27). With the potential for marriage reduced, some women found the Ursuline method acceptable. They entered the convent, living with their new sisters in harmony until capture by raiders. One of these women was Khionrea, baptized Thérèse. While at the convent, Khionrea learned to read and write French and Algonquin. When captured by the Iroquois and married to one of their warriors, she preached to them (Davis 1995).

The women found the easiest resistance strategy to be refusal to convert. This strategy
was especially employed by the older women, who clung fervently to the traditional ways.

Younger women, too, resisted conversion. One woman refused to convert despite her husband’s urging, saying “Dost thou not see that we are all dying since they told us to pray to God? Where are thy relatives? Where are mine? the most of them are dead; it is no longer a time to believe” (Devens 1992:23).

However, simply resisting conversion was not enough for the men who feared cultural change. Shamans and other leaders fed off of the fear of witchcraft to ward off Christianity. In the early seventeenth century, Samuel de Champlain explored the St. Lawrence River and Great Lakes region seeking military and trade alliances for the French. After a speech to the Hurons in which he tried to convince them to ally with the French, he realized quickly that his task would be difficult. The Huron leader Tessouat refuted his speech, accusing the French of inviting war, refusing to aid the Hurons, causing general discontent and of practicing witchcraft (Champlain 265).

This accusation was one of the first of many occasions on which the Hurons accused the French of practicing witchcraft. The most frequent target of accusations were the Jesuit missionaries in Nouvelle France. As the Jesuits noted, witchcraft and magic were an important aspect of Huron culture. The Jesuits felt that the Hurons were either very superstitious or possessed by the devil. On the other hand, the Hurons reacted to rapid demographic and cultural changes caused by disease and European influence by accusing the Jesuits of conspiring to destroy them through witchcraft.

More observant Hurons noticed that they did not suffer from the diseases until the Jesuits
came to their village (JR 19:90). One Jesuit observed that “On dit encore presque autant que
jamais que nous sommes la cause de la maladie” [They say more often than ever that we are the
cause of sickness] (JR 15:50). Some Hurons claimed that the Jesuits were raising the disease like
sheep, while others who had seen pictures of Hell claimed that the dragons and serpents they had
seen were used by the Jesuits to spread the diseases (JR 14:104). The strange objects the Jesuits
carried with them were suspect—bibles and other writings were avoided for fear of poisoning.
The Jesuit gestures such as kneeling or the sign of the cross were also suspect—the Hurons felt
these gestures were part of the spells (JR 18:40). It was also widely believed that the Jesuits
were poisoning water sources to afflict the people (JR 21:220). The Jesuits were accused of
being witches by those whom they considered to be either sorcerers or charlatans—a very strange
situation as compared to their European experiences. 8

The sacraments of baptism and extreme unction were suspect. “When the Indians noted
that baptism was closely followed by death, they were swift to attribute the loss of a member of
their family to the ministrations of the priest” (Eccles 1990:45). When the Jesuits would come to
baptize the sick, the door was often shut in their face (JR 21:218-221). Some Hurons felt that
baptism was the Jesuit cure for the diseases, while others felt it was the cause of the diseases (JR
19:166). In one case, a woman baptized as Anne caught a fever and died two days after her
baptism—a bad omen for the Jesuits (JR 15:104). The cross was also suspect, and in many cases
it was torn down to allow traditional cures to work unhindered. This action was especially
distressing for the Jesuits, for “to Frenchmen, the cross symbolized a religious alliance with the
natives, and reflected the latters’ desire to embrace their French religion” (Seed 1995:44). In one
case, the arendiowane Tehorenhagegnon claimed his spells for rain were not working because of a Jesuit cross. Luckily for the Jesuits, it rained before the village fell into an uproar (JR 10:35).

As time went on, the Hurons grew more and more hostile towards the Jesuits. Père François Joseph le Mercier found himself in a difficult situation in 1637. At a feast in the village in which he was working, a chief named Taretande threatened him. "Il avait dit que sans doute que nous étions la cause de la maladie, et que si quelqu'un de sa cabane venoit a mourir, il fendroit la tête au premier François qu'il trouveroit" [He had said that without a doubt that we (the French) were the cause of the sickness, and if anyone from his household came to die, he would split the head of the first Frenchman he found] (JR 13:214). Taretande did not stop there. After the feast, he and his brother Sononkhiaconc came to Pere Francois' cabin and continued to threaten him (JR 13:214).

In 1640, Père Hierosme Lalemant reported that the Jesuits were being persecuted. Their crosses were torn down with clubs and hatchets, or were burnt down (JR 19:183). He also reported that Père Jean de Brebeuf had been beaten in the village of St. Joseph for sorcery. He said, "C'est lui qui dans l'esprit de ces pauvres Sauvages passe toujours pour le plus grand sorcier des Français, et la source de toutes les misères qui ruiment le pays..." [It is he (Brebeuf) who in the minds of these poor savages passes always as the greatest French sorcerer and the source of all the miseries of the land] (JR 19:195).

In at least one instance, the Jesuits were lucky they became ill before anyone else, for their illness exonerated them and made them victims like the Hurons (JR 13:105). In another village suffering from a smallpox epidemic, the Jesuits feared for their lives, for, as one Jesuit
said, “On ne parle plus d’autre chose, on crie tout haut qu’il faut massacrer les Français” [They speak of nothing else, they cry constantly that they will massacre the French] (JR 19:90). In yet another village, “On ne parloit pas que de tuer et manger ces deux pauvres pères” [They spoke of nothing but killing and eating these two poor fathers] (JR 21:220). The Jesuits were now being subjected to the same sort of treatment that European priests had given to suspected witches in Europe not so long before the establishment of Nouvelle France.

In addition to their powers as inflicters of disease, the Jesuits had powers attributed to them which were also traditional powers of the arendiowane. In one case, a woman approached the Jesuits and asked if they could teach her how to kill the grasshoppers which plagued her corn crop (JR 14:104). In another case, Jesuits predicted the eclipses of the sun and moon, and were seen thereafter as prophets. However, the Hurons grew upset when the Jesuits could predict the future but could not change it as other arendiowane could (JR 17:118). Also, in the Huron belief system, if a witch caused a disease, he or she always had a cure for that disease. The Jesuits were confronted by the victims of epidemics, demanding a cure. When it became obvious that baptism was not the cure for smallpox, many Hurons became very upset.

The claims of the Hurons were corroborated by neighboring tribes. In the Tobacco League, a man grew ill and summoned a shaman to perform a curing ceremony. During the ceremony, the man vomited up a lead pellet. They immediately concluded that the French must have been the cause of the illness.9 The Montagnais were also suspicious of the French (JR 12:7) The Algonquins on more than one occasion told the Hurons that the French were the cause of the epidemics. They claimed that “d’eux étoit provenue la contagion de l’année passée” [they had
brought last year’s sickness] (JR 10:35) in 1636. Other Algonquins claimed that a French woman had brought disease to the land. However, because of the constant contact with Native American groups, the Jesuits seemed the most suspicious to them and were the most often accused.

The easiest way for the Hurons to resist the pressure of conversion would have been to simply not convert. However, taken in the context of the changing economy of Nouvelle France, the Hurons had to compromise their spiritual values to gain economic advantages. Those groups not gaining an advantage--women and shamans--resisted much more vehemently to changes that offered them nothing but a loss of status and an uncertain future. This resistance was shared by other groups facing many of the same changes as the Hurons, such as the Incas.

Among the Incas, the women and shamans also had the most to lose. Their resistance took several forms. Some brave souls refused to convert, and were often subjected to corporal punishment for their refusal. Other Incas, especially women, fled to the Puna, a wasteland controlled by the Incas in which the Spanish had no interest. Here, in relative freedom, the Incas continued what aspects of their traditional religious system they could. Other Incas remained in the Spanish controlled areas, where they continued an underground religious system. In a classic case of diffusion and acculturation, the Incas, who had previously held goddesses very high in their spiritual system, began a cult of the Virgin in worship of Mary, mother of Jesus. This cult of Mary was, and still is, present in many other South American countries (Silverblatt 1987).

After such sweeping and rapid changes, those who chose to resist felt they had nothing left to lose. Some chose to compromise, adopting aspects of Catholicism into their lives that
complemented their own beliefs. Others chose to reject Catholicism completely, sometimes violently. However, the dependence on trade with Europe that the Hurons had developed, as well as the declining population, gave the Jesuits an advantage. The Jesuits were able to baptize many dying Hurons, thus saving their souls even if they were not truly converted. The Ursulines were able to attract women into convents, where they found safety from the uncertainty of their new status. However, the Jesuits were still largely unsuccessful in converting large segments of the Huron population. By the time they had begun making progress, the Iroquois had begun their attacks on the Huron in search of new hunting grounds and a trade monopoly.
Conclusions

During the Early Modern Period in Europe, witchcraft accusations brought fear and panic to many European communities. The laity looked to their religious leaders whenever possible to purge witches from society. However, in Nouvelle France, the Jesuits found a new situation: They were no longer the religious leaders. Those Hurons who would not be converted often turned to their own chiefs and shamans for answers as epidemics spread, rather than to the Jesuits. The epidemics were very difficult for the Hurons. The spread of disease affected more than just the Huron population—the psychological and cultural impacts were tremendous. The Hurons needed a cause for the disease, something to blame—or someone. The Jesuits were quite accurately accused of bringing disease with them to America, although not through viruses and bacteria. The Jesuits were accused by the Hurons of practicing witchcraft.

It should not have seemed surprising to the Jesuits that the Huron regarded them with suspicion. The culture shock on both sides must have been tremendous. Perhaps there was a sort of self-righteousness on the part of the Jesuits, and they could not imagine that they could be accused of such a heinous sin. However, in the midst of such a devastating population loss, the Hurons needed an explanation. Just as the Europeans had blamed witchcraft for their woes, the Hurons blamed witchcraft for their illness. In this way, the Hurons reacted to a terrible situation in the same way the Europeans had reacted to social crises in Europe such as the Black Plague and the Reformation (Barstow 1994). They needed a scapegoat, and the Jesuits seemed to be the likely cause of the problem. In all reality, the French presence was a large part of the problem, but not through the means the Hurons believed. The French did bring disease to the Hurons, but
through natural causes, not intentional, malicious witchcraft.

The French also brought about vast cultural changes. These changes profoundly affected the women of the Hurons. Many found themselves beaten and ostracized as their villages accepted Christianity. Their only hope was to enter a convent or find another village. The equal status they once held with the men was now challenged by the French Catholic hierarchical system, and they lacked the power and resources to combat it. They felt the prejudice of the French, who assumed they were weak and unable to comprehend the mysteries of God. Older women, who were used to the respect given to them as wise clan mothers and healers, resisted the French disrespect.

Previously, there was not a gender bias in witchcraft accusations in Huronia. Those Hurons accused by their own people were usually of lower status, perceived by their peers as marginal. The Hurons' reliance on dreams and visions also affected witchcraft accusations, as well as personal biases of the arendiowane. The French presence changed the accusation pattern. The Jesuits accused the arendiowane and women of transgressions ranging from being deceived by to actually consorting with Satan and his minions. The Hurons accused the Jesuits of bringing disease, and not having the cure for it, a transgression punishable among the Huron by death. Had the Jesuits come alone, and had they not been tied to the fur trade, they might have faced a population decline of their own.

The fur trade resulted in the loss of tradition and material culture from Huron society. These aspects were replaced by French goods and Christianity in some cases, or by the traditions and culture of other native groups. The Iroquois adopted many Hurons through both kindness
and force, allowing them to retain some of their traditions as long as they did not cause trouble. In fact, it was the Iroquois who dealt the final blow. In their quest to gain a monopoly on the fur trade, the Iroquois attacked the Hurons and other groups of the Great Lakes region, adopting many and forcing the survivors to move to the Wisconsin area. The decimated and psychologically exhausted Hurons had no chance. The Iroquois even offered them a chance to join their confederacy, but the Hurons were destroyed before their more traditionalist faction had a chance to break the French alliance (Salisbury 1992:506). During these “Beaver Wars,” the Jesuits used the opportunity to baptize the dying Hurons as a last ditch effort to save their souls. According to Salisbury, the Christian faction of the Hurons rose from approximately 15 percent to one half of the population by 1649 (1992:506).

Anthropologists believe that cultural change is inevitable. No culture remains truly static over time; change will occur as environments, demographics, and technology change. However, for the Hurons, the change came too fast for them to adapt. Rapid demographic and social changes, coupled with the military attacks of the Iroquois and the spiritual attacks of the Jesuits, resulted in the near extinction of Huron culture. If not for the few surviving traditionalists who escaped to Detroit, the Huron culture might have gone extinct, known only to textbooks. Instead, new versions of the Huron traditions are still practiced on reserves in the Great Lakes region today. The surviving Hurons entered into an alliance with other refugees in Wisconsin, forming the Wyandot Confederacy. This alliance, a result of the Beaver Wars, caused a sharing and blending of cultures, many aspects of which can be found today among modern Native American descendants in the Great Lakes region.
Endnotes

1. The Beaver Wars were a series of attacks on Great Lakes tribes from about 1845-1860. They were led by the Iroquois, who sought to gain a monopoly on the fur trade with Europe by eliminating their competition.

2. This is not to say that the father in the relationship had it easy. He was busy raising his own nieces and nephews.

3. A dog ceremony is an elaborate ceremony involving the sacrifice and consumption of a dog. It is often used to cure sickness or as a general wish of good fortune (Tooker 1964:93-94).

4. In some instances, the aretsan had to get creative. In one case, sand was the object used as a spell. The aretsan shook the victim, and sand poured out from him (JR 10:197).

5. In July 1629, Champlain surrendered to Lewis and Thomas Kirke, members of the Kirke family who were the primary English conquerors. However, the Treaty of Saint-Germain-en-Laye of 1632 gave the territory controlled by England back to the French. This treaty was signed by Louis XIII and Charles I, as part of the peace arranged between France and England in 1629. This peace was actually arranged in April of 1629, three months before the surrender of Quebec (Eccles 29-30).


7. Unfortunately, greater access to European traders and their goods also meant more exposure to European diseases.

8. One of these charlatans was Tonneroaouanone, who was selling an antidote to European diseases in Ossassane. He claimed the Jesuits were the cause of the epidemics (JR 13:211).

9. (JR 15:21) Although this occurrence may have been slight of hand, it is possible that the man had been shot with a lead pellet, thus making the French the cause of the malady through means other than witchcraft.
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