Cayuga Iroquois Households and Gender Relations During the Contact Period: An Investigation of the Rogers Farm Site, 1660s-1680s

Williams-Shuker, Kimberly Louise (2005) Cayuga Iroquois Households and Gender Relations During the Contact Period: An Investigation of the Rogers Farm Site, 1660s-1680s. Doctoral Dissertation, University of Pittsburgh. (Unpublished)

Abstract

The impact of the European presence in Iroquoian lands began to be strongly felt during the seventeenth century. The spread of epidemics, the participation of Iroquoian groups in the fur trade and the emerging world capitalist market, and the conversion of Natives to Christianity were among the numerous ramifications of Iroquois-European interaction during this period of nascent globalization. The goal of the dissertation is to investigate the extent to which traditional household-level patterns of social structure and economic organization changed or endured in the face of European contact, as well as how these processes impacted Iroquois gender relations and roles. The research project involved archaeological investigations of the Rogers Farm site, a Cayuga Iroquois village near Savannah, New York, dating from the 1660s to the 1680s. By the time of the site's occupation, the Iroquois had already experienced close to a century of interaction with Europeans. In addition, the village was the site of the Jesuit mission of St. René. The archaeological evidence recovered from Rogers Farm revealed both change and persistence in traditional household organization and domestic activities. Primary findings include: (1) a decrease in household size; (2) a decline in the importance of matrilineality and matrilocality in determining household membership; and (3) changes in household production and consumption of durable goods; but (4) continuity in household distribution of food resources. Although households contracted and were differently defined, they continued to operate cooperatively and carried out many of the same functions as prior to the Contact period. Members of the community took part in exchange with Europeans and incorporated new objects into their inventory of material culture, but the local-level economy remained based on reciprocal obligations. Lastly, neither the men nor the women of Rogers Farm were able to escape the consequences of the encroaching European presence in their lands. Men and women exercised different patterns in the selective adoption of European goods and in maintaining traditional technologies and productive activities. Although they experienced the effects of European interaction differently in their daily lives, they continued to play complementary roles in the newly reorganized economic endeavors of the period.

Share

Citation/Export: Select format...

Social Networking: Share Facebook Google Twitter

Details

Item Type: University of Pittsburgh ETD
Status: Unpublished
Creators/Authors: Williams-Shuker, Kimberly Louise
Email: klws25@pitt.edu
Pitt Username: KLWST25

ETD Committee: Title Member Email Address Pitt Username ORCID
Iroquois made peace with the French and established themselves in a neutral position between the French and the English. They also instructed them in modern farming methods and encouraged men to work on the farms, which represented a major cultural shift. A respected Seneca warrior named Gaiantwaka, known as The Complanter, helped bring about this change, as did his half brother, Ganiodayo (Handsome Lake). The contract farming system should be seen as a partnership between agribusiness and farmers. To be successful it requires a long-term commitment from both parties. Exploitative arrangements by managers are likely to have only a limited duration and can jeopardize agribusiness investments. Critics of contract farming tend to emphasize the inequality of the relationship and the stronger position of sponsors with respect to that of growers. Contract farming is viewed as essentially benefiting sponsors by enabling them to obtain cheap labour and to transfer risks to growers. However, this view contrasts with the increasing attention that contract farming is receiving in many countries, as evidence indicates that it represents a way of reducing uncertainty for both parties.