

Slavery, the Fox Wars, and the Limits of Alliance
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To make peace, it is necessary to begin by restoring to the [Fox] all the slaves of their nation whom the French hold ... It is [unnatural] to think that peace can be made with people whose children we are withholding.

—Philippe de Rigaud de Vaudreuil, governor of New France, 17161

ON the bitterly cold evening of December 13, 1723, Jean Becquet, maître d' hôtel, or master of the house, at the governor's residence, called for Father Étienne Boullard. When Boullard arrived, he found an ailing Indian woman called Marguerite-Geneviève, whom he promptly baptized. Returning to his small residence at the seminary, the priest recorded what he had learned about the woman during his visit. She was thirty-five years old. She had a fourteen-year-old daughter called Marie-Louise, whom he also baptized. She was a Fox Indian. And she was a slave: "captured in Fox territory by the Marquis de Vaudreuil," the governor of New France, "with whom she presently resides."

Only two months earlier, Vaudreuil had written a letter to France congratulating himself on successful peace negotiations with Marguerite-Geneviève's people in an ongoing conflict historians call the Fox Wars. Pitting New France's Indian allies against a coalition of Fox, Sauk, Kickapoo, and Winnebago, this series of clashes claimed thousands of lives and destabilized the Upper Country (or pays d'en haut) for the better part of thirty years. Charged with maintaining the region's Indian alliances, Vaudreuil proudly announced that he had thwarted recent plans by his native allies to attack Fox villages by sending a well-respected French officer to the region "to Persuade them to be Reconciled and to Live in peace."³ As he had done many times before, Vaudreuil pressured Upper Country Indians to embrace the Fox as allies rather than enemies, seeking greater regional stability to facilitate French commercial and territorial expansion.

To avoid difficult questions, Governor Vaudreuil never mentioned to his French superiors that his household, like scores of others in New France, was served by Fox slaves who had been captured in the very attacks he claimed to oppose. For the previous ten years, these slaves had trickled into Canada as allied Indians attacked Fox villages, making Fox men, women, and children the primary source of enslaved labor in the Saint Lawrence River valley during the 1710s and 1720s. Because these slaves do not appear in the official reports that have informed earlier studies, their lives have been noted, if acknowledged at all, as interesting but insignificant side notes to the story of French-Indian diplomacy.⁴ Yet the records discussing these slaves, produced by parish priests, notaries, and court reporters a thousand miles from the violence, offer a valuable new perspective on the Fox Wars, one that allows scholars to reevaluate not only this important conflict but also the larger dynamics of French-Indian relations in North America. . .