

Partners in the Fur Trade

As they established trade with one another, Europeans and First Nations people learned about worldviews and cultures that were often very different from their own. In many cases, people from each group were puzzled by the other's motivations and actions. In almost all cases, people interpreted other people's actions through the lens of their own worldview. Read each statement on this page, considering how each speaker's worldview affected his viewpoint.

A **PIIKANI (PEIGAN) CHIEF** told a story to explorer David Thompson in 1787 in which he described his people's first close encounter with a horse. During a battle, a horse ridden by a rival was killed and the Piikani gathered to examine the animal up close:

Numbers of us went to see him, and we all admired him, he put us in mind of a Stag that had lost its horns; and we did not know what name to give him. But as he was slave to Man, like the dog, which carried our things, he was named the Big Dog.

In 1634, **FATHER PAUL LE JEUNE**, a Jesuit priest at Québec, reported the views of a local First Nations leader on the European desire for beaver pelts:

The Beaver does everything perfectly well, it makes kettles, hatchets, swords, knives, bread; in short, it makes everything . . . The English have no sense; they give us twenty knives like this for one Beaver skin.

Explorer **SAMUEL HEARNE** kept many journals of his travels and encounters with First Nations and Inuit peoples. In 1771, he wrote about how a group of Kitlimermiut (Copper Inuit) people, who had never seen a European before, responded to his appearance:

They flocked about me, and expressed as much desire to examine me from top to toe, as a European naturalist would a non-descript animal . . . The whiteness of my skin . . . was, in their opinion, no ornament, as they said it resembled meat which had been sodden in water till all the blood was extracted.

At one camp, he reported the community's custom of allowing women in labour to give birth alone in a tent at some distance from the rest of the community:

These people never attempt to assist each other on these occasions. They entertain that nature is abundantly sufficient to perform everything required . . . When I informed them of the assistance which European women derive from the skill and attention of our midwives, they treated us with the utmost contempt; ironically observing, "that the many hump-backs, bandy-legs, and other deformities, so frequent among the English, were undoubtedly owing to the great skill of the persons who assisted in bringing them into the world."

EXPLORATIONS

1. What does each statement tell you about the speaker's worldview? How did his worldview impact how he perceived the situation described?

2. In each case, the quotations show a First Nations perspective, but told through the words of a European. What are the problems with this type of evidence?