Recently, historians of colonial North America have paid much attention to intercultural mediators. Because these individuals frequently crossed cultural boundaries as interpreters, diplomats, and negotiators, they are fascinating characters for scholars studying interactions between native peoples and European colonists. In the recent historiography there have been basically two different interpretations about the role of mediators in intercultural relations. The first one argues that intercultural mediators were able to successfully bridge Native American and European cultures. According to this interpretation, the individuals who served colonial officials as interpreters and negotiators became people in between who brought radically different cultures closer together. Some of the mediators even created new identities by blending Indian and European cultural practices. Historian Margaret Connell Szasz, who edited a collection of biographical studies of intercultural brokers in North America, concluded that “intermediaries were, by definition, receptive to other cultural worlds, and inherent in this receptivity was the belief that those cultures offered something of value.”

The second interpretation of intercultural mediators is more sobering. According to this interpretation, negotiators were never sincerely interested in bringing the two cultures together. Instead, mediators only accommodated to native customs and practices in order to further colonial activities.

---

expansion at the expense of native peoples. In his innovative recent study about intercultural mediators in eighteenth century Pennsylvania, historian James H. Merrell persuasively demonstrated that Indian and European negotiators, “were not, it turns out, denizens of some debatable land between native and newcomer; almost without exception, they were firmly anchored on one side of the cultural divide.” Although colonial mediators closely cooperated with their native counterparts to preserve intercultural peace, they were unable and unwilling to shed their prejudices and negative feelings about Indians.2

While there have been a considerable number of studies about negotiators and interpreters of colonial New York under English rule, there has not yet been a systematical study of intercultural mediators in the colony of New Netherland which was governed by the Dutch West India Company (WIC) from 1624 to 1664. In this paper I analyze whether Dutch mediators in New Netherland should be viewed as people in between who tried to blend Indian and Dutch cultures, or as individuals who only pragmatically accommodated to native peoples in order to further colonial expansion.3

Although the Dutch in New Netherland were in frequent contact with various indigenous peoples, I focus here only on Dutch mediators among the Iroquoian-speaking Mohawks who lived in the region west of the Upper Hudson Valley. I have selected the Mohawk-Dutch relationship for analysis rather than Dutch interactions with other

---
