classified, treated, and separated. “Negro” in Brazil and in the United States, for example, came to have different meanings that reflected conditions and values, as well as degrees of social mingling, not genetic differences. As Sidney Mintz wisely reminds us, “The ‘reality’ of race is thus as much a social as a biological reality, the inheritance of physical traits serving as the raw material for social sorting devices, by which both stigmata and privileges may be systematically allocated.”

Thus we gain little insight into the historical process by distinguishing cultural groups at the biological or physiological level. We are not considering genetically different groups but human populations from different parts of the world, groups of people with cultural differences. Most of all, we will be inquiring into the way these peoples, brought into contact with each other, changed over the course of several centuries—and changed in a manner that would shape the course of American history for generations to come.

The history of the American peoples begins not in 1492 but hundreds of centuries before the birth of Christ. It was then, according to archaeologists and geologists, that humans first discovered what much later would be called North America. Thus American history can begin with some basic questions: Who were the first inhabitants of the “New World”? Where did they come from? What were they like? How had their societies changed over the millennia that preceded the arrival of Europeans? Can their history be reconstructed from the mists of prehistoric time?

Almost all the material evidence suggesting answers to these questions comes from ancient sites of early life in North America. By unearthing pots, tools, ornaments, and other objects, and establishing the age of skeletal remains of the “first Americans,” archaeologists have dated the arrival of man in America to about 35,000 B.C., at about the time that humans began to settle Japan and Scandinavia.

Most Native American peoples have their own creation stories about their origins in North America itself. However, paleo-anthropologists generally agree that these first inhabitants of the continent were men and women from Asia. Game-hunting nomadic peoples from the inhospitable environment of Siberia, they migrated across the Bering Straits to Alaska.

---

in search of more reliable sources of food. Geologists have determined that Siberia and Alaska were connected by a land bridge only during the two long periods when massive glaciers covered the northern latitudes, locking up most of the world's moisture and leaving the floor of the Bering Sea exposed. These two long periods were from roughly 36,000 to 32,000 years ago and again from 25,000 to 14,000 years ago. At other times the melting glaciers raised the level of water in the Bering Straits, inundating the land bridge and blocking foot traffic to North America. So when Europeans found a way to reach North America in ships 500 years ago, they encountered a people whose ancestors had come on foot many thousands of years before. The main migration apparently occurred between 25,000 and 14,000 years ago, although our knowledge of this is very tentative and hotly debated as anthropologists discover new early human living sites.

Although most anthropologists agree that the migration was of Asian peoples, particularly those of Mongoloid stock from northeast Asia, the skeletal remains of these migrants also reveal non-Asian characteristics. It is probable that they represent a potpourri of different populations in Asia, Africa, and Europe, which had been mixing for thousands of years. But whatever the prior infusion of genes from peoples of other areas, these first Americans were Asiatic in geographical origin.

**CULTURAL EVOLUTION**

Once on the North American continent, these early wanderers began trekking southward and then eastward, following vegetation and game. Hundreds of generations passed before these nomads reached the Pacific Northwest. The migratory movement, taking thousands of years, ultimately brought them to the tip of South America and the east coast of North America. American history traditionally emphasizes the "westward movement," but for hundreds of generations in North America the frontier moved southward and eastward. The distances were immense—15,000 miles from the Asian homeland to Tierra del Fuego, the southernmost limit of South America, and 6,000 miles from Siberia to the eastern edge of North America. By roughly 9000 B.C. the first Americans were widely dispersed across the Western Hemisphere.

During the centuries spanned by these long migrations, one band in search of new food sources would split off from another. This process, repeated many times in many areas, marked the emergence of separate societies, numbering in the hundreds on the continent by the time the Europeans arrived. Cultural differences over thousands of years became more distinct as people in widely different ecological regions organized their lives and related to the land in ways dictated by their natural habitats. Much later Europeans would indiscriminately lump together a wide variety of native cultures under a single rubric "Indian." But in reality myriad ways of life had developed by the time Europeans found their way to the very old "New World." If Europeans had been able to drop down on native villages from the Atlantic to the Pacific coasts and from Alaska to the Gulf of Mexico in 1492 they would have found "Indians" living in Kwakiutl rectangular plank houses on the northwest coast, in Gothic domed thatched houses in Wichita grasslands, in earth lodges in Pawnee prairie country, and in barrel-roofed rectangular houses in Algonkian villages in the Northeast woodlands. Different societies had developed a great variety of techniques for providing basic shelter because they lived in areas where building materials and weather conditions varied widely. The same diversity marked the ornaments and clothes they fashioned, the tools they employed, and the natural foods they gathered.

This diversity of native culture is also evident in the languages they spoke. Linguistic scholars divide Indian languages, at the point when Europeans first arrived in North America, into twelve linguistic stocks, each as distinct from the others as Semitic languages are from Indo-European languages. Within each of these twelve linguistic stocks, a great many separate languages and dialects were spoken, each as different as English from Russian. In all, about 2,000 languages were spoken by the native Americans—a greater linguistic diversity than in any other part of the world.
How can we account for this striking diversity of Indian cultures? The explanation lies in an understanding of environmental conditions and the way in which bands of people lived in relatively self-contained communities for centuries, adapting to their natural surroundings and molding their culture in ways that allowed for survival in their region. As elsewhere in the prehistoric world, human beings were basically seed gatherers and game hunters. They were dependent for life on a food supply over which they had little control. They struggled to master their environment but were frequently at its mercy. Thus, to take a single example, as great geologic changes occurred in North America about 8000 B.C., vast areas from Utah to the highlands of Middle America were turned from grasslands into desert. Big game and plants requiring plentiful water could not survive these changes, and Indian societies in these areas either had to move on or find new sources of food or modify their cultures to the new conditions.

Another way of understanding the process of cultural change and the proliferation of culture groups is to focus on agriculture—the domestication of plant life. Like all living organisms, human beings depend ultimately on plants to survive. For both man and animals plants are the source of life-sustaining fuel. The ultimate source of this energy is the sun. But in tapping this solar energy humans and animals had to rely on plants because they are the only organisms capable of producing significant amounts of organic material through the photosynthetic process. Plant food was—and still is—the strategic element in the chain of life. It nurtured humans and it sustained the animals that provided them with their second source of food.

When humans learned to control the life of plants—agriculture is the term we give to the process—they took a revolutionary step toward controlling their environment. The domestication of plants began to emancipate human beings from oppression by the physical world. To learn how to harvest, plant, and nurture a seed was to assume some of nature's functions and grant partial control over what had been uncontrollable. In the wake of this acquisition of partial control over nature's forces came vast cultural changes.

Dating the advent of agriculture in the New World is difficult, but archaeologists estimate it at about 5000 B.C. Agriculture had already developed in Southwestern Asia and Africa and spread to Europe at about the time peoples in the Tehuacan Valley of central Mexico were first planting maize and squash. Where agriculture occurred first, a much debated subject, is not as important as the fact that the "agricultural revolution" began independently in several widely separated parts of the world, all of which were later subordinated by European colonizers.

When the production of domesticated plant food replaced the gathering of wild plant food, dramatic changes occurred in the life of societies. First, plant domestication gradually allowed settled village life to replace nomadic existence. Second, it spurred population growth, for even putting as little as 1 percent of the land under cultivation produced enormous increases in the food supply. This in turn caused large groups to split off to form separate societies. Third, the cultivation of plants reduced the amount of time and energy needed to obtain a food supply and thus created more favorable conditions for social, political, and religious development; aesthetic expression; and technological innovation. Last, it led in most areas to a sexual division of labor, with men clearing the land and engaging in the hunt for game while women planted, cultivated, and harvested crops.

Thus the agricultural revolution began to reshape the cultural outlines of native societies. Population growth and the beginnings of sedentary village life were accompanied by more complex social and political organization. Bands evolved into tribes, and tribes evolved into larger political entities. Tasks became more specialized, and a more complex social structure took form. In some societies the religious specialist became the dominant figure, just as in other parts of the world where the agricultural revolution had occurred. The religious figure organized the common followers, directed their work, and exacted tribute as well as worship from them; in return he was counted on to protect the community from hostile forces.

REGIONAL CULTURES

When Europeans first reached the "New World," Native Americans were in widely different phases of this agricultural revolution, and therefore their cultures were marked by striking differences. A glimpse at several of the societies with which Europeans first came into contact in the early sixteenth century will illustrate the point.

In the Southwest region of North America, Hohokam and Anasazi societies had been engaged in agricultural production and a sedentary village life for several thousand years before the Spanish arrived in the 1540s. By about 700 to 900 A.D., descendants of these people began to abandon the ancient pit houses dug in cliffs and to construct rectangular rooms arranged in apartment-like structures. By about 1200 A.D., "Pueblo" people, as the Spanish called them, had developed planned villages composed of large terraced buildings, each with many rooms. These apartment-house villages were often constructed on defensive sites—on ledges of massive rock, on flat summits, or on steep-sided mesas, locations that would afford the Anasazi protection from their northern enemies. The largest of them, at Pueblo Bonito, in Chaco Canyon, contained about 800 rooms and may have housed as many as 1,200 persons. No larger apartment-house type construction would be seen on the continent until the late nineteenth century in New York City.

By the time of Spanish arrival, descendants of the Anasazi were also using irrigation canals, check-dams, and hillside terracing as techniques for
bringing water to what had for centuries been an arid, agriculturally marginal area. At the same time, the ceramic industry became more elaborate, cotton replaced yucca fiber as the main clothing material, and basket weaving became more artistic. In its technological solution to the water problem, its artistic efforts, its agricultural practices, and its village life. Pueblo society on the eve of Spanish arrival was not radically different from peasant communities in most of the Euro-Asian world. Don Juan de Oñate reported home in 1599 after reaching the Pueblo villages on the Rio Grande that the Indians “live very much the same as we do, in houses with two and three terraces...”

Far to the north, on the Pacific coast of the Northwest, native people organized their societies around cedar and salmon. Tlingit, Haida, Kwakiutl, and Salish people lived in villages of several hundred, drawing their sustenance from salmon and other spawning fish. Their plank houses of red cedar displayed elaborately carved pillars and were guarded by gigantic totem poles that depicted animals with supernatural power such as the bear, sea otter, bald eagle, raven, killer whale, frog, and wolf. Early European explorers, who reached this region much later than most other parts of the hemisphere, were amazed at the architectural and artistic skills of the Northwest Indians. “What must astonish most,” wrote one French explorer in the late eighteenth century, “is to see painting everywhere, everywhere sculpture, among a nation of hunters.”

Carving and painting soft wood from deep cedar forests surrounding their villages, native people of the Northwest defined their place in the cosmos with ceremonial face masks. Often the masks represented animals, birds, and fish—reminders of magical ancestral spirits that inhabited the four interconnected zones of their cosmos: the Sky World, the Undersea World, the Mortal World, and the Spirit World.

Ceremonial masks had a pivotal role in the Potlatch, a great winter gathering where through song, dance, and ritual Northwest Indian peoples sought to give meaning to their existence and reaffirm their goal of achieving balance and harmony in their world. In the Potlatch ceremonial dances, native leaders expressed their family lineage and their chiefly authority in the tribe. By giving away many of their possessions, chiefs satisfied tribe members and thus maintained their legitimacy. Such largesse mystified and often disturbed Europeans. Attempts by American and Canadian authorities to suppress Potlatch ceremonies in the late nineteenth century never succeeded.

Far to the east, other Indian cultures evolved over thousands of years. From the great plains of the mid-continent to the Atlantic tidewater region, a variety of tribes belonging to four main language groups—Algonquian, Iroquoian, Muskogean, and Siouan—grew in strength. Their existence in eastern North America, which has been traced as far back as about 9,000 B.C., was based on a mixture of agriculture, food gathering, game hunting, and fishing. Like other tribal groups that had been touched by the agricultural revolution, they gradually adopted semi-fixed settlements and developed a trading network linking together a vast region.

Among the most impressive of these societies were the so-called Mound builders of the Ohio River Valley, who constructed gigantic sculptured earthworks in geometric designs, sometimes in the shapes of huge humans, birds, or writhing serpents. When colonial settlers first crossed the Appalachians, after almost a century and a half in North America, they were astounded at these monumental constructions, some reaching as high as seventy feet. Their stereotype of eastern Indians as forest primitives did not allow them to believe that these were built by primitive native peoples, so they postulated that survivors of the sunken islands of Atlantis or descendants of the Egyptians and Phoenicians had wandered far from their homelands, built these mysterious monuments, and then disappeared.

Archaeologists and anthropologists now conclude that the Mound builders were the ancestors of the Creeks, Choctaws, and Natchez. Their societies evolved slowly over the centuries and by the advent of Christianity had developed considerable complexity. In southern Ohio alone about ten thousand mounds, used as burial sites, have been pinpointed. Archaeologists have excavated another one thousand earth-walled enclosures, including one enormous fortification with a circumference of about three and one-half miles, enclosing about one hundred acres, or the equivalent of fifty modern city blocks. Archaeologists know that the Mound builders participated in a vast trading network that linked together hundreds of Indian villages across the continent because they can trace a great variety of items found in the mound tombs to widely separated parts of the continent: large ceremonial blades chipped from obsidian rock formations in what is now Yellowstone National Park; embossed breastplates, ornaments, and weapons fashioned from copper nuggets from the Great Lakes region; decorative objects cut from sheets of mica from the southern Appalachians; conch shells from the Atlantic seaboard, and ornaments made from shark and alligator teeth and shells from the Gulf of Mexico.

By about 500 A.D. the Mound builder culture was declining, perhaps because of attacks from other tribes or because severe climatic changes undermined agriculture. To the west another culture, based on intensive agriculture, was beginning to flourish. Its center was beneath present-day East St. Louis, and it radiated out to encompass most of the Mississippi watershed from Wisconsin to Louisiana and from Oklahoma to Tennessee. Hundreds of villages were included in its orbit. By about 700 A.D. this Mississippian culture, as it is known to archaeologists, began to send its influence eastward.

---


to transform the life of most of the less technologically advanced woodland tribes. Like the Mound builders of the Ohio region, these tribes built gigantic mounds as burial and ceremonial places. The largest of them, rising in four terraces to a height of one hundred feet, has a rectangular base covering nearly fifteen acres and containing 22 million cubic feet of earth. It is larger at its base than the Great Pyramid of Egypt. Built between 900 and 1100 A.D., this huge earthwork faced the site of a palisaded Indian city which contained more than one hundred small artificial mounds marking burial sites. Spread among them was a dense settlement, called “America’s first metropolis” by one archaeologist. This Mississippi Valley city, known as Cahokia, is estimated to have had a population of 30,000 to 40,000.

The finely crafted ornaments and tools recovered by archaeologists at Cahokia include elaborate ceramics, finely sculptured stonework, carefully embossed and engraved copper and mica sheets, and one funeral blanket for an important chief fashioned from 20,000 shell beads. These artifacts indicate that Cahokia was truly an urban center, with clustered housing, markets, and specialists in toolmaking, hide dressing, potting, jewelry making, weaving, and salt making.

By about 1300, two hundred years before Europeans arrived on the Atlantic seaboard, the Mound builder and Mississippian cultures had passed their prime and, for reasons not yet clear, were becoming extinct. But their influence had already passed eastward to transform the woodlands societies along the Atlantic coastal plain. Although the widely scattered and relatively fragmented tribes that were settled from Nova Scotia to Florida never matched the earlier societies of mid-continent in architectural design, earthwork sculpturing, or artistic expression, they were far from the forest primitives that Europeans pictured. Changed by contact with the Hopewell and Mississippi cultures of the Ohio and Mississippi river valleys, they added agriculture to the skills they had already acquired in exploiting a wide variety of natural plants for food, medicine, dyes, flavoring, and smoking. In the mixed natural economies that resulted, they utilized all the resources around them—open land, forests, streams, shore, and ocean.

For the most part, these people of the Northeast woodlands, on whose lands European fishermen began camping to dry their codfish in the late fifteenth century, lived in villages, especially after they had been influenced by the agricultural traditions of the Ohio and Mississippi Valley societies. Locating their cornfields near fishing grounds and learning to fertilize the young plants with the heads of fish, they settled into a more sedentary pattern of life. Domed wigwams of birch and elm, copied in the early years by Europeans, were clustered together in villages that were often palisaded. The birch-bark canoes, light enough to be carried by a single adult from stream to stream, gave them a means of trading and communicating over a vast territory. The extent of development among these Eastern woodlands societies on the eve of European contact is indicated by the archaeological evidence of a Huron town in the Great Lakes region which contained more than one hundred large structures housing a total population of between four and six thousand. Settlements of this size were larger than the average European village of the sixteenth century and larger than all but a handful of European colonial towns in America a century and a half after the first settlers arrived.

Along the Atlantic seaboard, from the St. Lawrence Bay to Florida, Europeans encountered scores of local tribes of the Eastern woodlands. Each maintained cultural elements peculiar to its people, although they shared in common many things such as agricultural techniques, the sexual division of labor, pottery design, social organization, and toolmaking. But the most important common denominator among them was that each had mastered the local habitat in a way that sustained life and ensured the perpetuation of their people. In the far north were Abenakis, Penobscots, Passamaquoddy, and others, who lived by the products of the sea and supplemented their diet with maple sugar and a few foodstuffs. Farther south, in what was to become New England, were Massachusetts, Wampanoags, Pequots, Narragansetts, Niantics, Mallicans, and others—small tribes occupying fairly local areas and joined together only by occasional trade. South of them, in the mid-Atlantic area were Leni Lenape, Susquehannocks, Nanticoke, Pamunkey, Shawnee, Tuscarora, Catawba, and other peoples, who subsisted on a mixture of agriculture, shellfish, game, and wild foods. They, too, were settled in villages and lived a semi-sedentary life.

One of the most heavily populated regions of the Eastern coast was the Southeast, where rich and complex cultures, some of them joined in loose confederacies, were located. Belonging to several language groups, these peoples traced their ancestry back at least 8,000 years. Some of the most elaborate pottery-making in the eastern half of the continent occurred in the Southeast, beginning about 2000 B.C. Hopewell burial mound techniques also influenced these cultures, and a few hundred years before Hernando de Soto marched through the area in the 1540s, grandiose ceremonial centers, whose construction involved earthmoving on a vast scale, had become a distinct feature of this area. In touch with Mississippian culture, the tribes of the Southeast evolved elaborate ceramic and basket-weaving techniques, long-distance trade, and in some cases, as with the Natchez, hierarchical and authoritarian social and political organizations. These people included the powerful Creeks and Yamassee in the Georgia and Alabama regions, the Apalachees in Florida and along the Gulf of Mexico, the Chocowas, Chicsawas, and Natchez of the lower Mississippi Valley, the Cherokees of the southern Appalachians, and several dozen smaller tribes scattered along the southeast coast.
THE IROQUOIS

Among the Eastern woodland societies, the one that boomed largest in the European-Indian encounters in North America was the Iroquois. Their territory stretched from the Adirondack Mountains to the Great Lakes and from what is now northern New York to Pennsylvania. Five tribes—the Mohawks ("People of the Flint"), Oneidas ("People of the Stone"), Onondagas ("People of the Mountain"), Cayugas ("People at the Landing"), and Senecas ("Great Hill People")—composed what Europeans later called the League of the Iroquois. The Iroquois confederation was a vast extension of the kinship group that characterized the Northeastern woodlands pattern of family settlement and embraced perhaps 10,000 people at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Situated at the major Indian trade routes in the Northeast and positioned between French and English zones of settlement, the Iroquois were intensely caught up with the onrush of Europeans, which is also to say that the settlers, whether Dutch, French, or English, were caught up with the Iroquois as well.

Not long after the arrival of Europeans, the loosely organized and strife-ridden Iroquois strengthened themselves by creating a more cohesive political confederacy. By learning to suppress intra-Iroquois blood feuds, villages gained stability, population increased, and the Iroquois developed political mechanisms for solving their internal problems and presenting a more unified front in negotiating with their Algonquian neighbors for the use of hunting territories to the north or in admitting dependent tribes to settle on their territory. This facilitated the development of a coordinated Iroquois policy for dealing with the European newcomers.

Work in the palisaded villages of Iroquoia, some of which bustled with more than a thousand people, was performed communally and land was owned not by individuals but by all in common. An individual family might till its own patch of land, but it was understood that this usage of land in no way implied private ownership. Likewise, hunting was a communal enterprise. Though individual hunters differed in their ability to stalk and kill deer, the collective bounty of the hunting party was brought back to the village and divided among all. Similarly, several families occupied a longhouse, but the house itself, like all else in the community, was regarded as common property. For the Iroquois the concept of private ownership of property—the idea that each person should own his own land or house—would have struck at the heart of the most important theme in their value system—the reciprocal and communal principle. "No hospitals [poorhouses] are needed among them," wrote a French Jesuit in 1657, "because there are neither mendicants nor paupers as long as there are any rich people among them. Their kindness, humanity and courtesy not only makes them liberal with what they have, but causes them to possess hardly anything except in common. A whole village must be without corn, before any individual can be obliged to endure privation."39 One historian has called this "upside-down

capitalism" where the goal was "not to accumulate goods but to be in a position to provide them to others." "

Village settlement was organized by extended kinship groups. Contrary to European practice, the Iroquois family was matrilineral, with family membership determined through the female rather than male line. Thus a typical family was composed of an old woman, her daughters with their husbands and children and her unmarried granddaughters and grandsons. Sons and grandsons remained with their kinship group until they married; then they joined the family of their wife or the family of their mother's brother. If this puzzled Europeans, so did the Iroquois woman's prerogative of divorce; if she desired it, she merely set her husband's possessions outside the longhouse door. Thus Iroquois society was organized around the matrilineal "Iriweside." In turn, several matrilineal kinship groups, related by a blood connection on the mother's side, as between sisters, formed an owaschira, or a group of related families. These owaschiras were grouped together in clans. A village might be made up of a dozen or more clans. Villages or clans combined to create a nation (or "kinship state," as it has been called) of Senecas or Mohawks.5

Iroquois society was not only matrilineal in social organization but invested the women of the community with a share of the political power unmatched in European societies. Political authority in the villages derived from the owaschiras, headed by the "matrons"—the senior women of the community. These women named the men representing the clans at village and tribal councils and appointed the forty-nine sachems or chiefs who met periodically at Onondaga as the ruling council for the confederated Five Nations. These civil chiefs were generally middle-aged or elderly men who had earlier gained fame as warriors but now "forsook the warpath for the council fire."6

The political power of the women extended beyond the appointment of male representatives to the various ruling councils. When individual clans met, in a manner resembling the later New England town meeting, the senior women were fully in attendance, caucusing behind the circle of men who did the public speaking and lobbying with them. To an outsider it might appear that the men ruled, because it was they who did the public speaking and formally reached decisions. But their power was shared with the women. If the men of the village or tribal council moved too far from the will of the women who had appointed them, they could be removed, or

"dehorned." Only so long as they could achieve a consensus with the women who had placed them in office were they secure in their positions.

The division of power between male and female was further extended by the role of the women in the tribal economy. While men were responsible for hunting and fishing, the women were the primary agriculturists of the village. In tending the crops they became equally important in sustaining the community. Moreover, when the men were away on hunting expeditions, often for a period of weeks, women were left entirely in charge of the daily life of the community. To a large extent, the village "was the woman's domain" while "the forest belonged to the men."7

Even in military affairs women played an important role, for they supplied the moccasins and food for warring expeditions. A decision to withhold these supplies was tantamount to vetoing a military foray. Clan matrons often initiated war by calling on the Iroquois warriors to bring them enemy captives to replace fallen clan members. Thus power was shared between the sexes, and the European idea of male dominance and female subordination in all things was conspicuously absent in Iroquois society.

In raising children Iroquois parents were more permissive than their European counterparts. They did not believe in harsh physical punishment. They encouraged their young to imitate adult behavior and were tolerant of fumbling early attempts. In the first months of a baby's life the mother nursed and protected the child and at the same time hardened it by baths in cold water. Weaning was not ordinarily begun until the age of three or four. Rather than beginning strict regimens of toilet training at an early age, Iroquois parents allowed the child to proceed at its own pace in achieving control over natural functions. Early interest in the anatomy of the body and in sexual experimentation was accepted as normal. All this was in sharp contrast to European child-rearing techniques, which stressed the importance of accustoming the child to authority from an early age and hardened him up by taking the child from the breast at about two years by toilet training at an early age, by making frequent use of physical punishment, by condemning early sexual curiosity, and by emphasizing obedience and respect for authority as central virtues. Iroquois parents would have regarded as misguided the advice of John Robinson, the Pilgrims' pastor, to the parents of his congregation: "Surely there is in all children ... a stubbornness, and stoutness of mind arising from natural pride, which must, in the first place, be broken and beaten down; that so the foundation of their education being laid in humility and tractability, other virtues may, in their time, be built thereon. ... For the beating, and keeping down of this stubbornness parents must provide carefully ... that the children's ills and willfulness be restrained and repressed. ... Children should not know, if it
could be kept from them, that they have a will of their own, but in their parents' keeping."

The approach to authority also differed for adult members of the society. Iroquois society, like most Indian societies of North America, had little of the complicated machinery that Europeans developed to direct the lives of its members. No laws and ordinances, sheriffs and constables, judges and juries, or courts or jails—the apparatus of authority in European societies—were to be found in the Northeast Woodlands prior to European arrival. Yet boundaries of acceptable behavior were firmly set. Though priding themselves on the autonomous individual, the Iroquois maintained a strict sense of right and wrong. Rather than relying on formal instruments of authority, however, they governed behavior by inculcating a strong sense of tradition and attachment to the group through communally performed rituals. It was this sense of duty, bolstered by a fear of gossip and a strongly held belief in the power of evil spirits to punish wrongdoers, that curbed antisocial behavior and produced a general domestic peace among the Iroquois. In European society a crime or unethical act might be dealt with by investigation, arrest, prosecution, sentencing, and imprisonment, involving at various steps along the way the authority of a number of people and institutional devices. In Indian society a simpler system operated to transform the aberrant individual. He or she who stole another's food or showed cowardice in war was "shamed" and ostracized until the culprit had atoned for his actions and demonstrated that he had morally purified himself.

It is a mistake to romanticize Iroquois culture or judge it superior to the culture of the European invader. To do so is only to invoke the same categories of "superior" and "inferior" that Europeans used to justify the violence they unleashed when they arrived in the New World and to forget that exercises in ranking cultures depend almost entirely on the criteria employed. Instead of grading cultures, almost always an exercise of expansionist societies attempting to subjugate other people, we best understand Iroquois society, like English or French society, as a total social system that had evolved over a long period of time before Europeans arrived. In dynamic relationship with their environment and with neighboring peoples, the Iroquois had become more populous, more sedentary in their mode of settlement, more skilled in agricultural techniques, more elaborate in their art forms. They had also emerged as one of the strongest, most politically unified, and aggressive societies in the Northeast woodlands. Even after the formation of the League of the Iroquois, which had as one of its objectives the abatement of intertribal warfare, an impressive amount of fighting seems to have occurred between the Five Nations and surrounding Algonquin peoples. Many of these conflicts involved a quest for glory, and some of them may have been initiated to test the newly forged alliance of the five tribes against lesser tribes which could be brought under Iroquoian domination. Whatever the reasons, the Iroquois on the eve of European arrival were feared and sometimes hated by their neighbors for their skill and cruelty in warfare.

PRE-CONTACT POPULATION

On the eve of European contact, how many Native Americans inhabited North America? Anthropologists and historians have argued for decades about pre-conquest population levels and have searched for methods that might provide reliable estimates. But only recently have scholars conceded that most estimates made in the past have been affected by the estimator's conception of Native American societies. When Indian culture is viewed as "savage," characterized by nomadic hunters and gatherers, it is difficult to think in terms of large populations in North America. But if these societies are seen as sedentary, agriculturist, and complex in their social organization, then larger numbers seem possible.

Until recently, the accepted population of Native Americans north of Mexico in the intermediate pre-contact period was about one million, with about ten million in the Americas as a whole. This estimate, made in 1910 by the noted anthropologist James Mooney, has been sharply challenged, primarily on the basis of research demonstrating that Mooney greatly underestimated the demographic disaster that occurred when Native Americans came into contact with European diseases. Mooney based his estimates on rough tabulations of Indians made in various areas several decades or more after initial contact. But he failed to recognize the precipitous population decline, approaching 90 percent in many regions, that occurred very rapidly when pathogens carried by Europeans infected Native Americans and spread like wildfire through their villages. Today's scholars believe that the pre-contact population north of Mexico was at least 3 million, and some estimates run as high as 10 million. For the western hemisphere the population may have been 60 to 70 million when Columbus reached it in 1492. Perhaps 700,000 lived along the Atlantic coastal plain and in the piedmont region accessible to the early European colonizers. Historical demographers will debate native population levels for many decades, weighing archaeological evidence, estimating the lethal effects of European diseases, and arguing over the carrying capacity of various Indian economic systems. But regardless of the twists and turns of this fascinating debate, we are left with the startling realization that Europeans were not coming to a "virgin wilderness," as some called it, but were invading a land which in some areas was as densely populated as their homelands.
THE NATIVE AMERICAN WORLD VIEW

While Native American and European cultures were not nearly so different as the concepts of "savagery" and "civilization" imply, societies on the eastern and western sides of the Atlantic had developed distinct—and sometimes radically different—systems of values in the centuries that preceded contact. Lurking behind the physical confrontations that would take place when European and Native American met were vastly different ways of looking at the world. These latent conflicts can be seen in contrasting European and Indian views of man's relationship to his environment, the concept of property, and personal identity.

In the Western view the natural world was filled with resources for man to use. "Subdue the earth," Christians read in the book of Genesis, "and have dominion over every living thing that moves on the earth." God still ruled the cosmos, of course, and men could not control supernatural forces, manifesting themselves in earthquakes, hurricanes, drought, and flood. But a scientific revolution was underway in the early modern period, giving humans more confidence that they could comprehend the natural world—and thus eventually control it. For Europeans the secular and the sacred were distinct, and the human relationship to the natural environment fell mostly into the secular sphere.

Native Americans recognized no such separation of secular and sacred. Every part of the natural world was sacred, and the world was inhabited by a great variety of "beings," each pulsating with spiritual power and all linked together to form a sacred whole. "Plants, animals, rocks, and stars," explains Murray Wax, "are thus seen not as objects governed by laws of nature but as "fellows" with whom the individual or band may have a more or less advantageous relationship." Consequently, if one offended the land by stripping it of its cover, the spiritual power in the land—called "mantou" by some woodlands tribes—would strike back. If one overfished or destroyed game beyond one's needs, the spiritual power inherent in fish and animals would take revenge because humans had broken the mutual trust and reciprocity that governed relations between all beings—human and nonhuman. To exploit the land or to treat with disrespect any part of the natural world was to cut oneself off from the spiritual power dwelling in all things and was thus equivalent to repudiating the vital force in Nature. To neglect reciprocal obligations in Nature's domain was to court sickness, hunger, injury, or even death.

Because they regarded the land as a resource to be exploited for man's gain, Europeans had no discomfort in treating land as a commodity to be privately held. Private ownership of property became one of the fundamental bases upon which European culture rested. Fences were the symbols of exclusively held property; inheritance became the mechanism for transmitting these "assets" from one generation to another within the same family, and courts provided the institutional apparatus for settling property disputes. In a largely agricultural society property was the basis of political power. In fact, political rights in England derived from the ownership of a specified quantity of land. In addition, the social structure was largely defined by the distribution of property, with those possessing great quantities of it standing at the apex of the social pyramid and the mass of propertyless individuals forming the broad base.

For Native Americans this view of land as a privately held asset was incomprehensible. Tribes recognized territorial boundaries, but within these limits the land was held in common. Land was not a commodity but a part of nature that the Creator entrusted to the living. John Heckewelder, a Moravian missionary who lived with the Delawares in the eighteenth century, explained their belief that the Creator "made the Earth and all that it contains for the common good of mankind; when he stocked the country that he gave them with plenty of game, it was not for the benefit of a few, but of all; Every thing was given in common to the sons of men. Whatever liveth on the land, whatsoever groweth out of the earth, and all that is in the rivers and waters ... was given jointly to all and every one is entitled to his share. From this principle hospitality flows as from its source."

In personal identity Indian and European values also differed sharply. Europeans were acquisitive, competitive, and over a long period of time had been enhancing the role of the individual. Most Europeans celebrated the wider choices and greater opportunities for the individual to improve his or her status—by industriousness, valor, or even personal sacrifice leading to martyrdom. Personal ambition, in fact, played a large role in the migration of Europeans across the Atlantic in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In contrast, the cultural traditions of Native Americans emphasized the collectivity—the band, lineage, or village—rather than the individual. Because they held land and other natural resources in common and their society was less stratified than in Europe, Indians looked askance at the accumulative spirit and personal ambition of the newcomers. "In contrast to the exalted position of man in Judeo-Christian tradition," writes Calvin Martin, the Native American "cosmology conferred upon the Indian a rather humble
CHAPTER ONE


tature.” Hence, in Indian society the ideal of the autonomous individual was carefully restrained by the overriding commitment to clan and tribe. Rivalry flourished in Iroquois society as much as in Europe, but the tribal ethos channeled rivalries into conferring benefits upon the longhouse or the entire village.

In spite of these differences it was not inevitable that the confrontation of European colonizers and Native Americans should lead to mortal combat. Inevitability is not a satisfactory explanation for any human event because it implies that man’s destiny is beyond human control and thus relieves individuals and societies of responsibility for their actions. As old as the tales told by conquerors, the narrative structure of inevitability is a winner’s rationalization for historical clashes; a mode of explanation rarely advanced by the losing side. We shall see that the clash of cultures took many forms in the New World, with nothing predetermined but with everything dependent upon the complex interweaving of many factors in particular places and at specific times.

2 Europeans Reach North America

From the fifteenth to the twentieth centuries one of the dominant themes of history has been the militant expansion of European peoples and European culture into other continents. Only in the last half century has this process been reversed, as colonized people have struggled to regain their autonomy through wars of national and cultural liberation. For Western historians this global expansion has been closely equated with the spread of “civilization,” the carrying of an allegedly superior European culture to so-called backward areas of the world. As various cultures were engulfed by colonizing Europeans, the notion grew in the western mind that the growing outreach of European civilization put “progress” at the disposal of “primitive” peoples.

Yet assuming the cultural superiority of Europeans at the time they reached the western hemisphere is a highly loaded notion. For centuries, the categorizing of “superior” and “inferior” cultures has been done by the conquering nations, with great emphasis placed on technological advances, such as metal working, and on literacy. These have been promoted as key benchmarks for describing and ranking cultures. Certainly literacy was an important element in the growth of European economies, the spread of urbanization, and the rise of technological and scientific innovations in Europe in the early modern period. But the contrast in economic growth
and technological development between Europe on the one hand and Africa and the Americas on the other is explained by a wide range of factors. Literacy, in fact, was more widespread in the Middle East and North Africa in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries than in Europe, yet Europe underwent more rapid economic development in the sixteenth century.

In exploring converging cultures in the Americas, it is best to leave aside crude comparisons, for example between a literate Europe and a nonliterate Africa or pre-Columbian America. This kind of mindset, leading toward claims of cultural superiority, masks the complex interaction of peoples from different parts of the world whose lives converged in the Americas.

What is important to know about European achievements in the age of Columbus is that, after a long period of recovery from the bubonic plague that devastated western Europe and parts of Africa in the 1540s, monarchs began to assert their political authority over feudal lords and unify their realms. This creation of power at the center of European societies placed the normal powers of the state—to tax, wage war, and administer the law—far more in the hands of ambitious monarchs. This new concentration of power was essential to the European expansionist impulse that was ripening in the second half of the fifteenth century. Also feeding this impulse was a mighty cultural revival known as the Renaissance. Beginning in Italy and spreading northward following revived commerce through Europe, the Renaissance ushered in a new, more secular age, encouraged freedom of thought, and emphasized human abilities. It reached its peak in the late fifteenth century when a dramatic series of European oceanic explorations began. Since the seventh century Islamic culture had been the most dynamic and expansionist force in the Afro-Eurasian world, penetrating Africa deeply and extending into Europe as far west as Córdoba, Spain. But now Christian and Jewish Europeans were to assume center stage in an epoch of trans-oceanic expansion.

SPANISH AND PORTUGUESE EXPANSION INTO THE AMERICAS

When he made landfall on the tiny island of San Salvador in the Bahamas in 1492, Columbus thought he had reached the East Indies. This was precisely his quest—to find an all-water route to the Orient so that European traders, who trafficked in the indispensable spices that made European food palatable, could avoid paying tribute to the Middle Eastern middlemen who skimmed the profits off overland trading ventures. Burning with desire to liberate Jerusalem from Muslim rule and believing he had reached Old Testament lands, Columbus sent ashore for reconnaissance Luis de Torres, a converted Jew who knew Hebrew, Arabic, and Chaldean—the biblical languages necessary for communication among Old Testament people.

In attempting to find a water route to the oldest parts of the Old World, Columbus had stumbled upon what was a new world only in the European mind. But this fortuitous error sparked the imagination of the Europeans—one of their most valuable qualities—and fueled a revival of enterprise and overseas expansion that lasted for more than four hundred years. Moreover, Columbus’s four voyages set in motion a gigantic mixing of populations from different parts of the world, shifted Europe’s commercial center of gravity from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic, and planted the seeds of the first global empires that spanned entire oceans.

It is customary to focus on the navigational and geographical importance of Columbus’s voyages, but his sea wanderings would have been written off as an expensive failure, once it was realized that he had not found the illusive water route to India, had it not been for the discovery of gold on Hispaniola in 1493. Without the gold and other precious metals, the new-found land would have been only an obstacle on the water road, to the Far East.

While his discovery was accidental, Columbus was still an archetypical figure of European expansion. Thoroughly medieval in his patterns of thought, he was also ambitious, adventurous, full of practical knowledge, ready to translate an idea, however ridiculed, into action, and audacious enough to maintain his course even when his sailors were ready to mutiny in despair of ever seeing dry land again. Capitalizing on advances in marine and mapmaking technology and on earlier Portuguese oceanic explorations into the Atlantic “sea of darkness,” as they called it, and down the west coast of Africa all the way to the southern tip, Columbus, like the Vikings five hundred years before him, discovered that the ocean west of Europe had its limits.

Once the Spanish found gold and silver, a wholesale rush of enterprising young men from the lesser nobility in Spain began the transatlantic adventure. By the 1560s they had explored, and claimed, if not always conquered, the Isthmus of Panama, Mexico, most of South America except Brazil and the far southern plains, and the southerly reaches of North America from California on the Pacific Coast to “La Florida” on the Atlantic Coast. Led by military figures such as Cortés, Pizarro, Ponce de León, de Soto, and Coronado, they established the authority of Spain and the Catholic Church over an area that dwarfed their homeland in size and population. By the end of the sixteenth century the Spanish had conquered the major centers of native population and established a thriving transatlantic trade, and were carrying African slaves by the thousands to their colonies and supervising the extraction of gold and silver in fabulous quantities from the lands under their domination.

From the 1490s to the 1590s, the colonization of the Americas was dominated by Spain. Its only rival was Portugal, whose energies first went into colonizing the Atlantic islands—Azores, Madeira, and Canary—
The Spanish Conquest and the Atlantic Exchange

For a quarter century after Columbus's first voyage in 1492, the Spanish colonizing efforts in the western hemisphere were confined to occupying the Caribbean islands of Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Hispaniola. Then, in two bold and bloody strokes, beginning in 1519, the Spanish overwhelmed the ancient civilizations of the Aztecs and the Incas. Hernán Cortés's march from coastal Veracruz over rugged mountains brought 600 soldiers into the Valley of Mexico where for two years they faced with Montezuma's people. Then in 1521, Cortés attacked the huge Aztec capital—Tenochtitlan (modern-day Mexico City). The Spanish soldiers were astounded to find themselves confronting an urban population of 100,000 or more contained within a city replete with floating gardens, elaborate causeways and aqueducts, and monumental temples. The Aztecs were equally astounded at the intruders with much hair on their faces and accompanied by huge animals—large, ferocious dogs and huge "deer" more powerful than any animal the Aztecs had seen that carried metal-clad warriors on their backs and traveled faster than the fleetest Aztec. Aided by dissident natives oppressed by Montezuma's tyranny, the Spanish brought the great Aztec ruler to his knees after a siege of 75 days. Over the next several decades they extended their dominion over the Mayan people of the Yucatan and Guatemala.

In a second conquest, in 1531–32, Francisco Pizarro marched from Panama through the jungles of Ecuador and into the towering mountains of Peru with a mere 168 men to overwhelm the densely settled Incas. Like the Aztecs, the Incas suffered from internal divisions. Capitalizing on this, Pizarro toppled the gold- and silver-rich Inca empire with a momentous victory at the capital city of Cuzco. From there, Spanish soldiers marched farther afield, plundering Inca cities and establishing their authority over native peoples in Bolivia, Chile, New Grenada (Colombia), and Argentina. By 1550, with only a few thousand soldiers, the Spanish had overwhelmed the major centers of native population throughout the Caribbean, Mexico, Central America, and the west coast of South America, creating an empire larger than any in the Western world since the fall of Rome one thousand years before.

The astounding Spanish victories were accomplished in part by enlist- ing the support of subject peoples who hated their cruel Aztec and Inca rulers. Spanish military conquest was also facilitated by bringing across the ocean two animals unknown in the Americas—mastiffs and horses—and an arsenal derived from metalworking capabilities—body armor and muskets. Yet the deadliest of all European weapons and the Spaniards' greatest ally was disease. Nearly every intruder from across the Atlantic, whether two- or four-legged, brought ashore pathogens that tore through the native peoples with a rapidity that was as gratifying to the Spanish as it was demoralizing to the indigenous people. This was part of an Atlantic exchange of people,
animals, plants, and germs that would transform nearly every society on both sides of the Atlantic, though with very different results.

The secret advantage to Europeans, unbeknownst to them, was that the millions of native peoples in the Americas had lived for many millennia isolated from epidemic diseases known in other regions of the world. The closing of the Bering Land Bridge thousands of years before had provided a "cold filter" through which no raging diseases could penetrate. Nor did native peoples have herd animals, which in Eurasia and Africa lived in close contact with humans, where they acted as hosts and conduits of infectious diseases. If native peoples did not quite live in a disease-free paradise, they were spared the killer pestilence that for hundreds of generations had severely punished Africans, Europeans, and Asians. These bacteriological infections—smallpox, diphtheria, measles, whooping cough, scarlet fever, and others—were steady killers in most parts of the world, especially in densely populated regions. Yet infected populations had gradually built up immunities against them that enabled many to survive virulent infections.

Indian peoples of the Americas had no such immunities. Defenseless once exposed to the killer pathogens and parasites, they fell like wheat before a scythe. Whole tribes could be nearly wiped out in a few decades, leaving vast areas depopulated. On the island of Hispaniola, where an estimated one million Taínos were present in 1492 to witness the arrival of Columbus, smallpox arrived in 1518. In what amounted to a biological holocaust, only about 1,000 Taínos were left a few decades later.

Indeed, Cortés's victory in 1521 was hugely aided by a terrible onslaught of smallpox in 1520–21 that may have halved the Aztec population just before the Spanish attack on Tenochtitlan. "Smallpox was the captain of the army of death in the war, typhus fever the first lieutenant, and measles the third lieutenant," writes the first historian to appreciate the role played by disease in the Spanish conquest and colonization of the southern hemisphere. "More terrible than the conquistadors on horseback, more deadly than sword and gunpowder, they made the conquest ... a walkover compared with what it would have been without their aid." The killer diseases "were the forerunners of civilization, the companions of Christianity, the friends of the invader." A murderous outbreak of smallpox in the 1520s similarly paved the way for Spanish conquest of the Inca.

The hammer blows unleashed by infectious diseases were so catastrophic for native people that they could hardly comprehend how their gods had failed them. Rampant disease caused mass agony, paralyzed community life, shattered leadership elites, and terrorized survivors. One of the first chroniclers of the Spanish conquest of Mexico described how smallpox, covering the bodies of horrified Aztecs, caused "great havoc." "They could not walk," wrote Fray Bernardino de Sahagún, "they only lay in their resting places and beds. They could not move; they could not stir; they could not change position, not lie on one side; nor face down, nor on their backs. And if they stirred, much did they cry out. Great was its destruction."2

Much more than microbes crossed the Atlantic with European explorers, conquerors, and settlers. With them came animal and plant life that transformed the landscape and altered ecosystems. Back across the Atlantic, more slowly, went plant and animal species that were equally transformative in Europe. Westward-bound ships brought wheat, barley, rye, and other grains; fruits such as peaches, pears, oranges, lemons, melons, and grapes; and vegetables such as radish, onions, and salad greens. All of these, unknown in the Americas, perpetuated European cuisine and gradually changed Indian diets. But much more important were the herd animals of the Europeans: burros, cattle, goats, horses, pigs, and sheep. The burro pulling a wheeled cart could move ten times as much corn or cordwood as a human beast of burden. The horse could carry a messenger twice the speed of the fleetest runner. Still more transformative was livestock. Cattle, sheep, and pigs flourished, grazing in the vast grasslands of the Americas and safe from the large carnivores that attacked them in the Old World. They reproduced so rapidly that feral livestock swarmed across the countryside, often increasing tenfold in three or four years. Indeed they flourished so well that in time they ate themselves out of their favorable environment, stripping away plant life and leading to topsoil erosion and desertification.

Pigs were even harder on the environment. Reproducing at staggering rates, they tore into the manioc tubers and sweet potatoes in the Caribbean islands where Columbus first introduced eight of them in 1493, devoured guavas and pineapples, ravaged lizards and baby birds—in short, stripped the land clean. Similar swine explosions occurred on the mainland of Mexico and Central America, where along with cattle they ominously devastated the grasslands. Meat was never lacking for European intruders (nor was leather or milk); all were there for the taking because Old World hoofed animals took to the savannas and meadows of the New World, as Alfred Crosby puts it, "like Adam and Eve returning to Eden."3

Spaniards—and later, other Europeans—naturally brought the flora and fauna that they prized most to the Americas. But also traveling with them were flora and fauna the newcomers would gladly have left behind. Weed seeds could never be strained out of bags of fruit and vegetable seed,

---

2Crosby, _Metamorphosis of the Americas_, in Herman J. Viola and Carolyn Margolis, eds., _Seeds of Change._
and once planted, they proved hard to control. Hence, the New World acquired invasive weeds, including clover, that crowded out native flora. Rats were pesky stowaways impossible to keep off ships bound across the Atlantic. Notorious carriers of disease deadly to humans, they did their part in punishing the European colonizers, though native people bore the brunt of their vicious bites. Reproducing nearly as fast as pigs, they decimated native small animals and added a new dimension to the human struggle for life.

Whereas westbound ships transiting the Atlantic brought more misery than munificence to Native Americans—death-dealing epidemic diseases greatly outweighing the acquisition of horses and certain new foods—eastbound ships crossing the Atlantic mainly brought benefits to Europeans. Yaws and syphilis, apparently not known in Europe until about 1500, were New World afflictions that created misery in the Old World, but never remotely on the scale of the scathing smallpox epidemics. Table foods such as peanuts, pumpkins, pineapples, squash, and beans enriched the European diet. So did turkeys and guinea pigs. Llamas and alpacas produced wool for warmth. But by far the most important was the spread in Europe of Indian maize and potatoes. The spread was gradual because it took generations to understand the fundamental advantage the potato had over Old World grains. For example, across the north European plain, from the North Sea to the Ural Mountains, farmers slowly learned that by substituting potatoes for rye—the only grain that would thrive in the short and often rainy summers—they could quadruple their yield in calories per acre. Columbus had been dead for several hundred years before potato and corn production took hold in Europe. But when this occurred, the change allowed for population growth and strengthened the nervous system of Europe’s diet. The same phenomenon occurred with the introduction of corn in southern Europe and Africa and later in China.

ENGLAND ENTERS THE COLONIAL RACE

By the time England awoke to the promise of the New World, the two Iberian powers were firmly entrenched there. England was the most backward of the European nations facing the Atlantic in exploring and colonizing the Americas. Only the voyages of John Cabot (who was in reality the Genoan-born Giovanni Caboto) gave England any title to a place in the New World sweepstakes. Moreover, Cabot’s voyages in the 1490s were never followed up. Even the buccaneering expeditions of John Hawkins in the 1560s must be dismissed as unimportant in the expansion of Europe into America because Hawkins was primarily involved in piracy—raiding Spanish trade in the Caribbean with the backing of Catholic-hating English merchants, who hoped to induce their government to sponsor their occasional attempts to challenge the New World monopoly of Spain and Portugal. England’s only significant contact with North America had been in connection with the Newfoundland fisheries where, since the 1520s, English fishing fleets had competed with the French, Portuguese, and Spanish for the valuable cod—a vital protein source in the diet of most Europeans.

But England too sought New World colonies, for colonies provided new markets, new sources of raw materials, and, if they contained gold and silver, added to the total supply of specie by which the strength of nations was measured. By the end of the sixteenth century, England was eager to establish a foothold on the North American coast, for Spain and Portugal already dominated the South American continent and parts of the Caribbean and had claimed the southern portions of the North American landmass as well. If the English did not move soon, it would be too late. By the same token, Spain intended to resist English incursions into its sphere of influence by attacking any English settlement that dared to exist on the Atlantic coast of North America. The first known map of the tiny English settlement of Jamestown, Virginia, drawn by an Irish Catholic sailor on an English ship that delivered colonists to the Chesapeake settlement, was smuggled back to Spain. It was highly prized because it provided the necessary information for a surprise attack on this first English foothold on the North American coast.

English entry into the colonial race had origins not only in the lure of New World resources but also in the ideological war that raged in Europe throughout the last half of the sixteenth century. All the western European powers facing the Atlantic, with the exception of the Scandinavian countries, were involved in this struggle between those who professed Catholicism and those who adhered to Protestantism. This national and religious conflict continued issues and interests first raised in the Reformation and Counter-Reformation.

During much of the sixteenth century England swayed back and forth between religious ideologies, living first under the Protestant regimes of Henry VIII (1509–47) and his sickly son, Edward VI (1547–53), and then under the Catholic reign of his daughter Mary Tudor (1553–58), who had married Philip II of Spain—the chief pillar of Catholic power in Europe. When Mary Tudor died and Henry’s second daughter, Elizabeth, took the throne in 1558, she returned England to Protestantism. Like her father, Elizabeth favored Protestantism primarily as an expression of national independence. Always, however, the religious question hung above her head. Philip II of Spain, her brother-in-law, regarded her as a Protestant heretic and plotted against her incessantly.

In 1587 the smoldering conflict between Catholic Spain and Protestant England broke into open conflict. The English braced themselves for the seaborne attack expected from the Spanish armada, regarded as the most powerful navy in the world. The battle that ensued is known simply as the Spanish Armada. In the spring of 1588 the Spanish fleet set sail for England, reaching its destination late in July. For two weeks a battle raged at sea. To
the amazement of most of Europe the English, aided by the Dutch, preserved. The Spanish defeat did not establish English superiority at sea or bring England any overseas territory in recognition of its victory. It did not even propel England into the overseas colonial race. But it did prevent a crushing Catholic victory in Europe and temporarily ended Spanish dreams of European hegemony. The Armada brought a temporary stalemate in the wars of religion and made clear for a generation—until 1618, when the beginning of the Thirty Years War again threw Europe into open religious conflict—that religious uniformity could not be imposed by force. England was free to pursue its own destiny, free from the domination of other European powers.

With the way clear for overseas expansion, the "westward fever" began to catch hold in England at the end of the sixteenth century. One inconsequential effort had already been made—the planting of a small settlement on Roanoke Island, off the coast of North Carolina, in the 1580s. But after the Armada the English gentry and merchants began to sense the profits beckoning from the New World. Their capital and experience would be indispensable in the decades ahead.

Urging their countrymen on were two Richard Hakluyts, uncle and nephew. In the last quarter of the 1500s they explained the advantages of settling the remote regions on the other side of the Atlantic. Glory, profit, and adventure awaited everybody: for the nobility at court colonization promised an empire in the New World and a source of new baronies, fiefdoms, and feudal estates; for the merchant there were new markets and a landmass filled with exotic produce that could be marketed at home; for the clergymen there awaited a continent filled with "savages" to be converted for the greater glory of Christ; for the commoner there beckoned a field of adventure and limitless economic opportunity; for the impoverished laborer there was the prospect of starting life anew amidst boundless land. The Hakluyts publicized the idea that the time was ripe for planting English stock across the Atlantic. Shakespeare contributed his bit to the national excitement by writing a play, The Tempest, about those who crossed the ocean to further the greatness of their country.

English participation in the age of exploration and colonization began with a generation of adventurous seadogs and gentlemen such as Walter Raleigh, Francis Drake, Humphrey Gilbert, and Richard Grenville. With limited capital and minimal support from the Crown, they attempted much and ended mostly in failure. History books give their exploits much room because they were the first to try. But England could not become a serious colonial power in the New World until the government, as in Spain and Portugal, gave active support to colonizing schemes, and, more important, until the merchant community and the rising middle class in England began pouring capital into overseas colonizing experiments. Thus all the early efforts came to little or nothing—the voyages of Hawkins in the 1560s on the Spanish Main; the Roanoke voyages of 1585 to 1588, which ended in

Theodore de Bry, a Flemish painter, traveled to London to meet John White, who did a water color of this Indian village of Secota when he was part of the Roanoke expedition in 1587. De Bry's rendition of White's water color is faithful in most particulars, including the depiction of corn in various stages of cultivation. When de Bry's engravings of the New World were published in the late 1580s, Europeans got their first full view (though often distorted) of what they would meet on the other side of the Atlantic. (Grand Voyages, published 1590)
failure; the Sagadahoc settlement on the coast of Maine in 1607, which lasted only a year; and even the settlement of Jamestown, Virginia, in 1607, which limped along for several decades.

To the difficulties of generating adequate financial and political support was added the reality that whether they focused on the North American continent or the Caribbean islands, English colonizers confronted rival claims of other European nations—claims that in many cases were backed up by actual occupation of territory. By the early seventeenth century Portugal and Spain already had about 150,000 colonists in their overseas possessions. Although most of them were in Peru and Mexico, where the Spanish established major population centers at Potosí, Mexico City, and Cartagena, they had also planted frontier outposts in southwestern North America and at various points along the Atlantic coast from Florida to the Chesapeake Bay. Spanish claims extended as far north as Newfoundland.

Englishmen were also approaching a continent occupied by the French. Since 1524, when Giovanni da Verrazano had explored the eastern edge of North America, the French had dreamed of finding cities of gold and the Northwest Passage to China. The French could settle, however, only where the Spanish had no use for the land. Thus, after abortive attempts to plant colonies in Florida and Brazil, which the Spanish and Portuguese wiped from the map, the French contented themselves with developing the northerly expanses of Canada.

**EARLY SPANISH INCursions IN NORTH AMERICA**

When the English first tried to plant themselves at Roanoke Island off the North Carolina coast in 1585, they entered a region where the Spanish had been active for three-quarters of a century. The effects of Spanish-Indian contact along the southern Atlantic coast had rippled through the region for many decades. In this zone of intercultural contact, Indians would have regarded the English as a new branch of arriving Europeans rather than the first bearers of a strange new culture.

Spanish incursions into southeastern North America were very different than the main areas of their colonizing zeal—silver-rich Mexico and Peru and even secondary efforts in Chile, New Granada, Cuba, and Jamaica. In the North American Southeast, the Spanish came mainly as explorers, plunderers, and traders. The Spanish had great difficulty in controlling this vast region and in fact met with a series of costly failures. Meeting many different chiefdoms, most of them warlike, rather than a centralized empire such as the Aztecs, the Spanish never truly dominated the Southeast.

Spanish explorers had been charting the southeastern and Gulf regions of North America since the early sixteenth century, beginning with Juan Ponce de León’s expeditions to Florida in 1513 and 1521. By the latter date the Florida tribes must have been fully aware of the dangers inherent in contact with Europeans, for in that year Lucas Vasquez de Ayllón, a Spanish imperial officer and member of the Royal Council of Hispaniola, lured some sixty Indians aboard his ships and whisked them away into slavery in the West Indies. "By such means," wrote a contemporary writer, Peter Martyr, "they sowed hatred and warfare throughout that peaceful and friendly region, separating children from their parents and wives from their husbands."4

For the next half century, Spaniards planted small, fragile settlements on the southeastern coast of the continent, engaged in minor trade with the Indians of the region, and established missions manned briefly by Jesuits and Franciscan fathers. But many attempts to bring the entire Gulf region under their control failed. From 1539 to 1542 Hernán de Soto led a plundering and ill-fated expedition deep into the country of the Creek people, several hundred miles from the coast. Hoping to find a new silver-rich Peru—where he had helped defeat the Incas a few years before—de Soto instead died miserably. Only half of his soldiers and African slaves survived tenacious Indian attacks and limped back to Mexico.

Again the Spaniards drove northward from Mexico, under Tristan de Luna in 1559 and under Juan Pardo in 1566-68, in attempts to establish their authority in the Southeast. Everywhere they went, the Spanish enslaved Indians, used them as provisions carriers, and lived off the land. But while Spanish weaponry and man-eating mastiffs terrified Indians and infectious diseases did their deadly work, the military expeditions never succeeded in completely pacifying the numerous chiefdoms.

In 1565 the Spanish made a more concerted effort to establish themselves in the eastern part of North America. Inspired by the construction of a French fort at the mouth of the St. John’s River in that year, they founded St. Augustine, now the oldest continuously inhabited town in the continental United States. After evicting the French, the Spanish established St. Augustine as a military outpost and a mission town coordinating Spanish religious efforts on the southeastern missionary frontier. On occasion, as in 1597, the various coastal tribes concerted themselves in an attempt to wipe out the Spanish missions and trading posts on the Atlantic coast and drive the Spaniards back to Florida. But the Franciscans kept returning as if God had meant for them to settle all the Indians of the region within the sound of the mission bell. Reaching the Indian’s soul, the Spanish friar proved more effective than the Spanish soldier.

Crucifix and mission bell outperformed sword and gun among the Guale, Apalachee, and Timucua. Respecting tribal customs such as polygyny and matrilinarity, the priests had converted most of the Florida Indians by

---

the 1640s. But the Spanish blackrobes could stop neither smallpox nor influ-
zena. Ghastly numbers of Indians succumbed to European diseases. This partly
explains the short-lived revolts of the Apalachee in 1647 and the Timucua
in 1656, away from the area of St. Augustine.

Meanwhile, New Mexico became a second region of missionary activity.
Francisco Vásquez de Coronado had explored the area in 1540–42, and half
century later, the Spanish mounted their first big incursion into the ancient
homelands of the Pueblo people along the Rio Grande. Thrusting northward
along the Rio Grande from the Spanish mining region in northern Mexico,
Don Juan de Oñate’s expedition, with 89 wagons and 129 men, reached the
heart of the Pueblo region in 1598, where 60,000 native people lived in
about 60 villages. Santa Fé, founded only three years after Jamestown,
became the administrative center of Spanish colonization thereafter.

With little gold and silver to exploit, the Spanish northern borderlands
were chiefly interesting to Franciscan missionaries. The Spanish established
small presidios, or garrisons, in this far-flung territory of the Southwest, and
they commandeered the labor of some Indians while mixing with Indian
women. But the primary institution of New Mexico was the Franciscan mis-


cation, which in many cases served also as presidio and administrative center.

Hence the Spanish presence in New Mexico was numerically insignificant.
Even as late as 1680 probably no more than 1,000 Spaniards lived in New
Mexico. By 1800 the number had grown only to about 20,000 in the South-
west, and of these the vast majority were the descendants of native people
who had mingled with Spanish soldiers. With no fur trade to conduct, or
with no fertile lands beckoning incoming immigrants to extract, and with no
digesting set of settlement contrasted sharply with that
igrant farmers, the Spanish pattern of settlement paralleled closely to that of

the English on the eastern side of the continent. The Spanish incursion
in the early 1600s, although, in the long run, some of
its effects paralleled those of the massive encroachment of land-hungry
farmers and town builders far to the east.

Sharp differences also marked the Spanish missionaries’ own methods.
In early Florida, and much later in California, they tried to gather Indians
within mission complexes where priests could closely supervise every aspect
of life. The California missions took root in areas where Indian peoples were
widely scattered and led a semi-nomadic existence, so the scheme bore
some of the marks of forced agricultural labor. To the Spanish priests,
supremely indifferent to physical deprivation, this semi-incarceration of na-
tive people was essential to the primary goal, for they viewed religious con-
version “as a broadly civilizing process” and thus attempted to bring about
a “full social and cultural reorientation of native life.” In New Mexico, how-
ever, Pueblo people had lived in settled villages along the Rio Grande for
centuries, practicing agriculture extensively. Here the Spanish missionaries

made no attempt to gather native people within the mission walls but in-


stead built their churches on the edges of settled towns. This led to a di-

vision of life “between a town-oriented secular aspect and a church-oriented

religious aspect.”

The lack of a mutually advantageous economic tie such as united
French and Algonkians in New France tended to place the full emphasis in
Spanish–Indian relations on religious conversion. This often involved a de-
termined effort by the colonizers to effect a wholesale cultural change
among the Indians, and tension was inherent from the outset. This can be
seen in the persistent mid-seventeenth-century outbreaks of violence against
the Franciscan missionaries of Florida by Guale, Apalachee, and Timucua
Indians. Similarly, in New Mexico, where Franciscans attempted to graft
Catholicism onto Pueblo culture, native people often staunchly resisted the
imposition of the Spanish Catholic worldview. The Franciscans’ work among
the Pueblo people along the Rio Grande in New Mexico “was less an effort
to transfer individuals from an Indian-type community to Spanish-type
community than it was to remake Indian communities into tightly knit,
church-centered social units with Indian leadership still operative.” Under
this program, the Jesuits were able to convert thousands of Pueblos in the
mission churches they built on the edges of ancient native villages in the
ear 1600s.

However, in the 1670s, when the Franciscans went beyond attempting
to overlay Pueblo culture with a thin veneer of Catholicism, they met with
fierce resistance. Spanish priests began to restrict traditional Pueblo reli-
gious activities—forbidding native dances, destroying masks and prayer
sticks, and imprisoning and flogging Pueblo priests and medicine men.
In every pueblo north of El Paso, native people answered this attempt to un-
dermine traditional culture by a concerted effort to drive the Franciscans
out of the region altogether.

Called Pueblo’s Rebellion after the Pueblo medicine man who coor-
dinated it, the revolt was a holy war against the attempt of foreigners
to forcibly undermine the Pueblo religion and way of life. The Pueblo
rebels destroyed every church in New Mexico; killed twenty-one of forty
priests and several hundred Spanish settlers; laid waste to Spanish ranches,
fields, and government buildings; and drove the remaining Spaniards out
of Pueblo country. Over the ruins of the Spanish plaza in Santa Fe they
rebuilt their kiva, the deep chamber where Pueblos engaged in activities.
Indians of the Rio Grande willingly borrowed the material culture of the
Spanish, but their well-integrated communities fought tenaciously against

Edward H. Spicer, Cycles of Conquest: The Impact of Spain, Mexico and the United States on
p. 287.
attempts to impose a religion and culture meant to obliterate the Pueblos' ancient cultural identity.

Although the Spanish attempted to reassert their control after Pope's Rebellion, they faced repeated resistance by Pueblos in the 1690s. Not until the early 1700s could the Spanish begin to establish control along the Rio Grande, and then only by declaring a cultural truce with eased demands for Pueblo labor tribute and certain Pueblo rituals permitted in return for nominal acceptance of Christianity. Spanish authority was not fully established until about 1740, and by that time, the deadly work of European diseases had cut the native population at least by half. By 1800 only one-sixth of the pre-contact Indian population existed in New Mexico. Though faced with less resistance, Spanish missionaries found they had fewer and fewer native people to convert to Catholicism.

In California the Spaniards made a brief and intermittent contact with the native population beginning in 1542, but the first permanent settlements did not appear until 1769. In that year Spanish forces landed at San Diego. Promptly constructing a presidio, or fort, they founded the Mission San Diego de Alcalá, the first of twenty-one Spanish missions eventually erected in California. During the first two centuries that preceded the founding of the San Diego mission, Spanish influence on native cultures in most parts of California was negligible. The native population at the time of contact numbered some 300,000 persons, and this number diminished slowly during the first two centuries of intermittent contact. Most Indian communities were organized by lineage of clan, though the Chumash and Gabrielinos along the southern coast lived in towns with more centralized political organizations. Indian culture in these southern coastal towns may have changed during the years prior to the first Spanish settlements, but Spanish influence in other areas was negligible.

During the late 1700s Spanish intrusion into the lands of various California Indian societies disrupted community stability and drastically altered native lifestyles. The missions that dotted the coast between San Diego and San Francisco drew their recruits from small dispersed villages, not the settled villages of New Mexico. Spanish encroachment forced many Indians to abandon their hunting and gathering practices and lineage-based political systems to take their places in the rigidly hierarchical ranking system that existed within the missions. The missionaries turned many natives into sedentary horticulturists and craftpersons, while a few were recruited as usquebras, or cowboys, to tend the large herds of cattle and horses on the outlying mission estates. During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the Indian population within reach of the mission system declined dramatically as periodic epidemics of smallpox, measles, dysentery, pleurisy, pneumonia, and syphilis took their ghastly toll.

THE FRENCH PENETRATION OF NORTH AMERICA

The French, like the Spanish, were a force in the New World before the English arrived. Their activities in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries were confined to harrying Spanish and Portuguese shipping, trading surreptitiously with Iberian settlers in the Caribbean and South America, and planting tiny fishing and trading settlements on the North American mainland.

French fisherman had been working the coasts of Newfoundland and Nova Scotia since the early sixteenth century. The development of a sporadic fur trade with the Indians of the area began in 1534 with Cartier's exploration of the Gulf of St. Lawrence. These efforts convinced the French that the St. Lawrence River area could be profitable, even if the climate was inhospitable. Realizing that only the St. Lawrence and Hudson rivers provided access by water into the interior of the northern parts of the continent, the French wisely chose to plant their first settlements near the mouth of the St. Lawrence in 1603. From there they pushed forward their quest for another form of New World gold—the skins of fur-bearing animals.

By the end of the sixteenth century the French were most numerous among the hundreds of European fishing ships that came annually to Canadian waters. When French settlements at the mouth of the Rio de Janeiro
and on the southeastern coast of North America were wiped out by the Portuguese and Spanish, respectively, in 1560 and 1565, the French decided to concentrate to the north, where their commercial activities would be free from Spanish and Portuguese molestation.

As valuable as fishing was, the fur trade turned out to be vastly more profitable. Nothing more was required than to bring trade goods desired by Indians across the Atlantic, anchor a few ships in a sheltered bay of the St. Lawrence, and wait for Indian traders to arrive with pelts. Military conquest was unnecessary and in fact would only adversely affect trade with the Indians. Even large settlements were not required, for the fur trade involved a simple barter relationship.

In time, the French decided to plant permanent settlements in North America because without a colonial population base their trading posts would be subject to the predatory raids of the Dutch, English, or any other colonizing nation. Thus the French planted a colony in 1604 at Port Royal, Nova Scotia, and in 1608 established a second settlement at Québec. This attempt to solidly claim the northern part of the continent was enough to induce the English, a thousand miles to the south, to mount a campaign of extermination against the French. Although England and France were not at war, the governor of Virginia, Sir Thomas Dale, commissioned a seasoned explorer and Atlantic seadog, Samuel Argall, to attack the French settlements in 1613. Just a few months after he had abducted Pocahontas in Virginia, Argall wiped out the French settlement at Port Royal.

For the next few decades the French struggled to plant tiny settlements in the face of growing English opposition centered in New England. But France was preoccupied with the Thirty Years War in Europe and could spare neither men nor money for overseas development. By 1643, after almost half a century of colonization, there were still fewer than four hundred Frenchmen in New France. Most of them were Indian traders or Jesuit priests, who had come in considerable numbers to convert the Indians. As one royal governor of Canada later remarked, only two kinds of business existed in New France—the conversion of souls and the conversion of beaver.

Under the leadership of Samuel de Champlain, backed by the Company of New France, New France was established on a more permanent footing. By offering free land the company lured settlers from France to establish a permanent agricultural society. By 1660, about two thousand Frenchmen lived in the colony (as compared with twenty times that number in New England), huddled in small towns along the St. Lawrence River.

While the Dutch, English, and Spanish typically used military force or guile to wrest land and political submission from their Indian neighbors, the French in the north forged relations of a much different kind with Indian societies of the St. Lawrence River valley and the upper Great Lakes region. For the French, the Indians were absolutely vital. The French were so few in number that they could not have entertained the slightest hope of survival without the friendship of the native peoples surrounding them. In 1640, after four decades of colonizing activity, the entire French population in North America was about 270, hardly equal to any of the number of New England towns. Even a generation later, in 1665, the French population had increased only to 3,000, not much more than that of several Huron towns on the upper Great Lakes.

A high proportion of these French settlers were male, which added to the dependency on Indian neighbors. In contrast to the English and Dutch settlements, where the sex ratio among Europeans was far more balanced, Frenchmen freely took Indian mistresses, concubines, and wives. They exhibited no embarrassment at this mixing of blood and were hard put to understand English qualms about interracial relations. The French Catholic church was more permissive in this regard also. In Nova Scotia, where French women were uncommonly scarce, interracial marriage was so common that one authority believed that by 1676 virtually all French families had Indian blood in their veins. In the more settled areas of the St. Lawrence River valley, where the Algonkian tribes were less sedentary and Jesuit priests raised some objections to racial mixing, interracial formation rather than interracial marriage was more customary. The Jesuits frowned on church marriages between the two cultures, but they could do nothing about the sexual urges of their parishioners. "In the Night time," wrote Baron de Lahontan, "all of them, barring the Jesuits, roll from House to House to debauch the Women Savages." Farther west at the trading posts, "miscegenation between the coureurs de bois and the Indian women was the rule rather than the exception."9

The practice of racial intermarriage became official government policy in the 1660s when Colbert, Louis XVI's architect of imperial reorganization, called for a full-fledged integration of the races. Colbert ordered the French settlers "to civilize the Algonquins ... and the other savages who have embraced Christianity, and dispose them to come and settle in community with the French, live with them, and bring up their children in their manners and customs." In spite of opposition from the Catholic Church, Colbert also encouraged intermarriage and urged the governor of New France to bring about a mingling of the cultures "in order that, having but one law and one master, they may form only one people and one blood."9 It was a policy contrived to bring the Indians under French control, not by destroying or weakening the indigenous population, but by assimilating it. A half century later, two lettered Virginians, William Byrd and Robert Beverly, pondered this "Modern Policy" adopted by France in Canada and lamented that English "false delicacy" in the early years on the Chesapeake

---

9Quoted in ibid., p. 197.
had kept them from making a "prudent Alliance" through intermarriage, as the French had done.  

It is true that racial mingling almost always linked French men and Indian women and that the offspring of these liaisons followed the mother. This meant that Indian blood was rarely added to the French gene pool. But despite this evidence of French ethnocentrism, frequent intermixing brought contacts of the most intimate nature between the two peoples, and this intimacy could not help but bring about greater mutual understanding. For Indian leaders marriage would seal alliances with the French. For the undermanned and "underwomaned" French colonists, intimate relations with native peoples of the St. Lawrence region made good sense.

Equally important in establishing relatively nonviolent relations was the fact that virtually every man in early New France was there either to trade furs or to evangelize among the Indians. Both tasks required Indian cooperation; only rarely could either be accomplished through coercion. Thus French traders traveled hundreds of miles into the remote Great Lakes regions of the Hurons, establishing trading posts, learning the language and customs of the tribes, and finding Indian consorts. In the English and Dutch settlements the Indian trader was the exception rather than the rule, since the vast majority of the settlers after the first few years were farmers engaging in an activity to which the Indians had nothing to offer once the colonizers understood native techniques of cultivating indigenous crops.

Those who were not traders in New France were generally Jesuit priests. They established missions, married themselves in hostile Indian country, and worked for the greater glory of their God by converting Indians to Catholicism. Fur trading and missionary work often went hand in hand, with missions established at important river junctions where the fur trade took place. Jesuits trekked northward to the farthest shores of the Gulf of St. Lawrence and westward as far as Lake Huron. Their main efforts were concentrated among some 15,000-20,000 Hurons who were settled in the Great Lakes region in towns of several thousand.

The Jesuits were more willing than the Puritans to accept that Indian beliefs in a supreme being, in the immortality of the soul, and in supernatural forces could be revised sufficiently to find acceptance from their Christian God. Whereas the Puritans insisted that Indians of the New England area renounce their way of life and abandon their religious beliefs as a starting point in accepting Christianity, the Jesuits studied the Indian structure of belief and attempted to change it slowly. Jesuits did not contest Indian belief that the mischievous—great spirits—smiled upon a successful hunt or military victory; rather they tried to persuade Indians that thanks should go to the power of Christ. "Indians were not so much being converted to Christianity," writes one historian, "as Christ was being converted into a manitous." The statement of Father Raguenau in 1647, which the Puritan clergy would have deplored, reveals the ethnocentrism of the French—but an ethnocentrism tempered by respect and affection. "One must be very careful before condemning a thousand things among their customs, which greatly affect minds brought up and nourished in another world. It is easy to call irrational what is merely stupidity, and to take for diabolical working something that is nothing more than human..."  

This greater flexibility in approaching native culture on its own terms, even while demeaning it, led to a far greater degree of cultural interaction in New France than in New England. The meager Puritan missionary activity focused on the weakest tribes, those that had lost or were losing their political autonomy and cultural self-sufficiency. Weakened by disease and warfare and demoralized by the rapid growth of the English population, small tribes abandoned some of their traditional ways and attempted to re-fashion themselves in the white man's image. Living in "praying villages," they conformed to English clothing styles, work habits, and forms of worship. In contrast, some of the greatest successes of the Jesuits in New France were among the most powerful Indian societies, although the priests never made much headway among the Iroquois. Like the English Protestant clergy, the French Catholic recollots believed that the true conversion to Christianity ultimately required giving up "savage" ways. But the Jesuits adopted a more gradualist approach and worked within a colonizing society that did not pursue a militant policy of establishing political domination over native people.

The different nature of the French—Indian relations is also revealed in the Gallic attitude toward Indian sovereignty. In all European—Indian contacts the concept of sovereignty was used to connote political authority and can be regarded as a kind of litmus test of the balance of power between the two cultures. All Europeans regarded native peoples as inferior and all pursued sovereignty as the ultimate goal, for if native peoples recognized the authority of European law and kingly authority they were, in effect, surrendering their political independence. Whenever Indians surrendered sovereignty, submission was not far behind. When the New Englanders fought the Pequots in 1637 the goal was to exterminate or at least bring under English jurisdiction a powerful tribe that refused to accept Puritan sway in this region. Similarly, as soon as the Chesapeake colonists were strong enough, they forced the Indians to recognize their sovereignty, a process that began with John Smith's attempts to exact tribute from the tribes.


of the Powhatan Confederacy. But in New France, the governing council was debating as late as 1664 whether or not an Algonkian Indian who had raped the wife of a French settler should be prosecuted in the French court of justice—a telltale argument revealing that French sovereignty had not yet been established.

Of course, declaring sovereignty and implementing it were different matters. All European colonizers, having judged their strength sufficient to pronounce their sovereignty, still faced the job of imposing it. In New France in 1664 French authorities decided to consult with the chiefs of nearby tribes about the rape. The Indian spokesman pointed out that friendly relations had been maintained for decades in spite of individual acts of crime and violence on both sides, and that each side must do its best to control its members. The French agreed that the Indian offender should not be prosecuted. A half century later, in 1714, when the Indians declared that the French had no right to jail or punish them for drunkenness, since they were not subject to the laws of the colony and the liquor, not the drinker of it, was responsible for breaches of conduct, the French acquiesced because “the matter is extremely delicate.” Assenting to the Indians’ claim of jurisdiction over wrongdoers, the French passed laws prohibiting the sale of alcohol to the Indians. When crimes were committed by Indians under the influence of alcohol, the French courts attempted to discover the illegal suppliers, prosecute him for violating French law, and charge him with damages committed by the drunken Indian. This was not the English way.

The French policy did not always reflect greater understanding of the Indians or acceptance of their culture. First and foremost it was a policy born of weakness. “The French were unable to impose their law on the Indians, and for one good reason,” writes one historian “to have attempted to do so with any degree of vigor would have alienated the Indians, and this the French could not afford to do.” But from this policy founded on weakness came the most lasting intimate, if not fully amicable, relations between Europeans and Native Americans on the continent. By regulating their own Europeans and Native Americans on the continent. By regulating their own subjects in relations with Indians and by continuing to recognize the sovereignty of the Algonkians, the French coexisted fruitfully with native societies to a degree unprecedented elsewhere in North America. That their settlements were so small and competed so little for cleared land doubtless helped in this regard.

In spite of the relatively pacific character of French-Algonkian relations, the Indians were not spared the ravages that beset other native societies after European arrival. Epidemic diseases were not a matter of policy or national character, and they struck the Hurons as mortally in 1649 as they had the Indians of New England three decades earlier. Nor could the French, however good their intentions, avert the attacks on their Huron allies by the Iroquois after the European rivalry for the fur trade began. Once the beaver supply dwindled in the traditional Iroquois hunting grounds, the Five Nations seized the role of中间men between the Albany traders and the Huron and Ottawa tribes of the Great Lakes region. When this could not be accomplished through diplomacy, as in the late 1640s, the Iroquois resorted to war. Within a few years they had decimated the Hurons and other tribes living around Lake Erie. War raged intermittently thereafter, as the Iroquois exploited the remaining beaver in their newly conquered territories and perfected the art of hijacking fleets of fur-laden canoes from the northern Ottawa country as they headed for French markets in Montreal.

Although Catholicism and French values helped shape the relationship with Indian societies, economic and demographic factors were sometimes more important. This is amply demonstrated by French relations with the Natchez of the lower Mississippi region in the early eighteenth century, which stand in stark contrast to the French experience in Canada. The Natchez were a highly stratified and ritualistic people, the southernmost descendants of the ancient Mound builders. In their social hierarchy, theocratic authority, hereditary class system, and celebration of war they more closely approximated European culture than any other group in eastern North America. After de Soto had passed through the country in 1542, they experienced little contact with Europeans until the arrival of Robert La Salle, the French explorer, who laid claim to the lower Mississippi valley for France in 1682. For another three decades, until the French established a trading post on the Mississippi River in 1713, the Natchez had only occasional contact with French missionaries and French and English traders.

When the French began a permanent fortification in Natchez country in the second decade of the eighteenth century—part of their plan to seize control of the interior of the continent—they brought soldiers, women, and African slaves with them. Trade with the Natchez was only incidental to French purposes. When the Indians killed five traders in retaliation for the ill treatment they had received, the French executed several minor chiefs. When tension flared again in 1722, the French governor burned three Natchez villages to the ground and demanded that the Natchez emperor, Tattooed Serpent, send him the head of one of the minor chiefs, though this violated tribal custom, by which all chiefs were immune from the death penalty.

The draconic policy of the French led to further hostilities. In 1729, when the French demanded land cessions without compensation, including the site of an important Indian village, the Natchez mounted an offensive to eliminate their oppressors. By this time the French had found the Natchez useless for their purposes in the lower Mississippi and felt no qualms about attempting to intimidate them. Though the Natchez overpowered the French at Fort Rosalie in 1729, killing several hundred of the French and taking prisoner many women, children, and black and Indian
slaves, they beat back the French only temporarily. Reinforcements arrived in 1731, and with the aid of Choctaw allies the French stormed the Natchez strongholds with cannon. Killing more than 1,000 Natchez, the French burned many captives at the stake and sold some 400 into slavery in St. Domingue. The surviving Natchez, scattering into small bands, sought refuge among other southeastern tribes. By the end of the year the Natchez nation, once nearly 5,000 strong, had ceased to exist as a sovereign people. Finding no way of utilizing the Indians to their own advantage, the French worked toward the elimination of these ancient sun-worshiping people with a thoroughness that would have aroused the envy of the English in New England, the Dutch in New Amsterdam, or the Spanish in Mexico.

ENGLISH IMAGES OF THE NATIVE AMERICANS

Englishmen approaching the North America coast had to reckon with Spain and France, whose established claims dictated that the English look to the middle part of the Atlantic seaboard for a toehold on the continent. Well aware of the Spanish presence, the English would build their forts facing the sea, to fend off Spanish attacks, rather than facing inland where the Indian danger lay. It was the prudent work of those who knew they were intruding on territory claimed by Spain.

But it was another people, the indigenous inhabitants of the land, that claimed English attention most forcefully. What did men like Gilbert and Raleigh know about the native occupiers of the land as they approached the forbidding coast of North America in the 1580s? How would they be received by these people whom Columbus, thinking he had reached India, mistakenly called Indians? How would Englishmen obtain the use or possession of land these Indians occupied? And how were ideas about the nature of Indian peoples influenced by the thorny question of obtaining sovereignty over the land? And how would the Indians’ long experience with Spanish and French traders, missionaries, plunderers, and settlers affect the native disposition toward the English?

No doubt the first English colonizers experienced the apprehensions that regardless of time or place fill the minds of those who are attempting to penetrate the unknown. But they were far from uninformed about the Indian people of the New World. Beginning with Columbus’s description of the New World, published in several European capitals in 1493 and 1494, of the New World, published in several European capitals in 1493 and 1494, a mass of reports, stories, and promotional accounts had been circulating among sailors, merchants, geographers, politicians, and churchmen who were participating in the early voyages of discovery, trade, and settlement. These voyages became the basis for an understanding of the Americas by any adventurer approaching the eastern edge of land in the western Atlantic Ocean.

From this considerable literature, the early colonists most likely held a split image of the natives of North America. On the one hand they had reason to believe that the Indians were a gentle people who would be receptive to those who came not to harm them but to live and trade with them. Columbus had written of the “great amity towards us” that he encountered in San Salvador in 1492 and described the Arawak Indians there as “a loving people without covetousness,” who “were greatly pleased and became so entirely our friends that it was a wonder to see.” The Indians “brought us parrots and cotton thread in balls, and spears and many other things, and we exchanged for them other things, such as small glass beads and hawks’ bells, which we gave to them.”

Verrazano, the first European to navigate the eastern edge of the continent, wrote with similar optimism from the Bay of New York in 1524. The natives were graceful of limb, tawny colored, with black alert eyes, and “dressed in birds’ feathers of various colors, and they came toward us joyfully, uttering loud cries of wonderment, and showing us the safest place to beach the boat.”

From this time on, accounts of natives of the New World included many such enthusiastic descriptions of native people and their eagerness to receive European explorers and settlers. This positive side of the image of the Indians not only reflected the friendly reception Europeans apparently received in Newfoundland, parts of Florida, and elsewhere in the Caribbean and South America, but also represented a part of the vision of the New World as an earthly paradise—a Garden of Eden where warring, impoverished Europeans could find a new life amidst nature’s bounty. That Columbus thought he had found the Gihon, one of the Biblical rivers flowing from Eden, when he reached the Orinoco River in 1498 is vivid testimony to this strain in the European mentality.

Another reason existed for drawing a favorable image of the North American natives. The English, like other European colonizers, hoped that trade with native peoples would become a major source of profit on the other side of the Atlantic. Indeed, the early English voyages were not primarily intended for the purpose of large-scale settlement and agricultural production. Trade with the Indians, the search for gold and silver, and discovery of the Northwest Passage were the principal goals. So a special incentive existed for seeing the Indian as something more than a “savage.” Only a friendly Indian could be a trading Indian. If trade was the key to overseas development, then it is not surprising that English promoters would suggest that the Indian might be receptive and generous—a person who could be wooed and won to the advantages of trade.

However, a counterimage of the Indian also lodged itself in the minds of Englishmen approaching the coast of North America. This negative view pictured a savage, hostile, bestial person and even a people cursed by God because they were descended from the ancient Israelites. Spanish and French literature of colonization bristled with such depictions. As early as the first decade of the sixteenth century, Sebastian Cabot had paraded in England three Eskimos taken captive on his voyage to the Arctic in 1562. A contemporary described the natives as flesh-eating, primitive specimens, who “spake such speech that no man could understand them, and in their demeanour like to brute beasts.”

A flood of pamphlets in the second half of the sixteenth century described the natives in terms that could have caused little optimism concerning the reception Europeans would receive. These accounts portrayed the Indians as crafty, brutal, loathsome half-men whose cannibalistic instincts were revealed, as one pamphleteer wrote in 1578, by the fact that “there is no flesh or fishe, which they finde dead, (smell it never so filthy) but they will eate it, as they finde it, without any other dressing [cooking].” Other accounts depicted the natives as bestial, living in sexual abandon, and in general moved entirely by passion rather than reason.

Apart from tales of travel and adventure in the New World, the English had a more striking reason for imagining that all would not be friendship and amiable trading when they encountered the native occupants of the North American coast. For years they had read accounts of the Spanish experience with Indian peoples in Mexico and Peru—and the story was not a pretty one. Chief among these Spanish accounts was the work of the Dominican friar Bartolomé de Las Casas, whose Breve Refutación de la Destructión de las Indias was translated into English and published in 1569. Englishmen could delight in Las Casas’s gory descriptions of Spanish cruelty and genocide, for such stories confirmed the worst things that the Protestant English believed about the Catholic Spaniards with whom they were about to go to war. The Hakluyts eagerly contributed to the “Black Legend” concerning the Spanish colonizers, labeling them “hell-hounds and wolves.”

Such accounts, useful in fueling anti-Spanish and anti-Catholic prejudices, also suggested that when Europeans met “primitive” people, slaughter was inevitable. Moreover, Las Casas was rebutted by a host of Spanish writers who justified Spanish behavior by insisting that the Indians had precipitated bloodletting and, because of their unalterably bestial nature, could be dealt with in no other way. However useful accounts of Spanish cruelty might have been for Protestant pamphleteers, Englishmen embarking for the New World must have wondered whether the same experience awaited them. The English knew from their own invasions of Ireland and the Netherlands in the late sixteenth century that indigenous peoples did not ordinarily welcome those who came to dominate them. However tractable and amenable to trade the Indian might appear in some of the English literature, the image of a hostile savage who awaited Christian adventurers could never be blotted from the English mind. Few Englishmen doubted that they enjoyed the same technological superiority as the Spanish. If they desired, they could presumably lay waste the country they were entering. The English experience with the Irish, in whose country military officers like Gilbert and Raleigh had gained experience in the subjugation of “lesser breeds” for several decades, suggested that the English were fully capable of every cruelty contrived by the Spanish. To imagine the Indian as a savage beast was therefore a way of predicting the future, preparing for it, and justifying what one would do, even before one caused it to happen.

Another factor nourishing negative images of the Indian related directly to the native possession of land coveted by Europeans. For Englishmen, as for other Europeans, the Indian occupation of the land presented problems of law, morality, and practicality. As early as the 1580s, George Peckham, an early Catholic promoter of colonization, had admitted that some Englishmen doubted their right to take possession of the land of others. In 1690 the thought was raised again by another promoter of colonization, Robert Gray, who asked rhetorically, “By what right or warrant can we enter into the land of these Savages, take away their rightful inheritance from them, and plant ourselves in their places, being unwronged or unprovoked by them?” It was an appropriate question to ask, for Englishmen, like other Europeans, had organized their society around the concept of private ownership of land and regarded this concept as important evidence of their superior culture. They were not blind to the fact that they were entering the land of another people, who, by prior possession, could lay sole claim to the entire continent.

The problem could be partially resolved by arguing that Englishmen did not intend to take the Indians’ land but wanted only to share with them what seemed a superabundance of territory. In return, they would extend to the Indians the advantages of a richer culture, a more advanced civilization, and, most importantly, the Christian religion. It was this argument that the governing council in Virginia used in 1610 when it advertised in England that the settlers “by way of marchandizing and trade, doe buy of them [the Indians] the pearls of earth, and sell to them the pearls of heaven.”

18A Good Speed to Virginia (1600), quoted in Wesley Frank Craven, “Indian Policy in Early Virginia,” William and Mary Quarterly, 3rd Ser., 1 (1944): 65.

Richard Hakluyt, Divers Voyages touching the discoveries of America, and the Hands adjacent unto the Same (1580), Hakluyt Society Publications, 1st Ser., 7 (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1850), 23.

exchange their land for such Christian instruction as a ragged band of Englishmen could provide. Another, more potent way of answering the question of English rights to the land was to deny the humanity of the Indians. Thus, Robert Gray asked rhetorically if Englishmen were entitled to “plant ourselves in their places” and then answered by arguing that the Indians’ inhumanity disqualified them from the right to possess land. “Although the Lord hath given the earth to children of men,” he wrote, “the greater part of it is possessed and wrongfully usurped by wild beasts, and unreasonable creatures, or by brutish savages, which by reason of their godless ignorance, and blasphemous idolatry, are worse than those beasts which are of most wise and savage nature.”

This line of reasoning was filled with danger for the Indian. While many leaders of colonization would avail, as one of them put it, that “every foot of Land which we shall take unto our use, we will barayne and buy of them,” others would find it more convenient to suggest that Indians, merely by being “Godless” and “savage,” as defined by English invaders, had disqualified themselves from rightful ownership of the land. In this sense much was to be gained by projecting deeply negative images of native peoples. The darker the image—the more it defined aboriginal peoples in nonhuman terms—the stronger was the European claim to the land of the New World. Defining the Indian as a “savage” or “brutish beast” or “tawny serpent” did not give Europeans the power to dispossess Indians of their land. But it gave them the moral force to do so if and when physical force became available. The Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, French, and English did not differ much in this regard.

A pamphlet published in London as the first English expedition was preparing to embark for Reanoke Island illustrates the tension between the positive and the negative English images of the Indian. Written by Sir George Peckham, who had accompanied Humphrey Gilbert on a voyage to Newfoundland in 1583, *A True Report of the late discoveries. . . of the Newfoundland Lands* clearly expressed the emerging formula for English colonization: formal expressions of goodwill, explanations of mutual benefits to be derived from contact between English and Indian peoples and yet, lurking beneath the surface, dark images and the anticipation of violence. Peckham’s pamphlet began with an elaborate defense of the rights of maritime nations to “trade and trafficke” with “savage” nations and assured Englishmen that such enterprises would be “profitable to the adventurers in particular, beneficial to the Savages, and a matter to be attained without any great daunger or difficulty.” Some of the natives, he allowed, would be “fearefull by nature” and disinclined by the “strange apparel, Armour, and weapons” of the English, but “courtesie and myldness,” along with a generous bounty of “prittie merchandizes and trifles as looking Glasses, Bells, Beades, Bracelets, Chains, or collers of Bewglye, Christall, Amber, Jett, or Glasse” would soon win them over and “induce their Barbarous natures to a likeing and mutuall society with us.”

Following this explanation of how he hoped the English might act, and how the Indians might respond, Peckham revealed what he must have considered the more likely course of events.

But if after these good and fairemeane used, the Savages nevertheless will not be heerewithall satisfied, but barbarously will goe about to practise violence either in repelling the Christians from their Portes and safe Landinges or in withstanding them afterwards to enjoy the rights for which both painfully and lawfully they have adventured themselves thereto: Then in such a case I holde it no breach of equity for the Christians to defende themselves, to pursue revenge with force, and to do whatsoever is necessary for attaining of their safety: For it is allowable by all Lawes in such distresses, to resist violence with violence. With earlier statements of the gentle and receptive qualities of the Indians almost beyond recall, Peckham reminded his countrymen of their responsibility to employ all necessary means to bring the Indians from “falshood to truth, from darkness to light, from the highway of death, to the path of life, from superstition idolatry, to sincere christianity, from the devil to Christ, from hell to Heaven.”

Thus two conflicting images of the Indian wrestled for ascendancy in the English mind as the first attempts to challenge the Spanish and French in North America began. At times the English tended to see the native as a backward but receptive person with whom amicable and profitable relations might be established. But the negative image, filled with visions of violence and bloodshed, reverberated even more strongly in the minds of those who were sailing toward land already occupied by people of a different culture.
Cultures Meet on the Chesapeake

The first encounters between English settlers and the native peoples of North America occurred in the temperate zone of the Chesapeake Bay and the lands just southward of this waterway. For a third of a century, from 1585 to 1620, this was the only region in which the adventurous English intruded on ancient homelands of American Indians. Though the number of settlers involved was very small, only a few thousand, the impact was very great—both on the English and Algonquian peoples of this region. The latter had already met—and repulsed—Europeans who had made brief incursions in the Chesapeake area in the 1560s. But the Spaniards (who soon went away) proved much easier to deal with than the English, who were determined to maintain a foothold on the continent once they arrived. The course of Anglo-Indian relations on the Chesapeake shaped English sensibilities and strategies for many decades and in faraway regions.

THE FAILED COLONY AT ROANOKE

England’s first real attempt to establish colonies in the New World came in 1585, when Walter Raleigh, a favorite at the court of Queen Elizabeth, organized a major expedition of ships and men. A year before, Raleigh had dispatched two ships on a reconnaissance voyage to the lower latitudes of the North American coast, for the English at this time still knew little about the climate and natural resources of the area between French-claimed territory in the St. Lawrence region and Spanish-held Florida. Relying on a Portuguese pilot who had accompanied an earlier Spanish voyage along the coast, Raleigh’s ship captains made landfall on the Outer Banks of the Carolina coast and established contacts with the local Indians on Roanoke Island. Two Indians were induced to return to England. Displayed in London, they were invaluable in the publicity campaign that Raleigh launched for a large expedition in 1585.

The second Roanoke voyage marked the first extended encounter between Indians and the English-speaking, Protestant variety of European. Some 600 men in 7 ships sailed from Plymouth in April 1585 and reached the Outer Banks that summer. About 100 of the men were left on Roanoke Island with promises that a relief expedition would return the next spring. Indians of the Chesapeake region then learned who and what these Englishmen were. Likewise, the accounts of the Roanoke experience later published in London helped plant ideas in the minds of other Englishmen coming to America of the people they were likely to encounter.

Though differing in detail, all accounts agree that the Indians of the Carolina coast were receptive to the English in 1585. Arthur Barrow, a member of the first expedition, wrote that “we were entertained with all love, and kindness, and with as much bounties after their manner, as they could possibly devise. We found the people most gentle, loving and faithful, void of all guile, and treason.” Barrow remarked that the Indians were “much grieved” when their hospitality was shunned by the suspicious English.1 Other accounts, while less complimentary to the Indians, also averred that the indigenous people were eager to learn about the artifacts of English culture. Though wary, they extended their hospitality. Since the English came in small numbers, the Indians probably did not regard them as much of a threat. No conflict occurred until the English discovered a silver cup missing and dispatched a punitive expedition to a nearby Indian village. When the Indians denied taking the cup, the English, deciding to make a show of force, burned the village to the ground, and destroyed the Indians’ supply of corn. After that, relations deteriorated.

Aware of their numerical disadvantage and convinced that the local Indian leader was organizing mainland tribes against them, the English employed force in large doses to convince the local Indians of their invulnerability. As one member of the expedition admitted, “Some of our companie towards the ende of the yeare, shewed themselves too fierce, in slaying some of the people, in some towns, upon causes that on our part, might

---

THE REESTABLISHMENT OF VIRGINIA

The English founded their first permanent settlement in the Americas at Jamestown, Virginia, in 1607. But it was not a colony at all, at least not in the sense of being a political unit governed by the mother country. Rather it was a business enterprise, the property of the Virginia Company of London, made up of stockholders and a governing board of directors that answered directly to James I. Its primary purpose was to return a profit to its shareholders—merchants, political figures at the royal court, and others who had invested capital in the hope that the English could duplicate the remarkable success of the Spanish and Portuguese in Mexico, Peru, and Brazil.

The King’s charter to the Virginia Company of London began with the suggestion that the company concern itself with bringing the Christian religion to such people “as yet live in darkness and miserable ignorance of the true knowledge and worship of God.” Christianizing the Indians of the Chesapeake area no doubt concerned many Englishmen, in a rivalry with Spain for the uncommitted peoples of the earth. (A recent analogy was the ideological struggle for the uncommitted people of the Third World by communist and capitalist countries after World War II.) But far more important in the minds of those who subscribed to shares in the Virginia Company was the desire to receive a return on their investment. Captain John Smith, who was to become a central figure in the drama unfolding in Virginia, later wrote: “We did admire how it was possible such wise men could so torment themselves and us with such strange absurdities and impossibilities: making Religion their colour, when all their aim was nothing but present profit.... For I am not so simple to think that any other motive than wealth will ever erect in Virginia a Commonweale.”

How would the Virginia Company enrich its stockholders? Nobody was quite sure, but it was assumed that profits in the New World would come in a variety of ways: through the discovery of gold and other minerals; by trade with the Indians; by production of pitch, tar, potash, and other products of the forest needed by the English navy; through the development of a fishing industry; and, best of all, by discovering the illusive passage through the American continent to Cathay. Some of these objectives had been realized in other English joint-stock ventures in Russia, in the Middle East, and in the Far East. Why not in North America?

Once sufficient capital was obtained, the principal problems were to recruit laborers who would go to the colony as employees of the Virginia Company and to establish the kind of administration and authority that would channel their energies towards the desired goals. Both of these problems proved thorny in the early years.

---


The tiny fleet that set sail for Virginia in December 1606 carried about 120 colonists under the command of Captain Christopher Newport. Sixteen weeks later, after stopping in the West Indies for water and provisions, they made landfall on the Chesapeake Bay. Men and provisions went ashore, and a few weeks later the ships disappeared over the horizon, leaving the small band of Englishmen alone in an unknown land.

What followed in the next nine months, before Captain Newport returned with supplies and additional settlers, is a dismal tale of human weakness and misfortune. The sea-wearied men explored the area, built fort shelters within it, planted crops, and organized a bit of fishing. But the colonists spent much of their time dividing into factions and organizing plots against each other. The supplies quickly dwindled, and the men were soon on starvation rations. Some deserted to the Indian villages where food was plentiful. Dysentery, caused by the brackish water of the drought-stricken Jamestown area, plagued the settlement. One of the members of the resident council of governors was expelled by his exasperated colleagues. A second was sentenced to execution as a spy for the Spanish, who were thought to be planning the elimination of the colony. A third was saved from hanging only by the arrival of the reprovisioned ships from England. When Newport returned in January 1608, only thirty-eight of the original settlers were still alive. Three days later fire destroyed most of the crude buildings in Jamestown and most of the freshly unloaded supplies.

Twice in 1608 and once in 1609 the Virginia Company of London sent ships with new settlers and supplies. But the "starving time" continued because the arrivals were not the intended colonists and the colonists so starved that they ate the seed and the food was wasted. Although the Virginia Company sent more than 900 settlers to the colony in the first three years, by the winter of 1609-10 only sixty survivors remained, and among them had deserted Count John Rolfe, A Relation of the State of Virginia (1616), quoted in Perry Miller, "Religion and Society in the Early Literature: The Religious Impulse in the Founding of Virginia," William and Mary Quarterly, 3d Ser., 9 (1949): 29.

not Mexico or Peru. Its earth contained neither gold nor silver, and thus all the frantic digging that was done in the early months and all the loading of ships with misapplied labor force or at least to profit from trade with the Indians. But Virginia was...


6Ibid., 461.
“A more damned crew hell never vomited,” growled the president of the Company. His opinion was echoed by one of Virginia’s first historians, who described the original colonizers as “unruly Sparks, packed off by their Friends, to escape worse Destinies at home... poor Gentlemen, broken Tradesmen, Rakes and Libertines, Footmen, and such Others, as were much fitter to spoil or ruin a Commonwealth, than to help to raise or maintain one.” This bizarre selection of colonists created manpower problems and also led to chronic social tension. Men of high social standing were regarded in England as essential to the strength and stability of society. But in a wilderness settlement on the edge of a vast, unknown continent, they only created resentment, unwilling to work themselves and unable to command the respect of those under them.

The most revealing example of the social tension in early Virginia is the case of Captain John Smith. Smith claimed no aristocratic blood; his father was a simple West country tenant farmer. Concluding at sixteen that life as a merchant’s apprentice held nothing for him, Smith embarked on war as a career. Before reaching his mid-twenties he had traveled and fought his way across Europe and back as a professional mercenary in the employ of various local warlords. He fought duels in Transylvania, battled the Turks on the plains of western Hungary, was captured and enslaved for several years in Istanbul, escaped into Russia, and worked his way back to England by way of North Africa. His military experience, his skill as a cartographer, and his toughness suggested to Virginia’s leaders that Smith would be a good man to have along when the going got rough.

Even on the ocean voyage Smith fell out with some of the leaders of the expedition, men with gentry blood flowing in their veins, and they clapped him in irons on the Susan Constant. When the secret orders were opened upon arrival on the Chesapeake, Smith discovered that he had been named a member of the Virginia governing council. This aroused further resentment. Smith had little patience with men who claimed that their social origins excused them from manual labor, and he did not hesitate to say so. As it happened, he was one of the few who possessed the courage and ability to explore and map the region around Jamestown, establish contact with the Indians, negotiate with them, and attempt rational organization of the colony’s slender human resources. His exertions, however, alienated the gentlemen councilors around him, who saw his aggressiveness and disdain for their social superiority as a calculated attempt to gain control of the colony and to depose them in the process. They attempted to eliminate Smith as a dangerous influence at Jamestown, but by September 1608 Smith had outlasted most of his enemies, and for a year he ruled the colony as president of the council.

REORGANIZATION AND TOBACCO

After three years of failure, the Virginia Company directors in London recruited ordinary farmers instead of soldiers of fortune. Under a new system of recruitment, about 1,240 new emigrants came to Virginia in 1610 and 1611 with promises of free land at the end of seven years’ labor for the company. But even with new manpower the Virginia Company could not develop staple crops or find a way of returning a profit to its investors. By 1616 death and emigration to England had reduced the population to 350. Again the company raised the ante for going to the Chesapeake. This time they offered 100 acres of land outright to anyone who would journey to the colony. Instead of pledging limited servitude for the chance to become sole possessor of land, an Englishman trapped at the lower rungs of society at home could now become an independent landowner in no more time than it took to reach a ship carrying him to the Chesapeake. Now the company operated simply as an organization for the promotion and sale of land. Its aim was to encourage as many English settlers as possible to come to Virginia to pursue their fortunes independently. In time, if the colony proved itself valuable, its vast land resources could be sold profitably. Other concessions were made. In 1619 the company allowed the election of a representative assembly, which would participate in governing the colony and thus bind the colonists emotionally to the land. In the same year the company shipped a boatload of unmarried women to the colony in order to improve morale and touch off a small population explosion.

In response to these concessions more than 4,500 colonists arrived between 1619 and 1624. They no longer came as employees of the Virginia Company of London or as individuals to be governed entirely at the discretion of the resident council and the governing council in London. Through its failures, the company had learned that only by promising immediate ownership of land and by allowing a degree of local government could it hope to keep the colony alive and growing. After almost two decades, London entrepreneurs adjusted their original plans to match the realities of the New World.

The new inducements to settlement helped lift the colony out of the depths of social disorder and unprofitability of the early years. But crucial to Virginia’s revival was the discovery that tobacco grew exceptionally well in the bottomlands of the Chesapeake region. Widely used in the seventeenth century as a mild narcotic, tobacco had first been brought to Portugal from Florida in the 1560s, a dubious gift of the New World to the
Old. But it was Francis Drake’s boatload of the “joyful weed,” procured in the West Indies in 1586 and then popularized among the upper class by Raleigh, that converted the plant from medicinal purposes to a social addiction. By the early seventeenth century the smoking craze swept England. Youngbloods developed various tricks and affectations as a part of the smoking cult: the “Ring,” the “Whiffle,” the “Gulp,” and the “Retention” became inane and obnoxious to the nose, painful to the lungs, and in the black stinking fumes thereof, nearest resembling the horrible stygian smoke of the pit that is bottomless.

This was to no avail. English society, as well as Europeans everywhere, cried for more New World tobacco leaf, oblivious to the dangers lurking in its delights. At first the West Indies supplied the bulk of the crop, but experiments with tobacco culture in Virginia proved phenomenally successful. Virginia shipped its first crop to England in 1617; seven years later it exported 200,000 pounds of leaf, and by 1638 the crop exceeded three million pounds. Tobacco became the Chesapeake region what sugar was to the West Indies and silver to Mexico and Peru.

Tobacco, of course, would not grow by itself, and as the demand grew, the English planters on the Chesapeake sought a source of cheap labor. In the Spanish and Portuguese colonies the settlers had incorporated the native populations into a forced labor system that approximated slavery. But the English lacked the power in the early years to enslave the local tribes. So the tobacco planters looked to England for their labor supply—and particularly to the most depressed segment of the population, made up of young men and women willing to sell their labor for four to seven years in exchange for passage across the Atlantic and a chance, after they had served their time, to become independent landowners and tobacco planters. England was full to become independent landowners and tobacco planters. England was full of such people, for population growth and the enclosure of land had created an army of unemployed. “Our country [is] overspitted,” wrote a magistrate in Kent, “not only with unpunished swarms of idle rogues and counterfeit soldiers but also with numbers of poor and weak but unpitied scurvy.”

Such impoverished immigrants were called indentured servants because they had committed themselves to serve a master for a specific period of time. They differed from the earlier employees of the Virginia Company only in that they had contracted their labor to an individual rather than to a company. Put to work in the tobacco fields, an indentured servant could tend about 1,000 to 2,000 tobacco plants, which could be expected to yield tobacco worth about £100 to £150 a year. Few men in England could generate an equivalent income for a year’s labor.

After tobacco proved successful, Virginia landowners clamored for indentured servants in order to bring more land under cultivation. Brought to the colony by the shipload, these servants were auctioned at the dock to the highest bidder. The more servants a landowner could purchase, the greater the crop he could produce; larger crops brought more capital with which to purchase more land and additional servants. Thus, Edmund Morgan writes, “Virginia differed from later American boom areas in that success depended not on acquiring the right piece of land but on acquiring men… Men rushed to stake out claims to men, stole them, lured them, fought over them—and bought and sold them, bidding up the prices to four, five, and six times the initial cost.”

Life for these indentured servants was nightmarish. If malarial fevers of the swampy Chesapeake area and malnutrition did not kill them within a few years, then the work routine imposed by masters, who treated them like cattle, usually did. Virginia’s servants became the personal property of a small group of tough, ambitious planters in whom political and social power was so concentrated that they would brook no restraint of their behavior. What might happen to a man who challenged this system became apparent to an ordinary immigrant named Richard Barnes in 1624. His tongue loosened by alcohol in a local tavern, Barnes uttered some “base and detracting” words against the resident governor. For this he was ordered that he “be disarmed [and] have his arms broken and his tongue bored through with an awl [and] shall pass through a guard of 40 men and shall be butted [with muskets] by every one of them and att the head of the troope kicked downe and footed out of the fort; that he shalbe banished out of James Cittye and the Island, that he shall not be capable of any privilidge of free-dome of the country … [hereafter].”

Barnes was not an indentured servant but a free man; indentured servants had no legal or moral freedom. The will of the ruling group of tobacco planters found law could be even more hazardous. Servitude in early Virginia was different from early chattel slavery only in degree. Unrestrained by the courts, which in the mother country protected the rights of servants against unduly oppressive masters, servant owners treated their bondsmen as pieces of property. John Rolfe, one of the leading figures of the colony, reported in 1619 that the “buying of men and boys” and even the gambling for cards for servants in Virginia “was held in England a thing most intolerable.” Six years later, an English merchant refused to take a boatload of indentured servants to Virginia because, as he explained, “servants were sold here up and down

---


10Ibid., p. 124.
ENGLISH-INDIAN RELATIONS

While Virginia’s promoters adapted their plans to the realities of the Chesapeake environment, the settlers were not only devising means of exploiting the land and immigrant labor but also encountering the native people of the region. They simply could not develop the region’s resources without directly confronting the original inhabitants of the land. From the time that the first Jamestown expeditions touched shore, Indians and Englishmen were in continuous contact in North America. Moreover, permanent settlement required acquisition of land by white settlers—land that was in the possession of native people. That single fact initiated a chain of events that governed the entire sociology of red-white relations.

Historians do not know exactly what Englishmen expected of the Algonquian occupants of the land as they approached the Chesapeake Bay in the spring of 1607. Nor is it possible to be certain whether the Indian had been reduced to a pile of bones by the English or the Roanoake colony had been reduced to a pile of bones by the Indians a generation earlier, and given the Indians’ sporadic experience with Europeans as a militaristic people, that neither side was as optimistic about encountering others as it was about conquering others. English pessimism must have intensified about the natives as they approached in outwardly friendly ways. When one-armed Captain Newport led the first exploratory trip up the newly named James River, just weeks after a tiny settlement had been planted at Jamestown, he was fused by the friendly greeting. The Indians, a member of his group wrote, “are naturally given to treachery, howbeit we could not find it in our travell up the river, but rather a most kind and loving people.” This account describes how the Algonquians wined and dined the English, explaining that they were “at oddes” with other tribes, including the Chesapeake tribe that had attacked the English at Cape Henry.

It is now known that the Indians of the region were accurately describing their situation when they said they were “at oddes” with other tribes. Some forty small tribes lived in the Chesapeake Bay region. The Powhatans were the paramount chief of about thirty of these, and in fact had forged the most centralized Algonquian polity in the south-eastern region. For years before the English arrived he had been consolidating his hold on the lesser tribes of the area, while warring off inland tribes of the Piedmont. In this situation Powhatan probably saw an alliance with the English as a means of extending his power in the tidewater area while simultaneously neutralizing the power of his western enemies. At the same time, his unpleasant experience with Europeans, including a clash just three years before with a passing English ship whose crew had been hospitably entertained but then had killed a local chief and kidnapped several Indians, no doubt made Powhatan wary of these newcomers. From the Powhatan viewpoint the newcomers “were potentially useful and potentially dangerous.”

John Smith and others quickly perceived the intertribal tensions as well as the linguistic differences among the Indians. But convincing themselves that some tribal leaders could find potential advantage in the arrival of the English was impossible. Perhaps because their position was so precarious, with dysentery, hunger, drought, and internal strife debilitating their small settlement, the English could only afford to regard all Indians as threatening. Hence, hostile and friendly Indians were seen as different only in their outward behavior. Inwardly they were identical—“savage,” treacherous men who only waited for a chance to drive the English back into the sea from which they had come.

During the first months of contact, the confusion in the English mind surfaced again and again. In the autumn of 1607, during the “sumprit time,” when food supplies were running perilously low and all but a handful of the Jamestown settlers had fallen too ill to work, the colony was saved by Powhatan. His men brought food to keep the struggling settlement alive until the sick recovered and the relief ship arrived. Many saw this as an example of Powhatan’s covert hostility rather than as an attempt of the chief to serve his own interests through an alliance with the English. “It pleased God (in our extremity),” wrote John Smith, “To move the Indians to bring us Corne, ere it was halfe ripe, to refresh us, when we rather expected ... they


CULTURES MEET ON THE CHESAPEAKE
would destroy us.” As a man of military experience among “barbarian” people in other parts of the world, Smith was not willing to believe that the Indians, in aiding the colony, might have found the survival of the English in their own interest. Another leader of the colony could only attribute the Indians’ generous behavior to the intervention of the white man’s God. “If it had not pleased God to have put a terror in the Savages heart,” he wrote,

“we had all perished by those wild and cruel Pagans, being in that weake estate as we were.”

In December 1607 Smith was captured during one of his exploratory incursions into Powhatan’s country and marched to Werowocomoco, the seat of Powhatan’s confederacy. Powhatan seems to have wanted to employ this opportunity to impress the English with his power, and thus arranged a mock execution ceremony for Smith. At the critical moment, as the executioners prepared to deliver the death blows, the chief’s favorite daughter, Pocahontas, threw herself on Smith to save him. About twelve years old, Pocahontas had been a frequent visitor to Jamestown, undoubtedly as an emissary of her father, and was well known to Smith. But rather than understanding the rescue in symbolic terms, as Powhatan’s way of indicating his strength but also his desire to forge a bond with the newcomers, Smith and other Virginians took Pocahontas’s gesture as a spontaneous outburst of love for the English—an un-Indian-like act attributable to English superiority or perhaps to God’s intervening hand. Hostility was on the English mind, sporadic hostility had already occurred, and Powhatan’s deliverance of the English leader, at a time when the colony was almost defenseless, was thus not conceived as a conciliatory act.

In the aftermath of the incident, Pocahontas became a kind of ambassador from Powhatan to the struggling Jamestown colony, an agent who became fluent in the English language and kept her father informed on the state of the internally divided Englishmen. By late 1608, more colonists had arrived in Jamestown, and Smith, as the new president of council, adopted an aggressive stance, burning Indian canoes, fields, and villages in order to extort desperately needed Indian maize and to cow Powhatan and his lesser chiefs into submission. Aware that Virginia could not be resupplied from England every few months and that the colonists were unable to sustain themselves in their new environment, Smith sought a forced trade with Powhatan. But by now, Powhatan had determined to let the Englishmen surive, a policy made manifestly clear not only by his refusal to trade corn but by his withdrawal of Pocahontas. On penalty of death, Powhatan forbade his young daughter to enter the English settlement. “Captain Smith,” warned Powhatan at a confrontation of the two leaders in January 1609, “some doubt I have of your coming hither, that makes me not so kindly seek to receive you as I would [like]. For many do inform me your coming is not for trade, but to invade my people and possess my country.”

Leading a colony where some men were deserting to the Indians while others starved, Smith raided Indian villages for provisions and slaughtered native people of both sexes and all ages. Colonists began to occupy Indian land in the James River valley. Powhatan retaliated by attacking the English

17Arber and Bradley, eds., Works of Smith, 1: 8-9.
18Barbour, ed., Jannanam Voyages, 144–45.
Powhatan’s policy of withdrawing from trade with the encroachers had succeeded. By the spring of 1610 the Spanish ambassador to England, Alonso de Velasco, reported home that “the Indians hold the English surrounded in the strong place which they had erected there, having killed the larger part of them, and the others were left, so entirely without provisions that they thought it impossible to escape.” Virginia could be easily erased from the map, Velasco counseled his government, “by sending out a few ships to finish what might be left in that place.” What the Spanish ambassador did not know was that two relief ships had reached Jamestown in May 1610 and found the situation so dismal that Sir Thomas Gates, arriving to assume the governorship of the colony, decided to embark the remaining sixty survivors, set sail for England, and admit that Englishmen had failed on the Chesapeake. On June 7, 1610, Gates ordered the forlorn settlement stripped of its meager possessions, loaded the handful of survivors aboard, and set sail down the James River for the open sea. The ships dropped anchor for the night after reaching the Chesapeake Capes and planned to start the return ocean voyage on the following day.

On the next morning three ships hove into sight. They carried 150 new recruits sent out by the Virginia Company and a new governor, Sir Thomas West, Lord De la Warr. Jamestown, at its moment of extinction, was reborn.

Now armed and provisioned, the revitalized Jamestown colonists revived their militaristic Indian policy in what amounted to an on-again, off-again war between 1610 and 1613. The new attitude toward the Powhatan Confederacy was apparent in the orders issued in 1609 for governing the colony. Earlier, the Virginia Company had instructed, “In all your passages you must have great care not to offend the naturals if you can eschew it.”

Now the governor was ordered to effect a military occupation of the region between the James and York rivers; to make all the tribes tributary to him rather than to Powhatan; to extract corn, furs, dye, and labor from each tribe; and, if possible, to mold the natives into an agricultural labor force as the Spanish had done in their colonies. As the English settlement gained in strength, Smith’s successors continued his policy of military foraging and intimidation. From 1610 to 1612 Powhatan attacked the colonists whenever opportunities presented themselves, and the English mounted fierce attacks that decimated three small tribes and destroyed two Indian villages. Much of the corn that sustained the colony in these years seems to have been extracted by force from Powhatan’s villages, although tribes on the fringe of Powhatan’s rule gladly traded maize for English shovels, hatchets, scissors, glass beads, and bells.

21Quoted in Grace S. Woodward, Powhatan (Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960), p. 120.


When John Smith published his *Generall Historie of Virginia* in 1624, London’s Robert Vaughan provided some fanciful illustrations of Smith’s heroism. Here, in 1606, Smith seizes the gigantic Powhatan, chief of the Chesapeake Bay tribes, by the scalplock. In the background, English soldiers match firearms against Indian bows and arrows. Smith never hunted Powhatan, but this early confrontation is accurate. (John Smith, *Generall Historie of Virginia*, London, 1624.)

wherever he could. Even the arrival of fresh supplies and several hundred new colonists in the summer of 1609 did not help, for the provisions were quickly exhausted, the men ravenously consuming more than they produced. When the relief ships departed in October 1609, with John Smith aboard one of them, Virginia embarked upon a winter of despair. Under the surveillance of Powhatan, who ambushed foraging colonists whenever he could, the death toll mounted. George Percy, Smith’s successor, wrote that after the horses had been eaten, the dysentery-racked Virginians were glad to make shift with [such] vermin as dogs, cats, rats, and mice. When these were exhausted, men resorted to “things which seem incredible, as to dig up corpses out of graves and to eat them—and some have licked up the blood which hath fallen from their weak fellows. And amongst the rest, this was most lamentable, that one of our colony murdered his wife, ripped the child out of her womb and threw it into the river, and after chopped the mother in pieces and salted her for his food, the same not being discovered before he had eaten part thereof.”

23Quoted in ibid., pp. 64-65.
In 1613 the English kidnapped Pocahontas in a move designed to obtain a return of English prisoners and a quantity of weapons that the Indians had acquired over the years and, as Pocahontas's abductor, Captain John Rolfe's promise of payment of "a great quantite of Corne." Samuel Argall put it, to force payment of "a great quantitie of Corn." Understanding that his daughter was not in harm's way, Powhatan made limited concessions to the English but refused to satisfy all the ransom conditions. In the following year, when the widower John Rolfe vowed to marry Pocahontas, Powhatan reluctantly assented to the first Anglo-Indian marriage in Virginia's history and signed a humiliating peace treaty. Pocahontas became the instrument of an uneasy truce between the two societies and returned to England with Rolfe and other members of Powhatan's Confederacy in 1616 in order to promote further colonization of the Chesapeake. She died on the eve of her return to Virginia in 1617, after helping to raise the money that pumped new lifeblood into the Virginia Company and consequently sent hundreds of new fortune-seekers to the Chesapeake as part of the population buildup that would lead to a renewal of hostilities five years after her death.

Notwithstanding misconceptions, suspicion, and violence on both sides, the English and the Powhatans lived in close contact during the first decade of English settlement and cultural interchange and trade occurred on a broad scale. Although it has been a commonplace in the popular mind since the moment when Europeans and Native Americans first met that the Europeans were "advanced" and the Indians were "primitive," the technological differences between the two cultures were equaled or outweighed by the similarities between these two agricultural societies. The main technological advantages of the English were their ability to traverse large bodies of water in wooden ships and their superiority in fashioning iron implements of wood in wooden ships and their superiority in fashioning iron implements of water. The Indians quickly incorporated such iron-age items as kettles, fishhooks, traps, needles, knives, and guns into their material culture, using nets and weirs to catch the abundant fish and shellfish of the Chesapeake waters and introduced the intruders to a wide range of agricultural products unknown in Europe before 1492. Englishmen in Virginia learned from the natives how to cultivate tobacco, corn, beans, squash, pumpkins, and other food products. Algonquians also introduced the English to a wide range of medicinal herbs, dyes, and such important devices as the canoe.

Such cultural interaction proceeded even while hostility and sporadic violence was occurring in the early years. It was facilitated by Indians living among the English as day laborers, while a number of settlers fled to Indian villages rather than endure the autocratic English rulers and oppressive tobacco plantations. This sojourning brought a knowledge and understanding of the other culture. Thus, even while the English pursued a policy of intimidation in the early years, they recognized the resilience and strength of the Algonquians' culture. Smith marveled at the strength and agility of the Chesapeake tribesmen, at their talent for hunting and fishing, and admired their music and entertainment. He noted that they practiced civil government, that they adhered to religious traditions, and that many of their customs and institutions were not unlike those of the Europeans. "Although the country people be very barbarous," he wrote, "yet have they amongst them such government, as that their Magistrates for good commanding, and their people for due subjection, and obeying, excell many places that would be counted very civil." Other Englishmen, such as the Anglican minister Alexander Whitaker, who proselytized among the Indians, wrote that it was a mistake to suppose that the Indians were merely savage people, "for they are of body lustie, strong, and very nimble: they are a very understanding generation, quicke of apprehension, suddain in their dispatches, subtile in their dealings, exquisite in their inventions, and industrious in their labour." So, while both sides adjusted uneasily to the presence of the other, both were involved in cultural borrowing.

THE WAR OF 1622 AND ITS AFTERMATH

After the increase of population that accompanied the rapid growth of tobacco production, relations between the two peoples underwent a fundamental alteration. While giving Virginia an important money crop, the cultivation of tobacco created an enormous new demand for land. As more and more men pushed up the rivers that flowed into the Chesapeake Bay to carve out tobacco plantations, the Indians of the region perceived that what had previously been an abrasive and sometimes violent relationship might now become a disastrous one. Powhatan had retired in 1617, just as tobacco cultivation began to expand rapidly. His younger brother, Opechancanough, who assumed leadership of the tidewater tribes, concluded that he must embark upon a program of military renaissance and spiritual revitalization.

Opechancanough was battling not only against land-encroaching Englishmen but against the diseases they were spreading among the Indian population. The deadliness of all European weapons were the microorganisms brought ashore in nearly every immigrant. In the Chesapeake region minor epidemics had taken their toll in the 1580s and again in 1608. Between 1617 and 1619 another epidemic decimated the Powhatan tribes.

In leading a reorganization of his people, Opechancanough relied heavily on Nemattanaw, a war captain and religious prophet whom the English


[29Quoted in Woodward, Pocahontas, p. 156.]
called "Jack of the Feathers" for the "fantastick Manner" in which "he would often dress himself up with Feathers... as though he meant it to fife." A shadowy figure who came often to the English settlements, Nemattanew had convinced his tribemen that he was immortal and that they would be immune to musket fire if they rubbed their bodies with a special ointment. In March 1622, as Opechancanough was piecing together plans for a unified attack on the Virginia settlements, the English murdered Nemattanew in retaliation for a settler death. Nemattanew's death triggered the famous Indian assault two weeks later that dealt the colony a staggering blow; but the highly combustible atmosphere generated by a half-dozen years of white expansion and pressure on Indian hunting lands was the fundamental cause of the attack.

Although it did not achieve its goal of ending English presence in the Chesapeake area, the Indian attack of 1622 and the famine that followed it wiped out nearly half of the white population. Included among the victims was Opechancanough's nephew by marriage, John Rolfe. It was the final straw for the Virginia Company of London, which declared bankruptcy and left the colony to the governance of the Crown.

The more important result was that those who survived the attack felt free to pursue a ruthless new Indian policy. Even though several leaders in the colony confided to men in England that the real cause of the Indian attack was "our owne perfidious dealing with them," it was generally agreed that henceforward the colonists would be free to hunt down the Indians wherever they could be found. Abandoning an obligation to "civilize" and Christianize the native, the Virginians adopted a no-holds-barred approach to "the Indian problem." One Virginian wrote revealingly after the attack:

Our hands which before were tied with gentleness and faire usage, are now set at liberty by the treacherous violence of the Savages... So that we, who hitherto had had possession of no more ground than their waste and our purchase at a valuable consideration to their owne contentment gained; may now by right of Warre, and law of Nations, invade the Country, and destroy them who sought to destroy us; whereby wee shall enjoy their cultivated places, turning the laborious Mattle of the victorious Sword and possessing the fruits of others labours. Now their cleared grounds in all their villages (which are situate in the fruitfulness places of the land) shall be inhabited by us, whereas hitherto the grubbing of woods was the greatest labour.  


In these sentences one can detect a note of grim satisfaction that the Indians had succeeded in wiping out one-third of the English population. John Smith, writing from England two years after the attack, noted that some men held that the attack "will be good for the Plantation, because now we have just cause to destroy them by all means possible." Another writer expressed the prevalent genocidal urge by reasoning that the Indians had done the colonists a favor by sweeping away the previous English reluctance to annihilate the Indians. He enumerated with relish the ways that the "savages" could be exterminated. "Victorie," he wrote, "may be gained many wais; by force, by surprize, by famine in burning their Corne, by destroying and burning their Boats, Canoes, and Houses, by breaking their fishing Wears [weirs], by assailing them in their huntings, whereby they get the greatest part of their sustenance in Winter, by pursuing and chasing them with our horses, and blood-Hounds to draw after them, and Mastives to tear them." 27

Once the Virginians slaked their thirst for revenge, the only debatable point was whether the extermination of the tidewater Indian tribes would work to the benefit or disadvantage of the colony. One prominent planter offered "reasons why it is not fitting utterly to make an exterpation of the Savages yet" and then assured his neighbors that he was not against genocidal extermination but opposed the destruction of a people who, if properly subjugated, could enrich all Virginians through their labor. But both subjugation and assimilation required more time and trouble than the Virginians were willing to spend. The simpler course, consistent with instructions from London to "root out [the Indians] from being any longer a people," was to follow a scorched earth policy, sending military expeditions each summer to destroy villages and crops. 28 In 1629 the council negotiated a peace treaty but then rejected it because a state of "perpetual enmity" would serve the colony better. The acculturation of the two people, even if possible, was not desirable.

For a number of years after the 1622 attack, the Virginians were too weak to carry out their genocidal urges on native peoples. But by 1640 Virginia had grown to about 8,000 settlers. By 1662 the population had swelled to 25,000 and the colony was shipping 7 million pounds of tobacco a year to England. Although the Crown appointed a royal governor to rule in conjunction with an appointed council and an elected House of Burgesses, the real power in the colony lay at the local level, where each tobacco planter operated autonomously with little regard for centralized authority. Men like Governor John Harvey, appointed in 1626, could complain that

these planters acted "rather for their own ends than either seeking the
generall good or doinge right to particular men." But he could do little to
foster a spirit of community or curb the appetites of the land-hungry, profit-
conscious tobacco planters. When he proposed a lasting peace with the
Indians and that the Chesapeake tribes be left unmolested on the land they
were occupying, the planters refused to cooperate. These were men who
had clawed their way to the top of the rough-hewn frontier society. They
eagerly conducted a fur trade with more distant tribes, but they had no in-
tention of allowing the governor to interfere with their takeover of large
tracts of land or their continuation of an aggressive Indian policy in the tide-
water region. When Harvey tried again in 1635 to impose his will, Virginia's
leaders plotted against him, provoked violence, and evicted him from the
colony while sending petitions back to the mother country complaining of
his arbitrary and unreasonable policies.

It was such tough, self-made, ambitious men as these, unhindered by
religious or humanitarian concern for the Indians and unrestrained by gov-
ernment, that the Chesapeake tribes had to confront after 1630. They also
had to face the rapidly shifting population balance—the drastic decline of
their numbers by disease and war during the first quarter-century of English
presence and the rapid increase of English colonists after 1624. These fac-
tors were beyond the control of the Chesapeake tribes. Even so, the natives
continued to follow their traditional way of life. Years of contact with Euro-
pean culture had done little to convince them that they should remodel
their religion, social and political organization, or values and beliefs on
English patterns. Powhatan's people eagerly incorporated technological in-
novations and material objects of the newcomers into their culture, but they
resisted or rejected the other aspects of European life.

Though greatly weakened by disease and war, many Algonquians were
still determined to drive out the English intruders rather than adapt to an
alien culture. Though far fewer in number than in 1622, Powhatan confed-
eracy tribesmen attacked in April 1644 under the leadership of the aged
Opechancanough. His warriors carried him into battle on a litter. That the
young warriors were willing to risk an all-out attack, knowing the grim
reprisals that would rain down on them if they were defeated, indicates the
stubborn resistance of the Indians to cultural annihilation.

The Powhatan tribes were again the losers in the war of 1644, although
they killed hundreds of colonists, about one-twelfth of the white population.
They lost partially because the aid they expected from white Marylanders,
whose relations with Virginia had always been abrasive, did not materialize.

Yet their determination apparently convinced the Virginians that Indians
could barely be cowed into subservience. Rather than risk future wars, the
colonists altered the policy of the 1620s by signing a formal treaty in 1646
with the survivors of the Powhatan Confederacy. It drew a line between red
and white territory and promised the Indians safety in their territory north
of the York River. In return the Powhatan tribes agreed to render military
assistance in the event of an attack by tribes outside the Chesapeake area
and promised a yearly tribute of beaver skins to the Virginia colony in ac-
nowledgement of their subject status. Powhatan's Confederacy died with
this peace treaty.

When Virginians took a census in 1669, only 11 of the 28 tribes de-
scribed by John Smith in 1608 and only about 2,900 of the 20,000 Indians
present when the English arrived remained in the colony. The English
victory in the clash of the two societies was mostly due to the continued
immigration of new settlers to the colony during an era when disease dras-
tically thinned the Indian ranks. Also important to the Indians' decline was
their inability to unite against the incoming European peoples. They out-
numbered the English during the first two decades of settlement and might
have expected to be further aided by the fierce internal divisions that
gripped the Virginia colony for years. But in times of military crisis the
colonists were better able to unite, if only momentarily, than the tribes of
the Chesapeake region.

A more indirect factor in the decay of Indian strength was the grow-
ing functionlessness of the Chesapeake tribes after the English no longer
depended on the maize trade. This can be best understood by looking com-
paratively at the English and Spanish systems of colonization. In the Spanish
colonies, the densely settled Indians had been utilized effectively as a
subjugated labor force, both in the silver mines and in agriculture. The
Spanish had unerringly located the native population centers in Mexico and
Peru and made them the focal points of their colonization efforts. The Indians
supplied the bulk of the labor for Spanish extractive and productive enter-
prises in the early decades; hence it was not only desirable but necessary to
assimilate them into the European culture. Moreover, the Spanish church
had a vested interest in the Indians. It sent hundreds of missionaries to the
colonies to obtain as many conversions as possible for the greater glory of
the church. Also, because the Spanish immigrants were disproportionately
male, Indian women served the function of mistress, concubine, and wife.
Though regarded as inferior to Spanish women, thousands of them became
the sexual partners, inside and outside marriage, of Spanish men and in this
way were of the utmost importance to the colonizers. Of course none of
these roles could be fulfilled until the native societies had been subordi-
nated to Spanish authority, and the Spanish employed the most merciless
forms of mass killing and terrorization to ensure their ascendancy in the
first period of contact. Thereafter, Spanish colonizers regarded native peoples
not primarily as a threat, though the possibility of native uprisings was always present, but as a population that could answer the economic, religious, and biological needs of the settlers. In spite of the catastrophic spread of European diseases, which reduced the Indian population by as much as 75 percent in the first century of contact, an impressive degree of acculturation and assimilation took place in the Spanish colonies.

In English Virginia none of these factors pertained except in the most limited way. The English brought no military force comparable to the conquistadors to subjugate the Chesapeake tribes and drive them into agricultural labor. The Anglican Church sent only a handful of clergymen to the colony, and they made only token efforts to mount a missionary campaign. Their power over local settlers so far as relations with the Indians was concerned was minimal. Nor was there any significant sexual conjoining of English males and native women, partly because of English squeamishness about women of another culture but probably even more because Indian women, living in tribes not subjugated by the English, had no inclination to consort with men of the intruding society. Interracial marriages were almost unknown in Virginia except in frontier areas where trappers and traders often made liaisons with native women.

Only in the maize and fur trade, where the Indian was food producer, trapper, and skin dresser, did the natives serve the needs of the white colonist. But the trade for corn lasted only until the colonists became self-sufficient by about 1616, and the fur trade was of negligible importance in the early Virginia settlements. What the colonists primarily wanted from the Indian was cleared land. Within the first generation of European settlement, neither side possessed the military capacity to subjugate the other. But for the English subjugation was unnecessary. With little to contribute to the goals of English colonization, native people were regarded mostly as an obstacle. In an almost perfect reversal of Spanish Indian policy the English in Virginia after 1622 worked to keep the two cultures apart. Like the Spanish policy, this plan was based on calculations of self-interest. Differences in the exploitable resources of the Spanish and English colonies, in the density of Indian population, in the demographic composition of the colonizing and colonized societies, and in the social backgrounds of the colonists, rather than differences in national character, in attitudes toward the indigenous people, or in national policy, were chiefly responsible for the pursuit of assimilation in Spanish America and the goal of racial separation in Virginia.

Cultures Meet in the Northeast

While Indians of the Powhatan confederacy were planning their attack on the white settlements of Virginia in 1622, Dutch and English colonizers were entering Indian territory hundreds of miles to the north. The commerce-minded Dutch got the first foothold in the northeastern Atlantic seaboard. Therefore, the religion-minded Pilgrims and Puritans who followed would have to reckon carefully with the Dutch presence and their trading relationships with native peoples.

Whether they were Dutch or English, the European newcomers came face to face with diverse Algonquian peoples, some of them composing largely autonomous small tribes and others, such as the Iroquois, that were populous, powerful, and organized into confederacies. Relationships among all these Indian societies, sometimes amicable and often hostile, went back hundreds of years. Into this maze of Indian relations, contending Europeans made their way filled with ambition and uncertainties.

THE DUTCH IN THE NORTHEAST

Hollanders had achieved independence from their own colonial masters, the Spanish, only in 1609. But even by then they had become the principal carriers of seawore commerce in Western Europe and had begun interloping