



## CHAPTER TWO

### *Colonial America Without the Indians: A Counterfactual Scenario*

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MORE than thirty years ago, Bernard DeVoto lambasted students of American history, especially the academic kind, for having made “shockingly little effort to understand the life, the societies, the cultures, the thinking, and the feeling of Indians, and disastrously little effort to understand how all these affected white men and their societies. . . . Most American history,” he chided, “has been written as if history were a function solely of white culture—in spite of the fact that till well into the nineteenth century the Indians were one of the principal determinants of historical events.”

Three decades later, it behooves us to ask whether we should be tarred with the same brush. Have we done any more or any better to understand the American natives and especially to integrate them into the main course of American history, not as an exotic if melancholy footnote but as one of its principal *determinants*? In answer to the first part of the question, it can be argued that the history of America’s Indian peoples has grown tremendously in volume and sophistication since 1952, thanks less to traditional American historians than to historically minded ethnologists and those hybrid progeny of history and anthropology known as ethnohistorians. As for the second part, it must be confessed that the current generation, no less than DeVoto’s, has

“A Chief Lord of Roanoke,” an engraving published by Theodor DeBry in 1590, executed from a drawing made by John White along the North Carolina coast in 1585.

made "disastrously little effort to understand how [the Indians] affected white men and their societies."

Where historians have not deigned to tread, others have rushed in. Since the last quarter of the nineteenth century, several articles and chapters have treated "The Contributions of the American Indian to Civilization" or "Americanizing the White Man." But most of them are either derivative, unhistorical, or downright foolish. They all suffer from at least one of four major problems. First, with one antiquated exception, they take as their subject all of American history and culture, with no differentiation of sections, classes, demography, or chronology. Second, "Indian" culture is similarly overgeneralized; no allowance is made for tribal, culture area, or chronological differences. Third, they focus on isolated *materials* and *traits* rather than on cultural *complexes* (how they were used, perceived, and adapted by the colonists). And, finally, the conclusions of some and the implications of all lack common sense. To suggest, even indirectly, that "what is distinctive about America is Indian, through and through" or that Americans are simply Europeans with "Indian souls" is blithely to ignore the "wholly other" nature of English colonial society—its aggressive capitalism; exploitative attitudes toward natural resources; social hierarchy; nuclear kinship system; religious intolerance; literacy and print communications; linear sense of time; imperialism based on conquest; superiority complex based on religion, technology, social evolution and, ultimately, race; and desire to replicate the major features of the mother society as completely and quickly as possible.

One predictable reaction to the well-meaning fatuity of such efforts to plug the Indian into American culture (if not history) was that of Wilbur Zelinsky, who surveyed *The Cultural Geography of the United States* in 1973. After scanning the colonial period, Zelinsky concluded that "the sum of the lasting aboriginal contribution to the North American extension of British culture was distinctly meager. . . . Had the European colonists found an utterly unpopulated continent, contemporary American life would not have differed in any major respect from its actual pattern."

Who's right—DeVoto or Zelinsky? Were the Indians a temporary and irrelevant backdrop to the realization of Anglo-American destiny or were they "one of the principal determinants" of American history? The answer is not without importance. If Professor Zelinsky is correct, colonial history can remain a monochromatic study of Puritan preach-

ing, merchant adventure, and imperial legislation; and textbook publishers can—when the political "heat" from the Indian Movement cools—cut the now-mandatory opening chapter on America's "prehistory" and adventitious references to the familiar cast of kamikaze warriors, noble collaborators, and patriot chiefs.

In a brief essay it is impossible to describe all the ways in which the Indians determined American history in the colonial period. However, it might be possible to suggest the outlines of such a description by following Professor Zelinsky's lead and imagining what early American history might have looked like in the utter *absence* of Indians in the New World. This kind of counterfactual discussion has its pitfalls as history, but for heuristic purposes it has few rivals if handled with care. When the main issue is the indispensability or irrelevance of a people to a complex course of historical events, the shortest way to resolve it is to reconstruct those events without the disputed variable. "Had the European colonists found an utterly unpopulated continent," we should ask, "would colonial American life have differed "in any major respect from its actual pattern?"

To begin at the beginning, in the period of European discovery and exploration, we can say with confidence that if Columbus had not discovered *los Indios* (and they him), the history of Spanish America would have been extremely short and uneventful. Since Columbus was looking for the Far East, not America or its native inhabitants, he personally would have not been surprised to find no Indians in the Caribbean—the new continent was surprise enough. But he would have been disappointed, not only because the islands of the Orient were known to be inhabited but also because there would have been little or no reason to spend time exploring and settling the New World in lieu of his larger goal. America would have been regarded simply as a huge impediment to his holy plan to mount an old-fashioned crusade to liberate Jerusalem with profits derived from his short-cut to Cathay.

If the Caribbean and Central and South America had been unpopulated, the placer mines of the islands and the deep mines of gold and silver on the mainland in all likelihood would not have been discovered and certainly not exploited quickly without Indian knowledge and labor. It is simply inconceivable that the Spanish would have stumbled on the silver deposits of Potosí or Zacatecas if the Incas and Aztecs had not set Spanish mouths to watering with their sumptuous gold jewelry and ornaments. Indeed, without the attraction of that enormous wealth

to be commandeered from the natives, it is likely that the Spanish would not have colonized New Spain at all except with a few supply bases from which to continue the search for the Southwest Passage.

It is equally possible that without the immediate booty of Indian gold and silver, the Spanish would have dismissed Columbus as a crack-brained Italian after one voyage and redirected their economic energies eastward in the wake of the Portuguese, toward the certifiable wealth of Africa, India, and the East Indies. Eventually, sugar cane might have induced the Iberians to colonize their American discoveries, as it did the Cape Verdes, Madeiras, and Canaries, but black laborers would have had to be imported to mount production. Without Indian labor and discovery, however, saltwater pearls and the bright red dye made from the cochineal beetle—the second largest export in the colonial period—would not have contributed to Spain's bulging balance sheets, with all that meant for the political and economic history of Europe in the sixteenth and early seventeenth century.

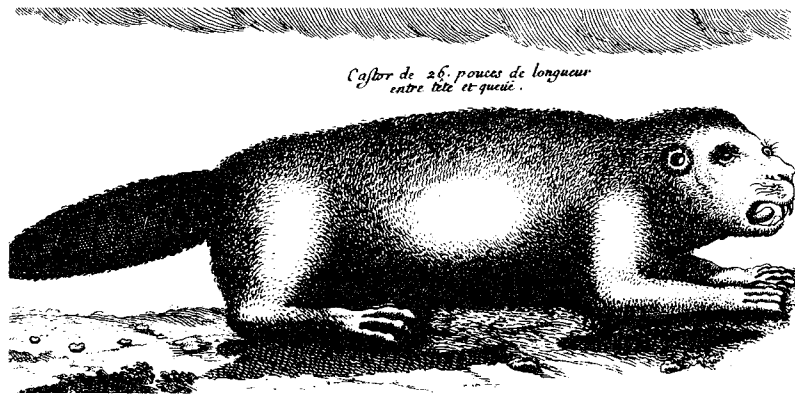
Perhaps most important, without the millions of Native Americans who inhabited New Spain, our textbooks would be silent on the Spanish conquest—no "Black Legend," no Cortés or Montezuma, no brown-robed friars baptizing thousands daily or ferreting out "idolatry" with whip and fagot, no legalized plunder under the *encomienda* system, no cruelty to those who extracted the mines' treasures and rebuilt Spanish cities on the rubble of their own, no mastiffs mangling runaways. And without the fabulous lure of Aztec gold and Incan silver bound for Seville on the annual bullion fleets, it is difficult to imagine Spain's European rivals beating an ocean path to America to establish colonies of their own, certainly not as early as they did.

Take the French, for example. The teeming cod on the Grand Banks off Newfoundland would have drawn and supported a small seasonal population of fishermen, as it did early in the sixteenth century. But without the Indian presence, that would have been the extent of French colonial penetration. Verrazzano's 1524 reconnaissance of the Atlantic seaboard would have been an even bigger bust than it was, having found no promising Northwest Passage to the Orient; and Jacques Cartier probably would have made two voyages at most, the second to explore the St. Lawrence far enough to learn that *La Chine* did not lie on the western end of Montreal Island. He would have reported to Francis I that "the land God gave to Cain" had no redeeming features whatever, such as the greasy furs of Indian fishermen and the promise

of gold and diamonds in the fabled Kingdom of the Saguenay, of which the Indians seemed to speak with such conviction.

If by chance Champlain had renewed the French search for the Northwest Passage in the seventeenth century, he quickly would have lost his backers without the lure of an established fur trade with the natives of Acadia and Canada, who hunted, processed, and transported the pelts in native-designed, -built, and -manned canoes or on native snowshoes and toboggans. And without the "pagan" souls of the Indians as a goad and challenge, the French religious orders, male and female, would not have cast their lot with Champlain and the trading companies that governed and settled New France before 1663. Without the Indian fur trade, in short, no seigneuries would have been granted along the St. Lawrence, no *habitants*, *engagés* or "King's girls" shipped out to Canada. Quebec and Montreal would not have been founded even as crude *comptoirs*, and no Jesuit missionaries would have craved martyrdom at an Iroquois stake. Needless to say, no "French and Indian" wars would mar our textbooks with their ethnocentric denomination. North America would belong solely to settlements of English farmers. For without the Indians and their fur trade, the Swedish and the Dutch would have followed the French lead by staying home or turning to the East for economic inspiration.

Without the lure of American gold and the Elizabethan contest with Spain that grew partly from its advent, the English, too, probably would have financed fewer ocean searches for the Northwest Passage. Unless Indian chamberpots were thought to have been made of gold, far fewer gentle-born investors and low-born sailors would have risked their lives and fortunes on the coasts of America. Unless the Spanish had reaped fabulous riches from the natives and then subjected the latter to cruel and unnatural bondage, Sir Walter Raleigh would not have sponsored his voyages of liberation to Guiana and "Virginia." If the Spanish flotas had not sailed regularly through the Straits of Florida, English privateers would not have preyed on the West Indies nor captured the booty that helped to launch permanent colonies in Ireland and North America. Arthur Barlowe's 1584 voyage to North Carolina would probably not have been followed up so soon without the discovery of friendly natives capable of securing a fledgling colony from Spanish incursions. If settlers had come the following year, fewer need have been soldiers, they need not have been deposited on Roanoke Island for security reasons, and they probably would never have been lost



An early European illustration of a North American beaver (in French, *castor*). From Baron De Lahontan, *Nouveaux Voyages Dans L'Amerique*, published first in France in 1704.

without an Armada scare to detain supplies or the free-lance privateering of rescuers.

Sooner or later, the English would have established colonies in America to provide a safety valve for the felt pressures of population growth and economic reorganization and as a sanctuary for religious dissenters. But without the Indians, our textbooks would assume a very different appearance in the chapters beyond the first; and the first, of course, would not be about the Indian "prehistory" of the continent but a much truncated treatment of exploration that barely mentioned the Spanish, Portuguese, French, Swedish, and Dutch.

Once English settlement was under way, the absence of native villages, tribes, and war parties would have altered rather drastically the timing and chronology of American history. In general, events would have accelerated because in reality the Indian presence acted as a major check on colonial development. Without a native barrier (which in the colonial period was much more daunting than the Appalachians), the most significant drag on colonial enterprise would have been the lack of Indian labor in a few minor economies, such as the domestic economy of southern New England (supplied by Indian captives in the Pequot and King Philip's wars) and the whale fisheries of Cape Cod, Long Island, and Nantucket. Indians were not crucial to wheat farm-

ing, lumbering, or rice and tobacco culture and would not have been missed by English entrepreneurs.

Without Indians to contest the land, English colonists would have encountered no opposition to their choice of prime locations for settlement except from English competitors. They would not have had to challenge Indian farmers for the fertile river valleys and coastal plains the natives had cultivated for centuries. Without potential Indian or European enemies, sites could have been located almost entirely for economic rather than military considerations, thus removing Jamestown, Plymouth, and St. Mary's City from the litany of American place-names. Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Charleston would probably have developed where they are, either because Indian opposition to their founding was minimal or because they were situated for optimal access to inland markets and Atlantic shipping lanes.

In an empty land, English leaders would also have had fewer strategic and ideological reasons for communal settlements of the classic New England type. Without the military and moral threat of Indian war parties, on the one hand, and the puzzling seduction of native life, on the other, English colonists would have had to be persuaded by other arguments to cast their lots together. One predictable result is that New England "Puritans" would have become unbridled "Yankees" even faster than they did, and other colonies would have spread across the American map with equal speed. In other words, by 1776, Anglo-American farmers in large numbers would have spilled over the Appalachians, headed toward their "Manifest Destiny" in the West. Without Indians, Frenchmen, or Spaniards in the Mississippi Valley and beyond to stop them, only the technology of transportation, the supply of investment capital, and the organization of markets en route would have regulated the speed of their advance.

Another consequence of an Indian-less America would be that we could not speak with any accuracy of "the American frontier" because there would be no people on the other side; only where two peoples and cultures intersect do we have a bona fide frontier. The movement of one people into uninhabited land is merely *exploration* or *settlement*, and does not constitute a frontier situation. In fact, without viable Indian societies, colonial America would more nearly resemble Frederick Jackson Turner's famous frontier in which Indians are treated more like geographical features than sociological teachers. In Turner's scenario,

the European dandy fresh from his railroad car is "Americanized" less by contact with palpably attractive human societies than by the "wilderness" or Nature itself. Moreover, the distinctively "American" character traits in Turner's catalogue produced by living on the fore edge of westering "civilization" would have been exaggerated by the existence of *truly* limitless cheap land and much less control from the Old World and the eastern "Establishment."

Not only would Turner's mythopoeic frontier really have existed in a non-Indian America, but three other common misunderstandings in our teaching of colonial history would have been realities. First, America would indeed have been a "virgin land," a barren "wilderness" that was not home or well-known to perhaps 4 million native people north of Mexico. If those people had not existed, we would not have to explain their catastrophic decline—by as much as 90 percent—through epidemics of imported diseases, warfare, injustice, and forced migrations—the "widowing" of the once-virgin land.

Second, colonial history would be confined to the political boundaries of the future United States, much like the weather map on the six o'clock news. Without Indians, we could continue to ignore French Canada and Louisiana, the Spanish Southwest, the Russian Northwest (which would not exist without the Indian seal trade), and the borderless histories of Indian-white contact that determined so much of the shape and texture of colonial life.

And third, we would not have to step up from the largely black-and-white pageant of American history we are offered in our textbooks and courses to a richer polychromatic treatment if the Indians had no role in the past. We would not have to pay lip service to the roll call of exclusively male Indian leaders who have been squeezed into the corners of our histories by modern American Indian activists. Still less would we have to try to integrate into our texts an understanding of the various native peoples who were here first, remained against staggering odds, and are still here to mold our collective past and future.

To get a sharper perspective on an Indian-free scenario of colonial history, we should increase our focal magnification and analyze briefly four distinguishable yet obviously related aspects of colonial life—economics, religion, politics, and acculturation.

If Professor Zelinsky's thesis has any merits at all, they lie on the economic side of the ledger. The economy of Anglo-America without the Indians would have resembled in general outline the historical

economy but with several significant exceptions. Farming would certainly have been the mainstay of colonial life, whether for family subsistence or for capitalist marketing and accumulation. But the initial task of establishing farms would have required far more grubbing and clearing without the meadows and "park-like" woods produced by seasonal Indian burning, and especially without the cleared expanses of Indian cornfields and village sites. Many colonists found that they could acquire cleared Indian lands with a few fathoms of trading cloth, some unfenced cows, or a well-aimed barrel of buckshot.

A more serious deficiency would have been the absence of maize or Indian corn, the staple crop grown by the colonists throughout the colonial period to feed their families and sometimes to fatten their livestock for export. If Indians had not adapted wild Mexican corn to the colder, moist climates of North America and developed the agricultural techniques of hilling, fertilizing by annual burning, and co-planting with nitrogen-fixing beans to reduce soil depletion, the colonists would have lacked a secure livelihood in both the long and the short run, particularly in the early years before traditional European cereal crops could be adapted to the American climate and soils. Even if traditional crops could have been transplanted with ease, colonial productivity would not have benefited from the efficiency and labor savings of native techniques, which were often taught by Indian prisoners (as at Jamestown) or by allies such as Squanto at Plymouth. So central was maize to the colonial economy that it is possible that its absence would have acted as a severe brake on westward settlement, thereby counteracting to some degree the magnetic pull of free land.

The colonial economy would also have been affected by the lack of Indian trade, the profits from which were used to fuel the nascent economies of several colonies, including Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and South Carolina. Without early fortunes made from Indian furs, some of the "first families" of America—the Byrds, Penns, Logans, Winthrops, Schuylers—would not have been launched so solidly or so soon in shipping, slaves, rice, tobacco, or real estate. Nor would the mature economies of a few major colonies have rested on the fur trade well into the eighteenth century. New York's and Pennsylvania's balance of payments with the mother country would have been badly skewed if Indian-generated furs had not accounted for 30–50 percent of their annual exports between 1700 and 1750. By the same token, a substantial portion of English exports to the colonies

would not have been sent to colonial traders for Indian customers, whose historical appetites for English cloth and West Indian rum were appreciated even by those who realized that furs accounted for only 0.5 percent of England's colonial imports, far behind tobacco and sugar.

The lack of Indians and Indian property rights in America would have further complicated the colonial economy by greatly narrowing another classic American road to wealth. If the new land had been literally inexhaustible and "dirt cheap," the range of legal and extralegal means to acquire relatively scarce land for hoarding and speculation would have been markedly reduced. Within the unknown confines of the royal response to a huge, open continent, every man, great and small, would have been for himself. If the law condoned or fostered the selective aggrandizement of colonial elites, as it tended to do historically, unfavored farmers and entrepreneurs could simply move out of the effective jurisdiction of the government or find more congenial leaders to do their bidding. The proliferation of new colonies seeking economic and political "independence" from the "tyranny" of the Eastern Establishment would have been one certain result.

Finally, America without Indians would entail the rewriting of the history of black slavery in the colonies. It is likely that, in the absence of Indians, the colonial demand for and use of African slaves would have begun earlier and accelerated faster. For although the historical natives were found to be poor workers and poorer slaves, the discovery took some time. Not only would the rapid westward spread of settlements have called for black labor, perhaps more of it indentured, but the rice and tobacco plantations of the Southeast probably would have been larger than they were historically, if scarce land and high prices had not restricted them. In a virgin-land economy, agricultural entrepreneurs who wanted to increase their acreage could easily buy out their smaller neighbors, who lacked no access to new lands in the west. Of course, greater numbers of black laborers would have been needed to do the work because white indentured servants would have been extremely hard to get when so much land and opportunity beckoned over the horizon. By the same token, the slaves themselves would have been harder to keep to the task without surrounding tribes of Indians who could be taught to fear and hate the African strangers and to serve the English planters as slave-catchers.

While most colonists came to the New World to better their material condition, not a few came to ameliorate the spiritual condition of the

"godless" natives. Without the challenge of native "paganism" in America, the charters of most English colonies would have been frankly materialistic documents with pride of motive going to the extension of His (or Her) Majesty's Eminent Domain. Thus American history would have lost much of its distinctively evangelical tone, though few of its millenarian, utopian strains. Without the long, frustrated history of Christian missions to the Indians, we would lack a sensitive barometer of the cultural values that the European colonists sought to transplant in the New World and one source of denominational competition in the eighteenth century.

Without Indian targets and foils, the colonists even of New England might not have retained their "Chosen People" conceit so long or so obdurately. On the other hand, without the steady native reminder of their evangelical mission in America, the colonists' early descent into ecclesiastical "tribalism" and spiritual exclusiveness might have accelerated with time. The jeremiads of New England would certainly have been less shrill in the absence of the Pequot War and King Philip's War, when the hostile natives seemed to be scourges sent by God to punish a sinful people. Without the military and psychological threat of Indians within and without New England's borders, the colonial fear of limitless and unpredictable social behavior would have been reduced, thereby diminishing the harsh treatment of religious deviants such as Roger Williams, Anne Hutchinson, Quakers, and the Salem witches. Finally, the French "Catholic menace" to the north would have been no threat to English Protestant sensibilities without hundreds of Indian converts, led by "deviously" effective Jesuit missionaries, ringing New England's borders. The French secular clergy who would have ministered to the handful of fishermen and farmers in Canada would have had no interest whatever in converting heretics hundreds of miles away and no extra manpower to attempt it.

The appearance of the "French menace" introduces the political realm of colonial life, which also would take on a new complexion in the absence of American natives. Even if the French had settled the St. Lawrence Valley without a sustaining Indian fur trade, the proliferating English population and European power politics would have made short work of the tiny Canadian population, now bereft of Indian allies and converts in the thousands. In all likelihood, we would write about only one short intercolonial war, beginning much earlier than 1689. Perhaps the Kirkes would never have given Quebec back to the French

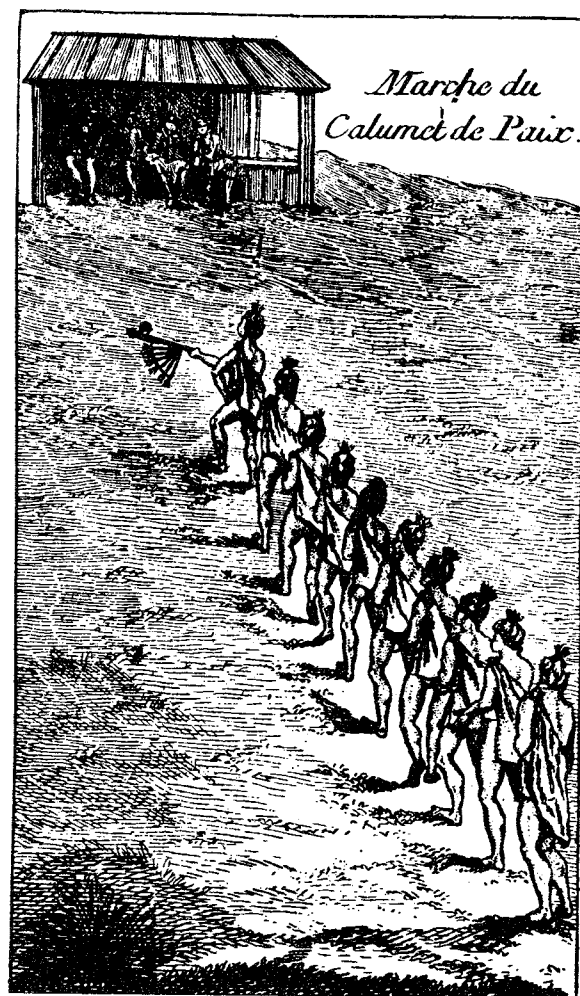


in 1632. Without the Catholic Indian *reserves* of Lorette, Caughnawaga, and St. Francois, Canada would quickly have become English, at least as far north as arable land and lumber-rich forests extended.

Without a formidable French and Indian threat, early Americans would not have developed—in conjunction with their conceit as God's "Chosen People"—such a pronounced "garrison mentality" as innocent and holy victims of heavily armed satanic forces. If the English had not been virtually surrounded by French-allied Indian nations and an arc of French trading forts and villages from Louisiana to Maine, the Anglo-American tendencies toward persecuted isolationism would have been greatly sublimated.

As the colonies matured, the absence of an Indian military threat would have greatly lightened the taxpayers' burden for colonial defense, thereby placing much less strain on the political relations between governors and representative assemblies. Indeed, the assemblies would not have risen to political parity with the royal administrators in the absence of financial crises generated by war debts and defense needs. Intercolonial cooperation would have been even less conspicuous than it was historically. Royal forces would not have been called in during the eighteenth century to bolster sagging colonial defenses, and no imperial debts would have been incurred which the colonies would be asked to help amortize. Consequently, the colonies would have had few grievances against the mother country serious enough to ignite an American Revolution, at least not in 1776. And without the concentration of Indian allies on the British side, the colonists might have achieved independence sooner than they did.

Another reason why the colonists would probably not have been ready for revolution in 1776 is that, without the steady impress of Indian culture, they would not have been or felt sufficiently "Americanized" to stand before the world as an independent nation. Without Indian societies to form our colonial frontiers, Anglo-American culture would have been transformed only by internal developments and the evolving influence of the mother country and of the black and other ethnic groups that shared the New World with the English. Black culture probably would have done the most to change the shape and texture of colonial life, especially in the South. But English masters saw little reason to emulate their black slaves in any positive way, to make any *adaptive* changes in their own cultural practices or attitudes to accommodate perceived superiorities in black culture. English colonial



Europeans and Indians often allied themselves for mutual protection. This scene of peacemaking was contained in Antoine Simon Le Page du Pratz, *Histoire de la Louisiane*, published first in Paris in 1758.

culture changed in response to the imported Africans largely in *reaction* to their oppositional being, and pervasive and often virulent racism was the primary result. Other changes followed, of course, from the adoption of staple economies largely but not necessarily dependent on black labor.

English reactions to the Indians, on the other hand, were far more mixed; the "savages" were noble as well as ignoble, depending on English needs and circumstances. Particularly on the frontier, colonists were not afraid or loath to borrow and adapt pieces of native culture if they found them advantageous or necessary for beating the American environment or besting the Indians in the contest for the continent. Contrary to metropolitan colonial opinion, this cultural exchange did not turn the frontiersmen into Indians. Indian means were simply borrowed and adapted to English ends. The frontiersmen did not regard themselves as Indians nor did they appreciably alter their basic attitudes toward the native means they employed. But they also knew that their American encounters with the Indians made them very different from their English cousins at home.

While the colonists borrowed consciously and directly from Indian culture only on the frontier, English colonial culture as a whole received a substantial but indirect impress from the Indians by being forced to confront the novel "otherness" of native culture and to cope with its unpredictability, pride, and retaliatory violence. Having the Indians as sometime adversaries and full-time contraries helped not only to reinforce the continuity of vital English traits and institutions but to Americanize all levels of colonial society more fully than the material adaptations of the frontiersmen. These *reactive* changes were, in large measure, responsible for transforming colonial Englishmen into native Americans in feeling, allegiance, and identity, a change without which, John Adams reminded us, the American Revolution would have been impossible. The whole colonial experience of trying to solve a related series of "Indian problems" had much to do with giving the colonists an identity indissolubly linked to America and their apprenticeship in political and military cooperation.

What are some of these changes that would *not* have taken place in colonial culture had the continent been devoid of Indians? The adaptive changes are the easiest to describe. Without native precedent, the names of twenty-eight states and myriad other place-names would carry a greater load of Anglophonic freight. The euphonious Shenandoah and

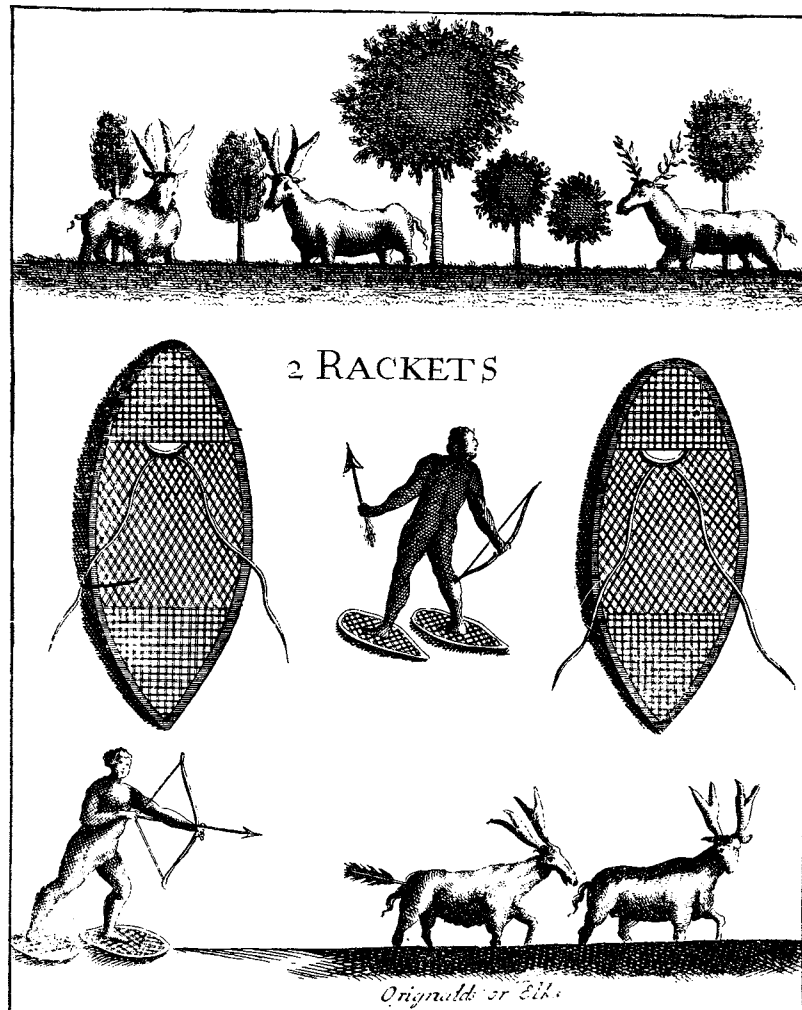
Monongahela might well be known as the St. George and the Dudley Rivers. We might still be searching for suitable names for the *moose*, *skunk*, and *raccoon*, the *muskelunge* and *quahog*, the *hickory* tree and marshy *muskeg*. It would be impossible, no doubt, to find *moccasins* in an L.L. Bean catalogue, or canned *succotash* in the supermarket. We would never refer to our children playfully as *papooses* or to political bigshots as *mugwumps*. Southerners could not start their day with *hominny* grits.

Without Indian guides to the New World, the English colonists upon arrival would have lacked temporary housing in bark-covered wigwams and longhouses. Not only would their diet have depended largely on imported foods, but their techniques for hunting American game and fowl and coping in the woods would have been decidedly meager. Without native medicines, many colonists would have perished and the *U.S. Pharmacopeia* would be short some 170 entries. Without Indian snowshoes and toboggans, winter hunting and travel would have been sharply curtailed. Without the lightweight bark canoe, northern colonists would have penetrated the country on foot, and not in comfortable moccasins and Indian leggings. English hunters probably would have careened around the woods in gaudy colors and torn English garments much longer, oblivious that the unsmoked glint of their musket barrels frightened the game. One can only imagine what Virginia's patriotic rifle companies would have worn in 1775 as an alternative to moccasins, leggings, fringed hunting shirts, scalping knives, and tomahawks.

Without native opponents and instructors in the art of guerrilla warfare, the colonists would have fought their American wars—primarily with the British—in traditional military style. In fact, without the constant need to suppress hostile natives and aggressive Europeans, they might have lost most of their martial spirit and prowess, making their victory in the now-postponed Revolution less than certain. Beating the British regulars at their own game without some of the stratagems and equipment gained from the Indians would have been nearly impossible, particularly when the British in the eighteenth century had gained experience in counterinsurgent warfare in Scotland and on the continent.

Although the absence of adaptive changes such as these would have done much to maintain the Anglicized tone and texture of colonial life, the absence of Indians would have preserved a number of more fundamental cultural values that were altered historically. The generalized Eu-





Baron de Lahontan, like many other early explorers, was fascinated by the snowshoes Indians used for hunting and travelling in deep snow.

European fear of barbarism that worried colonial planners and leaders would have dissipated without the Indian embodiment of the "heathenism" that seemed so contagious to English frontiersmen or the greater danger of Englishmen converting to an Indian way of life in captivity or, worse still, voluntarily as "apostates" and "renegades." Without the seduction of an alternative life-style within easy reach, hundreds of colonists would not have become "white Indians."

Second, and more generally, the English definition of themselves in America would have lacked a crucial point of reference because the Indians would no longer symbolize the "savage" baseness that would dominate human nature if man did not—paradoxically—"reduce" it to "civility" through government, religion, and the capitalist work ethic. Only imported Africans, not American natives, could have shown "civilized men [what] they were not and must not be." Because the historical settlers were "especially inclined to discover attributes in savages which they found first but could not speak of in themselves," they defined themselves "less by the vitality of their affirmations than by the violence of their abjurations." While all peoples to some extent define themselves by contrast with other peoples, the English colonists forged their particular American identity more on an Indian anvil than upon other European colonists or Africans. If America had been vacant upon discovery, the Anglo-American character would have been very different from that which we inherited.

For the whole spectrum of colonial society, urban and rural, the Indians as cultural contraries were not as frustrating, alarming, or influential as the Indian enemy. As masters of an unconventional warfare of terror, they seared the collective memory, imagination, and even subconscious of the colonists, leaving a deep but blurred intaglio of fear and envy, hatred and respect. Having the American natives as frequent and deadly adversaries—and even as allies—did more not to "Indianize" but to "Americanize" the English colonists than any other human factor and had two contradictory results. When native warfare frustrated and humbled the English military machine, its successes cast into serious doubt the colonists' sense of superiority, especially when the only resource seemed to be the hiring of equally "savage" mercenaries. At the same time, victorious Indians seemed so insufferably insolent—a projection of the Christians' original sin—that the colonists redoubled their efforts to claim divine grace and achieve spiritual and social regeneration through violence. One of the pathetic ironies of

early America is that in attempting to exterminate the wounding pride of their Indian enemies the colonists inflated their own pride to sinful proportions.

The Indians' brand of guerrilla warfare, which involved the "indiscriminate slaughter of all ranks, ages and sexes," torture, and captivity for adoption, gave rise to several colonial reactions. The first reaction to the offensive war of the natives (which was in reality retaliation for previous wrongs, real or perceived) was a well-founded increase in fear and paranoia. The second reaction, as we have already suggested, was the development of a defensive "garrison mentality," which in turn reinforced the colonists' sense of being a chosen if momentarily abandoned people. And the colonists' third response to being forced to confront such an enemy was that they were frequently torn from their own "civilized" moorings and swept into the kind of "savage" conduct they deplored in their enemies, motivated conspicuously by cold-blooded vengeance. Without Indian enemies, it is doubtful if the colonists would have fallen to the slaughter and torture of military prisoners, including women and children, taken scalps from friends and enemies to collect government bounties, encouraged the Spanish-style use of dogs, or made boot tops and tobacco pouches from the skins of fallen foes. It is a certainty that non-Indian enemies would not have been the target of frequent if unrealized campaigns of literal genocide; it is difficult to imagine English settlers coining an aphorism to the effect that "the only good Dutchman is a dead one."

It is both fitting and ironic that the symbol chosen by Revolutionary cartoonists to represent the American colonies was the Indian, whose love of liberty and fierce independence had done so much to Americanize the shape and content of English colonial culture. It is fitting because the Indians, by their long and determined opposition, helped to meld thirteen disparate colonies into one (albeit fragile) nation, different from England largely by virtue of having shared that common history of conflict on and over Indian soil. It is ironic because after nearly two centuries of trying to take the Indians' lives and lands, the colonists appropriated not only the native identity but the very characteristics that thwarted the colonists' ultimate arrogations.

If such a scenario seems plausible, we should be able to agree with DeVoto that, without the Indians, America would not be America as we know it. The sooner we acknowledge that fact, the sooner we can get down to the serious business of assessing the Indians' decisive place in American history.

### For Further Reading

The Indian impact on American culture has long fascinated historians and anthropologists. The first scholar to give the subject sustained attention was the novelist and gifted amateur historian, Edward Eggleston, whose "The Aborigines and the Colonists" appeared in the *Century Magazine* (May 1883): 96–114. His article was the only study restricted to the colonial legacy until James Axtell, "The Indian Impact on English Colonial Culture," in his *The European and the Indian: Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial North America* (New York, 1981).

Other attempts to measure the Indian impact have suffered from talking about "Indians" in general and about all of American history. Some of their titles suggest the breadth and vagueness of their approach: "The Contributions of the American Indian to Civilization" (by Alexander F. Chamberlain), *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, n.s. 16 (1903–4): 91–126; "The Influence of Aboriginal Indian Culture on American Life" (by Clark Wissler), in *Some Oriental Influences on Western Culture* (New York, 1929); "American Indians' Contributions to Civilization" (by Everett E. Edwards), *Minnesota History* 15 (1934): 255–72; "Americanizing the White Man" (by Felix Cohen), *The American Scholar* 21 (1952): 177–91; and "What We Owe the Woodland Indians," in Wilbur R. Jacobs, *Dispossessing the American Indian: Indians and Whites on the Colonial Frontier* (New York, 1972), 151–72. One author of books for young people, Hermina Poetgieter, even tried in *Indian Legacy* to describe *Native American Influences on World Life and Culture* (New York, 1981).

The most sensible contributions to the "impact" literature are by A. Irving Hallowell, late professor of anthropology at the University of Pennsylvania: "The Impact of the American Indian on American Culture," *American Anthropologist*, n.s. 59 (1957): 201–17, and "The Backwash of the Frontier: The Impact of the Indian on American Culture," in Walker D. Wyman and Clifton B. Kroeber, eds., *The Frontier in Perspective* (Madison, 1957).

For the general history of Indian-white relations in colonial America, see Garry B. Nash, *Red, White, and Black: The Peoples of Early America*, 2d ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1982); Francis Jennings, *The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest* (Chapel Hill, 1975); J. Leitch Wright, Jr., *The Only Land They Knew: The Tragic Story of the American Indians in the Old South* (New York, 1981); and James Axtell, *The Invasion Within: The Contest of Cultures in Colonial North America* (New York, 1985).