

Where the Buffalo Roamed

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You know the story. The Indians lived happily in America for billions and billions of years, dwelling peacefully with each other, co-existing harmoniously with nature, affirming the dignity and full equality of their women, practicing safe sex, and conscientiously following vegetarian diets. All that changed in the 19th century when evil white men moved into the American interior, slaughtered the buffalo, forced Indians to drink fire-water, used moving and sentimental Indian love-poetry for toilet paper (at least in *Dances With Wolves*), and clear-cut the Great Plains. This saga of the noble savage will be repeated constantly, mantra-like, during the Columbus quincentennial. The treatment of Western history has come a long way since the days when a New Yorker, fleeing a crabby wife, recommended the region because “there seldom is heard a discouraging word”.

Bad Old Columbus

This litany of lamentations begins with Columbus and his fellow Spaniards, considered great despoilers who initiated a 'holocaust' against the American Indians. Nasty stories of Spanish abuses were largely passed down by the English, who had their own reasons for believing and perpetuating the Black Legend. The source for many of these stories was future bishop Bartholomew de las Casas's “A Brief Relation of the Destruction of the Indians” (1552), whose criticism of Spanish abuses prompted reforms. It is ironic that the Spanish were vilified because of information in a book that actually produced changes.

The most sobering aspect of the Columbian discovery and the global interchange which followed was the introduction of new diseases to America. For American Indians, who had never been exposed to these germs and thus lacked immunities, European diseases were lethal and quickly reached epidemic proportions. Columbus, of course, moderns argue, was morally responsible for all this. Isn't it odd that Columbus, an unsuspecting conduit for new diseases to America, is considered a scoundrel by the same politically correct zealots who with equal vigor argue that homosexuals, whose perverse lifestyle is infecting the wider population with AIDS, are immune from censure?

The transmission of new diseases was not just a European endeavor; it was truly a global phenomenon. Europeans brought many deadly diseases to America: smallpox, cholera, diphtheria, influenza, measles, mumps, whooping cough, etc. Even childhood diseases could become killer epidemics in virgin populations. Africans also brought deadly infections to the new world: malaria, yellow fever, and sleeping sickness. The person who infected the Aztecs with smallpox, thus securing Cortes's eventual victory in Mexico City, was a slave with the Narvaez expedition.

The Amerindian contribution to the global interchange of disease was Montezuma's first "revenge"—syphilis. The Amerindian origin of syphilis has recently become controversial, with revisionists insisting that pristine Indian communities could not have had such a nasty disease. But pre-Columbian Indian remains do show the ravages of syphilitic infection and the disease first appeared in Europe and seaports around the world in the early 16th century, right after the discovery of America. England's James I, as part of an anti-smoking campaign, even argued that tobacco caused syphilis, reasoning (not very well) that the Indians smoked, that the Indians had syphilis; therefore smoking caused syphilis.¹

Syphilis was not the first foreign disease to devastate the old world. When Columbus came to America in 1492 Europe was just recovering from its worst epidemic, the bubonic plague (or Black Death). The same historians who with great weeping and gnashing of teeth document how European diseases decimated Amerindian populations in the 15th century are unconcerned about this Asian-spread epidemic that wiped out much of Europe in the 14th century. Politically correct disease historians have selective memories.

1 The "Seeds of Change" exhibit at the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History includes the skull of a pre-Columbian syphilis victim. Some deny it. William McNeill claims that the disease had old world origins, arguing that the apparently very intelligent syphilis spirochete "eventually hit upon a substitute method of passing from one host to another by infecting the mucous membranes of the sex organs". [*Plagues and Peoples* (N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1977), p. 159.] Others ignore it. A textbook I use goes into great detail about European diseases but is silent on syphilis. The book's comments on other Eurodiseases is characteristic of the approach of modern historians and demographers. They usually note that the disease mortality rate was "as high as 95%", which puts the matter in the most dramatic and worst light. The death rate was only this high in the first 50 years after contact. Even then, mortality rate statistics are uncertain because there were no pre-contact census. Modern demographers, to reconstruct the level of pre-contact (pre-epidemic) Indian populations, frequently argue that Indian populations were much, much greater than originally estimated. I suspect that they have two motives: to show that Indian civilizations were more advanced than previously thought, and to show how awful Spanish contact was in terms of the mortality rate. If there were only a few hundred thousand Indians in North America, for instance, as earliest estimates had it, people might conclude that this relatively small handful of Indians was greedy for trying to dominate a whole continent as a personal preserve. The tendency in modern histories is to revise Amerindian population figures, sometimes quite arbitrarily, upwards. The textbook claims that the Spanish always underestimated the population to avoid paying taxes on the number of Indians in their *encomiendas*. It is just as plausible that, for extra glory and bragging rights, conquistadors and dons overreported the number of Indians they conquered or governed. In short, modern historians have assumed that America's "noble savages" must have had a more advanced status and higher population concentration than originally estimated, which were then depleted by a "holocaust" of Eurodiseases.

The whole discussion of disease transmission and the responsibility for it has humanistic and naturalistic assumptions which ignore Biblical teaching that disease is governed by the providence of God and may be part of His judgments. Plagues and pestilence came upon both the people of God, for covenantal infidelity (Deuteronomy 28; Rev 2), and unbelievers (Leviticus 18), for whose gross immorality the land "spewed them out". Any Christian perspective on history must take seriously the judgments of God on both heathen and Christian cultures. Past Christians understood this. When John Calvin noticed syphilis spreading throughout Europe, he attributed it to neither the accidents of history nor the malice of Indian peoples, but to the judgment of God upon immorality. His sermon on Deuteronomy 28:25-29 is as applicable today as it was 400 years ago:

And as for the extraordinary diseases, we see how men are hardened by them as well. I pray you, have we not seen that God within these fifty years has brought up new diseases against harlotry? Whence comes syphilis and all these other filthy diseases, which cannot be counted at this time? Where do these come from except from God, who utters such vengeance as formerly was never seen? The world wondered at it, and for a time men were greatly afraid of it; but yet in all this they have had no consideration for the hand of God. And at this day it has become so ordinary a matter that the despisers of God (I mean the lecherous sort and the whoremongers, who give themselves to all sorts of lewdness) do but wring their groins at it. Though God smites them with such a leprosy (for it is a kind of leprosy), so that they are eaten up with fretting and with other filthiness, yet they do not cease following their practices and only mock at the illness.²

“Peaceful Savages”

The quincennial litany also ignores the bloody, brutal, and demonic nature of many Amerindian civilizations. Aztecs practiced human sacrifice on a mega-scale in their deathcult, which included the ritual offering of their victim's heart, the ceremonial preservation and wearing of the slain's skin, and cannibalism. One of the reasons for the Aztec domination of their neighbors and the creation of an empire was to secure captives for use as human sacrifices in the deathcult. That is also why these neighboring tribes were eager to help Cortes, whom they considered a liberator.

Cannibalism was common in America, despite the pleas of “noble savage” partisans to the contrary. The term “cannibal”, itself, is derived from the Carrib Indians, and the Aztecs used the conquistadors to beef up their “chili”. Bernal Diaz, one of Cortes's men, recalled with horror how captured Spanish soldiers fared at the hands of the Aztecs:

[They] were being carried by force up the steps, and they were taking them to be sacrificed. When they got them up to a small square in front of the oratory,

² John Calvin, *The Covenant Enforced*, ed. James Jordan (Tyler, Texas: I.C.E., 1990), p.159. The phrase “to wring their groins” was an expression of contempt.

where their accursed idols are kept, we saw them place plumes on the heads of many of them and with things like fans in their hands they forced them to dance before [the god], and after they had danced they immediately placed them on their backs on some rather narrow stones which had been prepared as places for sacrifice, and with stone knives they sawed open their chests and drew out their palpitating hearts and offered them to the idols that were there, and then kicked the bodies down the steps, and the Indian butchers who were waiting below cut off the arms and the feet and flayed the skin off the faces, and prepared it afterwards as glove leather with the beards on, and kept those for the festivals when they celebrated with drunken orgies, and the flesh they ate in chilmole. In the same way they sacrificed all the others and ate the arms and legs and offered the hearts and blood to their idols.... When we saw those cruelties all of us in our camp said the one to another: "Thank God that they are not carrying me off today to be sacrificed."³

These practices also occurred in North America and were common in some of the most romanticized tribes. The famed Iroquois were guilty of the grossest forms of cannibalism. Richard White begins a recent study of the Great Lakes tribes with an account of what Seneca warriors, part of the Iroquois confederation, did to children captured from the Miami tribe.

Every night as the Senecas traveled home, they killed and ate a Miami child. And every morning they took a small child, thrust a stick through its head and sat it up on the path with its face toward the Miami town they had left. When the Senecas were within a day's march of their own village, they sent their people a message telling them to prepare a great kettle and spoon to enjoy the good broth they were bringing them. It was at this last campsite that the pursuing Miami warriors at last caught up with the Senecas. Two Miami spies watched the Seneca camp. And that night, as usual, for the evening meal one of the Senecas decapitated a child and prepared the body for the kettle. Hearing a noise outside the camp, the cook tossed the head into the bushes and told the wolf he imagined lurking there that he was giving it the head of a Miami for its supper. The Miami spies carried the head back to their companions who sorrowfully recognized it.⁴

The most troublesome aspect of these practices is that they were an essential part of Indian religions. Cultural barbarism, itself, is not unique and many peoples in world history have behaved viciously. But most have stopped short of making ritual torture, dismemberment, and cannibalism an integral part of their worship. The following, by a

3 Bernal Diaz, *The Conquest of Mexico*, Trans. A.P. Maudslay (Farrar, Strauss, and Cudahy, 1956), p. 436. Rousas Rushdoony once told me about the reception he got after mentioning the etymology of "cannibal" in a lecture at the University of Oregon law school. Refusing to even hear the proof, a professor denounced him as anti-Indian and berated the school official who set up the lecture.

4 Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp.4-5. (The Miamis eventually got even!)

sympathetic historian, is an example of the religious rites of the Canadian Hurons:

Torturing a prisoner was an important act dedicated to the sun, symbol and embodiment of their war god. [I]t could last as long as six days. It was necessary to keep the victim alive for at least one night because executions had to culminate at dawn, when the sun could view the offering made to him. As the ritual began in a war chief's longhouse, women and children beat the captive freely. They pulled out his fingernails and made deep gashes in the fleshy parts of his body, where they inserted live coals. Then others stripped off his scalp and burned every inch of his body, sometimes using hot resins that stuck to his torso and made him writhe in pain. Whenever the prisoner seemed about to expire from such treatment, he was revived with water and rest. As dawn approached, the war chiefs led him to a platform, built especially for the final act, where they quickly dispatched him and, if he had proved an admirable warrior, ate his heart in order to absorb his courage. Then they cut up the body and cooked it, inviting everyone in the village to feast in symbolic triumph over a worthy opponent.⁵

Modern historians have a blind spot to these brutal and demonic practices. Some are in denial; their response to proof of such practices is to insist that they are “lies—all lies”. They would have more credibility if they followed Voltaire's approach and acknowledged American cannibalism, but then made light of it. Recalling a 1725 conversation with an Indian maiden, who claimed that it was “better to eat one's enemy than to leave him to be devoured by wild beasts”, Voltaire suggested it was worse to kill your neighbor and let him rot in the ground as wormfood, as Europeans did, than to put him to good, posthumous use, as the natives did, by eating him. While he could stomach cannibalism, Voltaire was at least scandalized by ritual human sacrifice, an Indian practice modern historians acknowledge, but refuse to condemn because of their pluralistic and relativistic orientation.⁶

Plenty of Indian tribes, of course, did follow the time-honored European practice of killing their enemies and letting them rot. While some tribes were known for their gentle and humane ways, others glorified fighting, developed warrior cultures, and aggressively pursued imperialistic policies toward their neighbors. While it is true that Europeans fought for and took Indian lands, this was nothing new in America; Indians had been fighting and dispossessing each other for centuries.

The Sioux Indians, memorialized in Costner's *Dances With Wolves*, are an excellent

5 Henry Bowden, *American Indians and Christian Missions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), pp.70-71. Liberals will, of course, squeal that we must not condemn these practices. Ask yourself what their reaction would be if U.S. servicemen had done the same thing in, say, Vietnam. I'm guessing that they would then find the behavior worthy of judgment.

6 Voltaire, “Cannibalism”, in *The Philosophical Dictionary*. Every semester I will have some student who will argue that one must not condemn the brutal cannibalism of the Aztecs. They never know what to say when I ask if we can condemn the same practices today, as in the Jeffrey Dahmer case.

example. Theaters-full of movie-goers felt bad that Costner's buddies were going to lose their land in the Black Hills to encroaching whites. The film failed to mention, however, that the Sioux were also recent immigrants to the area, arriving in the mid-18th century to drive out the Kiowa and Cheyenne tribes. These tribes had earlier, in turn, driven out the Crow Indians. And before that, the Arapahoe occupied the Black Hills; no one knows which tribes they dispossessed. The Sioux moved to the region because they were driven out of Minnesota by the Ojibway, or Chippewa tribe. The next time Ojibway Indians complain about whites taking their ancestral lands in Minnesota, ask for a Sioux perspective. Recently someone put it this way:

[no tribe] has clear and unsullied title from time immemorial to the land now occupied by whites. Rather, tribe after tribe, all culturally disparate, speaking different languages, praying to different gods, squabbled over the land. The only difference is that some of the later tribesmen had white faces.⁷

And when Indians weren't fighting each other, they still didn't think much of neighboring tribes. With a few notable exceptions, such as Tecumseh, Amerindians did not possess a pan-Indian sense of racial identity. Though this is easy to forget in our race-conscious age, their main sense of identity was tribal. This was also true for Europeans, who viewed themselves in "tribal" terms as English, French, and Spanish, but rarely as "Europeans". With little sense of pan-caucasian identity, EuroAmericans often allied with Amerindian tribes to fight against other Europeans. Indians had the same ethnocentrism, viewing themselves as "the people", and considering their neighbors "barbarians" or "sons of she-dogs". In short, the Indians were not the egalitarian and humanitarian models of the New Age their PC hagiographers would have us believe.

Indian Eco-freaks?

Another myth about the 'noble savage' is that they lived in harmony with the land, were never wasteful, and were the spiritual ancestors of modern environmentalists. A popular commercial depicting an old Indian weeping at the sight of pollution has cemented in the public imagination the notion that Indians were proto-naturalists who lived in perfect ecological balance with the elements. But that is not true. While Indians did live close to nature and usually made full use of their resources, this was largely a matter of necessity for people with a subsistence life-style.

Some Indians were incredibly wasteful and destructive to the environment. The Arapahoe Indians of Colorado stampeded buffalo into death-traps with prairie fires, butchered the best animals, leaving the rest to rot, and left a burned-over wasteland unable to sustain life. In the late 17th Century Father Hennepin noted that, in times of plenty, Indians would sometimes kill forty or fifty buffalo, taking only the tongue or the choicest parts. Such waste was not uncommon. On his famous expedition of 1804, Meriwether Lewis

⁷ Paul Valentine, "Hollywood's Noble Indians: Are We Dancing With Myths?" *Washington Post* (March 31, 1991). This excellent article is well worth getting.

passed a hundred “mangled carcasses of Buffalow” which had been driven over a 120 foot cliff by the Indians, leaving an “immense pile of slaughter” and “a most horrid stench”. But perhaps most destructive was the Plains Indians' standard hunting practice of “cow selectivity”, in which buffalo cows were sought and killed because Indians preferred their tender meat and softer hides, which were easily processed for robes and lodge coverings. Constant pressure on cows eventually crippled the buffalo population.

Other practices, while not destructive to the environment, and even helpful, showed the Indians' willingness to manipulate their environment. They used fire, for instance, to control insects, gather food, clear brush, herd animals, fight enemies, enhance soil fertility, and communicate with others. They built so many fires around the future site of San Diego in 1602, for instance, that Spanish explorer Vizcaino complained that the sky became overcast. (This is the first example of pollution in southern California!) In some areas, Indians built dams and irrigation ditches, and in other areas, productive fields. In short, they were neither preservationists nor progenitors of modern “environmentalist wackos” who refuse to tamper with the landscape, for Indians controlled and manipulated their surroundings—sometimes for good, and sometimes for ill.⁸

The Indian Bisocide

Old westerns sometimes include a moving scene where the Indian chief concedes that the buffalo are all gone and his traditional way of life is passing as well. For years I told my students that one of the saddest aspects of the Euro-Indian conflict on the Great Plains in the late 19th century was the destruction of a centuries-old pattern of life, and I heaped abuse on Buffalo Bill and other callous characters who caused it. A superb article in the *Journal of American History* this fall, however, suggested that this tear-jerking scenario was totally inaccurate.⁹

First, the Plains Indians' buffalo hunting culture was really only possible after the arrival of the horse, reintroduced in America by Europeans. (Someone told me about a recent archeological find of an ancient cave that was filled with bones of the original species of American horse, which Indians evidently had been devouring. It's a good thing Europeans got here before Indians started eating Spotted Owls.) The buffalo cultures of the Plains were only possible *after* Columbus came—thus Europeans are charged with destroying a culture to which they contributed the vital component.

Furthermore, widespread buffalo hunting was not possible until the early 1800s. In “Bison Ecology and Bison Diplomacy”, Dan Flores argues that vast buffalo herds appeared only after a series of very wet summers in the early 19th century. At that point, Indian tribes made a conscious decision to follow the buffalo, live entirely off the hunt, and define themselves exclusively as bison predators. In short, the famous buffalo

8 *Ibid.*; and James Davidson and Mark Lytle, *After the Fact: The Art of Historical Detection*, 3d edition (N.Y.: Knopf, 1992), p.103.

9 Dan Flores, “Bison Ecology and Bison Diplomacy: The Southern Plains from 1800 to 1850”, *The Journal of American History* (September, 1991):465-485.

cultures of the Great Plains, which have defined “Indianness” for generations of Americans, were a recent development, *not* a centuries-old pattern of life.

Observers warned the Indians that abandoning agriculture to depend solely upon buffalo hunting was dangerous. In the late 18th century, the Spanish governor of New Mexico begged the Comanche Indians to stay with their fields, predicting that the buffalo were an exhaustible resource. Indian leaders even cautioned about this impending change of lifestyle. And the decision to follow the buffalo, once made, was irreversible, for Indians lost critical horticultural knowledge and skills. On the eve of the 20th century, then, the Plains Indians deliberately reverted to a paleolithic culture. That decision was essentially religious, as the Indians believed that the swelling buffalo herds were supernatural in origin.

About the time Indians committed themselves to buffalo predation, the herds began to decline. This was due to a climatic change, as the Plains returned to its more normal, semi-arid state. Then too, buffalo grazing lands faced pressure from other animals, such as the horse, which Indians bought, stole, collected, and traded. Cattle were also competitors, and worse, brought bovine diseases which crossed over to and attacked the bison population. And with the pattern of cow selectivity in hunting, Indians further damaged the ability of bison to sustain herd sizes. By 1850, well before major white penetrations of the Plains, Indians noted times of hunger and the vanishing buffalo herds. Buffalo Bill and his buddies only exacerbated a trend begun much earlier by the forces of nature and the Indians themselves.

This new information is sure to disturb the politically correct. The Indians turned from raising and eating vegetables, which was good, to eating red meat, which was bad, especially since bison were not humanely killed. The status of women in buffalo cultures declined. Worst of all, perhaps, Indians turned capitalistic; by hunting, hoarding, and selling buffalo robes, they tied themselves to an international hide market, the demands of which furthered the exploitation and decline of bison herds.

Dances With Hollywood

Nothing has done more to perpetuate liberal myths about the Plains Indians than Kevin Costner's *Dances With Wolves*, the beautifully done and ever politically correct film that was the Academy Awards 1991 “Best Picture”. The historical inaccuracies of this film were so gross as to be amusing. (My wife hates to go to films like this with me; I either gripe about the propaganda or giggle at its silliness.)

My favorite was the scene where the old medicine man asked Kevin Costner why he was going to start a family so soon instead of waiting. “Sure!”, I told my wife, “I bet they have a Planned Parenthood set up in one of those tepees!” The Indians not only lacked modern birth control technology, but, because of continual warfare, the uncertainties of their nomadic lifestyle, and the dangers of buffalo hunting, faced the serious threat of

underpopulation. Hence their willingness to steal and adopt outsiders. Added to show the enlightened nature and progressive spirit of the Indians, this ridiculous scene only demonstrates the director's desire to manufacture a politically correct film.

That desire is repeatedly shown in the film's representation of women. Indian women possessed the morals of Hollywood starlets, as in the case of the widowed squaw, still in mourning for her husband, who fell in love with and became promiscuous with Costner. Indian women were amazingly liberated, according to the film, and were honored and affirmed by their sensitive and gentle husbands. Yet the romantic tradition of Europe never flourished among the polygamist Indians, who secured wives by purchase. When 19th century artist George Catlin suggested painting a few pictures of Sioux women, he was heartily jeered at by the whole village, and someone explained that women were good for nothing, since they “never took scalps, nor did anything better than dress skins and make fire”.¹⁰ In the film's depiction of both women's sexuality and their place in society, modern American and Hollywood values are artificially forced unto Indian culture.

For a different perspective on the Sioux Indians romanticized in Costner's film, see Francis Parkman's *The Oregon Trail*. Parkman, one of the great American historians of the 19th century, wrote a fascinating journal while living with the tribe in the 1840s. Though the politically correct despise him because he is critical of the tribe's militaristic spirit and lack of responsibility and discipline, Parkman is a perceptive observer, a superb writer, and an excellent foil for modern, PC treatments of the Indians.

Contrary to their current reputation as a pure, pre- capitalist and non-materialistic people, Indians could be as given to avarice as modern Americans. Parkman recalled how “Hog”, an obese and ugly Indian with an insatiable appetite for horses, of which he had an enormous herd, tried to sell him one of his daughters. Parkman declined.¹¹

Or take food. In Costner's film, white Americans were guilty of the vilest eating practices, such as the mule driver who was slurping down greasy, half-cooked bacon just before the Indians caught him. Gross Indian cuisine, at least according to the Costner, had a certain raw nobility, as when Indians ceremonially feasted at the fresh kill. At least Indians ate lean meat! But the Indian diet Parkman observed and shared would surprise modern Americans. Dogmeat was considered the greatest delicacy—especially from white dogs. When a mangy cur growled at him, Parkman got even by buying the mutt from a squaw, paying the delighted owner extra to prepare it, and inviting the whole village to the feast. Modern, sanitized descriptions of Indian life usually omit this.

In one sense, Hollywood gets even with *Dances With Wolves*. For decades movies cast Indians as savages and buffoons, without much character, personality, or diversity, while whites generally appeared as the “good guys”. Now, that is reversed. Every once in a

10 George Catlin, *North American Indians* (N.Y.: Penguin, 1989), p. 219.

11 Francis Parkman, *The Oregon Trail* (N.Y.: Airmount, 1964), p.137-138. 12. Bowden, *American Indians and Christian Missions*, p. 86.

while, a less-than-noble Indian appears, to give the film psychological depth and try to maintain credibility, but on the whole they are seen as a positive force, whereas whites are invariably the villains.

This “getting even”, however, though understandable, is dangerous since it is driven by a general hostility to Western culture. One critic suggested that in *Dances With Wolves* Costner committed cultural suicide. The film opens with Costner, depressed and frustrated by the Civil War, riding back and forth along enemy lines trying to get himself shot. Reassigned to the West, he encounters a crazed outpost commander who, after wetting his pants and babbling incoherently, blows out his brains. *Dances With Wolves* is best seen as an attempt to disparage traditional American culture, using as a vehicle the myth of the “noble savage”.

Historians on the Warpath

With the same motives, historians have also perpetuated that myth. There is an increasing tendency to present American history in a dualistic fashion, depicting EuroAmericans as possessing every vice and native Americans as being the repository of every virtue.

On March 3-4, 1992, I attended the Capitol Historical Society's symposium on “Native Americans and the Early Republic” in Washington, D.C. The symposium convened at the Senate Office Building in the historic Senate Caucus Room, the scene of the Watergate proceedings, the Iran-Contra hearings, and the recent attempt by radical activists and liberal senators to scalp Clarence Thomas. (The closest office, incidentally, just down the hall and across from the men's room, only a bridge-width away from the caucus room, is Ted Kennedy's.) Here, at the center of national power, scholars from around the world regurgitated the noble savage myth.

One art historian argued that the relief sculptures in the U.S. Capitol rotunda, featuring Pocahontas saving John Smith, the Pilgrims landing at Plymouth Rock, William Penn signing a treaty with the Indians, and Daniel Boone fighting with them, were all racist and depicted exploitation. Even Penn's conscientious attempt to purchase land fairly and maintain peaceful ties with the indigenous people was exploitative, she argued, because Penn hoped to make money in America, and thus had the same greedy and vicious motives as those who ruthlessly waged wars against the Indians. When another scholar noted that the reliefs were sculpted by foreigners and asked how, then, they could symbolize American racism and ethnocentrism, the art historian replied that the reliefs “resonated with ideological implications”—which is academese for “I can't prove it, but I need to justify my research grant somehow.” In other words, American racism and ethnocentrism were so deepseated and pervasive that even Italian sculptors were infected with it.

I saw the best example of the sneaky racism interpretation at the symposium's concluding reception in the Mike Mansfield Room at the Capitol which, featuring a free buffet and an

open bar, allowed historians to belly up to the federal trough. To illustrate the level of institutional racism against Indians one historian charged that the government practiced “subtle subversion” through diet. While slurping down a meat ball from the buffet, he explained that Indians were fit and trim before whites came, but exhibited tendencies toward obesity after their removal to reservations. There you have it—the government made Indians fat!

Throughout the conference whites were depicted as evil and rapacious, while Indians were the “good guys”. Historians took great pains to sympathize with and explain away strange Indian practices, such as polygamy, prostitution, and husbands sharing their wives with visitors. In the latter instance, the historian insisted that whites not be judgmental but sympathize with the Indians’ “ceremonial use of sex”. To criticize Indian peculiarities, of course, would be a sure sign of “ethnocentrism”. One scholar has berated missionaries who “condemned blood feuds, failing to notice how deeply these were ingrained in the Huron value system as a practice that combined group solidarity with personal initiative”. Of course, there is little attempt to understand or sympathize with white viewpoints (although one scholar pointed to this shortcoming). The only Indians criticized at the symposium were Christians, who had allegedly committed some dastardly deeds. Just as the government made Indians fat, it seems, Christianity made them savages.¹²

Lessons

Americans should be alert for manifestations of the “noble savage” myth. This dualistic approach to history seems ubiquitous nowadays, so don’t believe everything you hear about the evils of white civilization and the glories of Indian cultures. And beware of the guilt manipulation that follows this myth. One symposium paper at the Capitol Historical Society argued that native Americans had a truly multiracial and multicultural society which was eventually crushed by the onslaught of EuroAmericans. The moral, of course, was that 20th century white Americans should repent of their sins and embrace the truly egalitarian and humanitarian example of the Indians. That moral will be repeatedly hyped during the Columbus quincentennial by PC liberals who are committed both to the “politics of guilt” and to a Manichaeian vision of history.

At the same time, though this reaction is tempting given the prevalence of jaundiced interpretations today, do not jump on an anti-Indian bandwagon and perpetuate an equally erroneous “ignoble savage” myth. The purpose of this article is to debunk the fashionable “noble” savages, not to debase Indian culture or people. Amerindians were no different from any other fallen people; some tribes were relatively benign, others were worse. But there are instances of cruelty, barbarism, and cannibalism equally as bad among the pre-Christian people of Europe. And judged by the millions of dismembered, aborted children today, the savagery of post-Christian America is far more serious than anything in Amerindian societies.

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Christians should also be concerned about statist implications of the Euro-Indian conflict. Relations between the two peoples were consistently driven by ever-shifting governmental policies. In the past century liberals, motivated by either altruism or a passion for social engineering, have imposed upon Indian peoples a badly flawed statist welfare system which is inherently destructive to traditional Indian values, communities, and sense of responsibility. I am acquainted with a Christian tribal leader who demonstrates a truly Biblical form of charity within his clan. With their original political decentralization and emphasis on family loyalty and responsibility, Indian communities could offer an alternative to Western systems that are, alternately, either statist or individualist, and might provide insights into the nature of the original Hebrew republic.

Christians, furthermore, should use a biblical perspective to judge the interactions of Europeans and Indians. One of the most dramatic events in early American history was the conversion of Rebecca Rolfe. The U.S. capitol rotunda features a beautiful painting of this woman's baptism, an excellent representation of how people in the new world turned to Christ. Unfortunately, the event is rarely mentioned. And when Rebecca Rolfe is mentioned at all, it is by her heathen name, Pocahontas. It is strange that people who would never refer to Muhammad Ali as "Cassius Clay" or Kareem Abdul Jabbar as "Lew Alcinder", their names prior to conversion to Muhammadanism, insist on using Pocahontas's pre-Christian name.

There is a general tendency to ignore Christian missions. (Or, even worse nowadays, the charge is made that missions were part of a cultural imperialism which assaulted native religions. This viewpoint is essentially anti-Christian, since it assumes all religions are equally valid, and has strongly paternalistic overtones, assuming that Indian peoples were incapable of making a personal decision, rooted in conviction, to convert to Christianity.) There were many early Christian missions. In New England, John Eliot successfully converted the Indians, gathered them into Christian communities, and translated the Bible into the Indian language. (These communities of 'praying Indians' were specifically targeted for extermination by savages who saw themselves as fighting a religious war against the expansion of the gospel.) Other Christians started Indian schools; Dartmouth began as a mission school. Mark Twain, no friend to Christian endeavors, once complained that the country was "going to kill half the Indians and educate the other half to death".

The greatest failing of the American colonists was in not fully applying themselves to the conversion of the Indians and to live in peace with their new Christian brothers. After King Phillips's War, a notoriously bloody conflict memorialized in numerous captivity accounts, such as Mary Rowlandson's, Americans lost their ardor for Indian missions. In 1758, at the time of the French and Indian War, Scottish minister and future American leader John Witherspoon condemned the British for not supporting Indian missions. In "The Absolute Necessity of Salvation Through Christ", a sermon preached before the Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge, he charged that this failing was both impolitic and unchristian. Noting that God was punishing them for this failure, he urged the evangelization of the Indians because all peoples should be drawn into the

kingdom of God the father.

[Little] or nothing has been attempted by the British [in evangelizing the Heathen]. And is not God, in his righteous providence toward us at the present, manifestly and severely punishing us for this neglect? Are we not engaged in war with a potent and formidable neighbor, in which the Supreme Disposer of all events hath visibly written disappointment on every one of our attempts? ... And are not our colonies in that part of the world exposed to the most cruel and merciless deprivations...? Who, then, are the instruments of this cruelty? Must we not answer, Those very Indians, a great part of whose territory we now possess, and whom, with contempt equally impolitic and unchristian, we suffer to continue in ignorance of the only living and true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent?

The dwindling commitment to evangelization eventually colored the colonists' perspectives, both of the Indians and treaty obligations. Since American Christians used an Exodus motif to describe their migration to America and relationship to the Indians (the American version of the Canaanites), it is helpful to understand this model better. The Gibeonites were a Palestinian people who made a treaty with the Hebrews, who were just entering the land. Though the Gibeonites negotiated the treaty deceptively, Israel was bound to keep it. Israel eventually fought for and protected the Gibeonites. When the sun stood still for Joshua—the greatest miracle of the conquest—it was in a battle to defend the Gibeonites (Joshua 10). When Saul planned to exterminate the Gibeonites, and did kill some in his “zeal” for Israel, the guilty parties were executed (2 Sam 21). Americans should have shown the same concern for and commitments to the covenants made with the Indians.

According to Jonathan Edwards, that the discovery of America and the Protestant Reformation occurred in the same generation was a unique mark of God's providence. It allowed for true, Biblical Christianity to flourish in the new world, which would, he believed, be a leaven for the whole world. But American Indians have, for the most part, not shared in that revival. It is unfortunate that in America, a seedbed of evangelical religion and missionary enthusiasm, the native peoples are still largely unevangelized. And it is fitting that the New Age paganism of our day draws heavily from the naturalism and spiritualism of traditional Indian religions. It is too bad that Christians did not heed Witherspoon's admonition and dedicate themselves to bringing the gospel to the land where the buffalo roamed.