

Native Reactions to the Invasion of America

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Perhaps the greatest difference between the Columbian observances of 1892 and 1992 is that the American natives were virtually absent a century ago whereas today they are clearly at the center of attention. Indian voices loudly and clearly present their own views on the meaning of their ancestors' discovery of Columbus and its deadly aftermath, while even nonnative academics ensure that the "Admiral of the Ocean Sea" no longer enjoys the limelight.

The reason is simple: since the late 1960s and the concatenation of Vietnam, the American Indian Movement, the rise of Black Power, the civil rights movement, the woman's movement, and the hothouse growth of a new brand of social history, American society, the media, and the historical profession have rediscovered history's forgotten peoples—natives, women, and minorities—the allegedly "inarticulate" who left relatively few traces in the written records so favored by traditional historians. At a time of social upheaval, the nation's and the profession's focus and sympathy shifted from the newscatching movers and shakers of the past to its anonymous victims, the hewers of wood and drawers of water who swelled the ranks and made the elites and their successes possible. Indeed, "success" was redefined to include sheer survival, particularly when the deck was stacked and the odds were overwhelming.

In 1492 Columbus inaugurated what we in this historical generation are choosing to call the "Columbian Encounter" between the cultures and peoples of *two* old worlds—the Americas and the rest of the world known to Western Europeans. The term "encounter" is largely apt because it suggests that the so-called discovery was mutual: the American natives discovered, laid fresh eyes on, the swarthy Spanish sailors as surely and as importantly as the sailors discovered them for the first time.

But "encounter" is not a perfect fit: it is slightly misleading because it implies true parity of initiation and participation. Certainly the natives were involved up to their necks in America's rapidly evolving history from the moment Columbus and his crew stepped off the boats, not just in relatively segregated "Indian affairs," where we would expect to find them, but in many, perhaps most, aspects of colonial life for literally hundreds of years, where historians and ethnohistorians are increasingly discovering them. But the interaction between Indians and Europeans (and their unwilling African partners) occurred almost exclusively in the Americas, not in the other "Old World." And the Indians spent most of the conquest and colonial periods reacting and responding to the European strangers and invaders. Thus, the human encounter that we are reflecting on before and

after 1992 was largely initiated by the Europeans but took place locally, on the Indians' turf, which forced the natives primarily into a defensive mode.

Although the Indians were put on the defensive by the European incursion, they remained so only in a general sense. In the three hundred years after 1492, they had plenty of room and ability to respond to the European challenge, as infinitely various, creative shapers of their own destinies. Like the actions of their new rivals, native responses were fashioned from experience, expectations, and situational calculations of self-interest and odds of success. They also varied according to native interest groups, to the perceived nature, power, and stance of the European challengers, and to the timing or stage of contact. Except in the scenarios of generalizing historians, the Columbian encounters were never between generic "Indians" and "Europeans" but always between segments or factions of native groups (which we call "tribes" for convenience) and similar, equally interested subgroups of European nationalities. Both sets of factions were grounded in differences of age, gender, social status, kinship, history, and perception of the problem and its potential solution.

In the fluid conditions of contact, the American natives understandably sought to maintain the *status quo ante* as much and as long as possible. In the face of new challenges from a people and a world they had never before known or even imagined, the various Indian groups worked mightily and often cleverly to maximize their political sovereignty, cultural autonomy, territorial integrity, power of self-identification, and physical mobility. In one way or another, of course, the European colonists over time sought to or effectively did minimize the natives' freedoms in order to reduce the natives' "otherness" to familiarity, predictability, and control. To counter this offensive, the natives resorted to five basic strategies, which were not always sequential or mutually exclusive: initially, they tried to *incorporate* the newcomers; when that failed, they tried at various times to *beat*

them, to *join* them, to *copy* enough of their ways to beat them at their own game, and to *avoid* them altogether.

In the inaugural stage of exploration, natives and newcomers enjoyed a relatively short "honeymoon," a peaceful period of feeling each other out. Because the technologically stronger Europeans were greatly outnumbered and found themselves in the dangerous unknown of someone else's country, they kept their weapons sheathed and put on their most accommodating behavior until they could get the lay of the land and probe the weaknesses of its peoples. But they were extremely wary the whole time because they brought to America prefabricated images of the "savage," occasionally noble but mostly ignoble, from their experiences in Africa and Asia and from their reading of ancient, biblical, and Renaissance travel literature. They expected the worst and, in their ignorance or ham-handedness often provoked the natives into fulfilling their expectations.

Likewise, the Indians based their initial behavior upon their own preconceptions and expectations. But unlike the Europeans, the natives expected novel strangers to be either equal or superior to themselves, either powerful and potentially dangerous "persons," animated by living "souls" like their own, or "gods," "spirits" from the heavens whose powers were of a higher order. The strangers' skin color was less noticeable than their hairiness; to the smooth-skinned natives, European beards and tufted chests and limbs were simply uncouth, signs of unintelligence and unmanliness. It was largely the items the newcomers wore, carried, and made that marked them as "spirits" of extraordinary ability and power. European cloth, metal, glass, and especially objects that seemed to "speak," such as clocks, books, and guns, all impressed the Indians as worthy of respect if not worship, as were their makers.

In order to harness or at least neutralize these unusual powers, the natives tried to incorporate the Europeans as honorary Indians or "true men," just as they adopted native strangers and even enemies captured in battle. They greeted them in friendly fashion

by clapping them on their chests, rubbing their arms, or painting their faces. They seated them on their best mats or furs and feasted them on their tastiest dishes. They showered them with presents, offered them the calumet pipe or wampum belt of peace, and made long speeches of welcome and adoption. They then bestowed Indian names upon them, the ultimate sign of acceptance. On occasion, they offered their young women as partners for the night or forever.

But even native groups who did not immediately offer the strangers full acceptance extended help, advice, and friendship. When European ships skirted the Atlantic or the Gulf coast after several weeks at sea, Indians usually guided them to safe anchorages, helped their crews collect firewood, food, and fresh water, and opened a small trade, sometimes giving the lonely sailors sexual favors or decorated fur pouches for hometown girls in exchange for durable (if weevilly) hardtack, rum, or movable pieces of ship's equipment. Natives often rained loaves of cornbread or freshly caught fish into the visitors' longboats.

Communication quickly became a problem, once the antic pantomime of sign language ventured beyond simple counting and exchange of visible objects. As the numerically dominant party on their home ground, the natives sought to make the gibbering newcomers learn the language of the country. Assuming that the hairy incompetents were the equivalent of Indian children, the natives quickly devised simplified pidgin languages for them, featuring elemental vocabularies and truncated grammars and syntax. A few European words might be thrown in to designate newly introduced objects, but the linguistic base remained American. When the explorers caught on as fast as Indian toddlers, they prided themselves on their linguistic skills and unwittingly bequeathed the childish pidgins to future generations as full-blown adult languages.

Spanish and English explorers, however, were usually too ethnocentric to do in Rome as the Romans did, so they sought to turn the linguistic tables by making the natives learn

their national languages or regional dialects instead. Some Indians were eager and able to put their tongues to a new school and quickly became indispensable as interpreters and brokers between the two cultures. A few young adventurers must have volunteered to sail away with the departing ships in order to see the touted miracles of the strangers' "new world" and to participate in the earliest American exchange programs for language immersion. But when volunteers could not be found, the Europeans did not hesitate to shanghai candidates for a year or more before returning them to America to serve as bilingual guides and go-betweens.

Those who were well treated and did not suffer unduly from the curiosity or contempt of their European hosts sometimes returned to be helpful to the invaders; Manteo at Roanoke and Squanto in Plymouth exercised considerable influence among their countrymen by virtue of their command of the English language and apparent possession of the secrets of English power. Others, however, quickly reverted to native ways and used their new skills against their teachers. Domagaya and Taignoagny, the two sons of chief Donnacona who were kidnapped by Jacques Cartier in 1534, taught their kinsmen at Stadacona (present-day Quebec City) to offer much lower prices for French knives and hatchets, presumably because they had seen how cheaply they could be made in Brittany.

Peaceful human explorations of initial contact gave way to the often hostile reaction of natives upon what might be called "second contact." Second contacts are easily confused with truly first contacts because they are the initial encounters described in several famous documents by European colonizers. But, in fact, we know from other sources and even the same documents that the natives had been provoked into bellicosity by previous European insults or injuries. When, for example, the English landed at Cape Henry in Virginia in 1607, Chesapeake warriors crept up on all fours "like Bears, with their Bowes in their mouthes" and charged the newcomers "very desperately in the faces," wounding a captain and a sailor with arrows "very dangerous[ly]."

In the winter of 1620 the Plymouth Pilgrims had a similar "First Encounter," for which they (re-)named the Cape Cod location where it occurred. Apparently for no reason, a number of Wampanoag warriors suddenly emerged from the woods and let fly several volleys of arrows at an English exploring party. The English expected the worst from the American "savages," but we can easily see that the Indians' response was not some atavistic bloodlust vented upon innocent white men. They had had plenty of contact with and provocation from Europeans before the Pilgrims stumbled into their midst. Some of the arrows they shot were tipped with European brass. Only six years earlier, Thomas Hunt of Virginia, the leader of a fishing party left behind when Captain John Smith sailed back to England, had, under the pretense of trade, kidnapped twenty-seven natives from the Cape and sold them as slaves in Spain. And to add insult to injury, the curious Pilgrims had rifled temporarily abandoned houses, corn caches, and graves of the local Indians while looking for a suitable site for settlement. It is small wonder that the natives were not prone to regard the latest wave of bearded seafarers simply as peace-loving pilgrims seeking religious toleration, as our textbooks have led generations of American schoolchildren to regard the Pilgrims.

The advent of large-scale parties of permanent settlers drastically recast the Indian-European equation, demanding from the increasingly beleaguered natives a set of responses as creative as they were crucial. The first major challenge posed by European settlers was inadvertent and only indirectly personal, namely, the importation of epidemic diseases that killed with added virulence in the "virgin soil" populations of the Americas. Ancient European scourges such as smallpox, diphtheria, and influenza and childhood diseases such as measles and mumps alike snuffed out the lives of astonishing numbers of defenseless Indian adults and children, leaving wide rents in the social fabric of native life. The biggest killer, smallpox, was capable of striking down 50–90 percent of an Indian village or tribe, partly

because everyone fell sick at the same time, leaving no one to provide fires, food, and especially water for the fever-ravaged victims, partly because the natives initially had no immunities from previous exposure to the disease. And native responses to the diseases, which were spread largely by human touch and breath, only increased their deadly reach and exacerbated their effects. It was native custom to crowd around the bunk of an ailing relative to lend comfort and a sense of solidarity; in the new disease environment, such behavior was as far from quarantine as it was possible to get. Moreover, the preferred native cure for most ailments was a stint in a steaming sweatlodge, followed by a naked plunge into the nearest snowbank or body of cold water. Particularly for the deadly fevers of smallpox, this was the worst course the Indians could have taken. Only when compassionate colonists in the eighteenth century persuaded them to forsake this traditional remedy did native mortality rates decelerate to some extent.

Although the natives remained helpless before the onslaught of foreign microbes all through the colonial period, they did respond flexibly to the demographic devastation wrought by them. As disease left yawning gaps in their social structures, technological repertoires, and communal memories, the Indians made three adaptations to cope with their losses. First, many tribes, the Iroquois nations of New York in particular, resorted increasingly to warfare with both native and colonial enemies to replenish their lodges. In traditional "mourning wars," native clans that suffered losses from disease or battle sent their menfolk on the warpath to capture prisoners as replacements. Once captured and brought home, prisoners were treated well, ritually separated from their former allegiances, and adopted fully and faithfully into the suffering clan in the precise place of the deceased. This process served the dual purpose of healing the losses of the grieving group while removing kith and kin from the ranks of the enemy.

Two other strategies were also variations on age-old schemes. One was to inter-

marry with black Africans and white Europeans. This practice did not differ much from inter-tribal marriages resulting from the adoption of natives prisoners. To the culturally "colorblind" Indians, taking spouses of a different hue was a much less "racial" act than it appeared to the increasingly race-conscious colonists. Nor was it confined to one sex, as intermarriage and sexual relations tended to be in patriarchal colonial societies. Indian women felt as free to move in with European traders, hunters, and soldiers as Indian men did to take captive or runaway Europeans to wife.

Like the first and second, the third strategy was a sensible response not only to epidemic mortality but to all forms of depopulation and dislocation caused by colonization. When tribal or village populations approached unviable levels, the survivors sought cultural and military refuge with more populous neighbors or with linguistically related kin even at a distance. The handful of Patuxets who survived a deadly sea-borne plague just before the Pilgrims arrived, for example, abandoned their village site overlooking Plymouth Harbor and threw in their lot with their Narragansett and other inland neighbors, who had been relatively unscathed.

Geographical relocation was a prominent native response to colonization all over North America. But it was not, contrary to popular opinion, then and now, easy for the semi-sedentary—not nomadic—natives to pull up stakes and leave their ancestral homelands. Nor was the direction of movement always predictable. Many groups, such as the Western Abenakis in northern New England and the Powhatans in Virginia after the 1622 uprising, responded to the European incursion by quietly drifting away from the new settlements and their corn-loving cattle and melting into the forgotten corners of the land. To maintain the hunting and gathering facets of their economies, native groups in the East had to put wide swaths of woodland between themselves and the spreading fields and unfettered herds of the colonists.

But some colonial establishments were not as intrusive as English farms and towns, and several native groups actually moved toward them to take advantage of their economic, military, or religious services. French trading posts and settlements in Canada and Louisiana were the most obvious beneficiaries of native relocations. After the founding of Quebec in 1608, nomadic hunters north of the St. Lawrence shifted their summer encampments along the river closer to the new town in order to receive presents and preferential rates from the French traders there. Beginning in the 1640s, natives from all over the Northeast moved to the vicinity of Montreal and Quebec to occupy *reserves* where missionary Catholicism, sedentary farming, and marginally frenchified living prevailed. Only *reserve* Indians who converted to Christianity were allowed to buy guns, with which they often defended the underpopulated French outpost of empire from the grasp of its Dutch and particularly English neighbors until 1760.

Native movements on the St. Lawrence were nothing compared with the French-sponsored resettlements in Louisiana, which resembled a high-speed chess game. The other European player in the early eighteenth century was the frail Spanish garrison at Pensacola. Because the Spanish were militarily weak and poorly provisioned, they could not give adequate protection or guarantee a steady supply of trade goods to their Indian neighbors and allies. When the French arrived in 1699, therefore, several small tribes moved to the new French capital at Mobile, around which French officers allotted them tribal domains.

As soon as the French moved up the Mississippi, local native villages leapt into a merry minuet, to an old French tune. In 1709 the Houmas "departed their settlement" and went to live on the west bank of the Mississippi near the river of the Chitimachas, while the Tunicas shifted to the Houmas' old site, closer to the French. A few years later, the pugnacious Chitimachas made peace with the French and were persuaded to "leave their homes on the river where they were and . . .

settle on the bank of the Mississippi . . . in a place that was marked off for them." Their move in turn "caused other native [*savage*] nations to make several changes of dwelling place," most of them to the banks of the river that served as the French lifeline to the rich Illinois country and upper Great Lakes. "All these nations are highly industrious," noted an appreciative Frenchman, "and all are quite helpful in furnishing food to the French, to the troops as well as to the people on the concessions." He did not have to say that the natives also furnished the deerskin staple of the French trade and the crucial military difference between life and death.

Virtually everywhere the Europeans went, disease, depopulation, and dislocation followed close on their heels. As favorite hunting and planting grounds were lost and traditional economic activities constricted, native individuals and tribes adjusted to the best of their abilities to the new order. For tribes blessed with access to the fur- and skin-bearing animals craved by colonial traders, initial efforts were directed toward harvesting those supposedly inexhaustible resources with just enough energy to supply their everyday needs, leaving intact their cultural and political autonomy. But these needs increasingly included imported European objects, made of superior materials or available in preferable colors and styles, such as woven cloth, glass beads, metal tools, ceramic tableware, and guns and ammunition. Over time, even the most abstemious natives became dependent on European manufacturers and distributors and the credit system that oiled the nascent "world system" in which they were all enmeshed. They also depleted their animal resources in their accelerating quest to supply colonial demand and their own, newly awakened wants and needs.

The advent of this predicament typically drew three related responses from the Indians. The first was to accelerate their search for rival Europeans as economic and political partners. By playing off at least two of their French, English, Dutch, and Spanish competitors, native tribes tried to augment their leverage as allies and customers,

on the principle that two fighting foxes might ignore the vulnerable henhouse. If a tribe was not located conveniently between two European colonies or outposts, they might move to such a place, invite a colonial post or garrison to locate near them to complete the desired triangle, or carry their furs and skins long distances to another supplier to show their more proximate partner their independence. Since virtually all colonies needed Indian neutrality or allies to succeed, the natives were usually assured of success in obtaining better prices, more gifts, and some increase in services, justice, and respect for their sovereignty. Only after the English drove the French from Canada and Louisiana and the Spanish relinquished Florida did the Indians find themselves between a rock and a hard place.

A second Indian response to increased debt and scarcity of marketable game was to sell land to eager English farmers, cattlemen, and governments. Between 1650 and 1670, the natives of the upper Connecticut River valley were largely forced by mounting debts at John Pynchon's stores, reduced colonial markets for surplus native food, and the overhunting of fur-bearing animals to sell major portions of their tribal estates along the river. But this remedy was not universally approved by the natives because they, like their English competitors, were riven by political factions. They knew, as Peter Thomas has reminded us, that "Indian leaders were no less guilty than some English of pursuing self-aggrandizement at the ultimate expense of other members of their own society." At a similar though later stage of development, the western Massachusetts Indians who had been settled by the English in a reserve town at Stockbridge on the Housatonic River chose to sell the land surrounding the town proper to satisfy English creditors. In 1765 these creditors persuaded the Massachusetts General Court to allow the natives to reduce their debts—accumulated largely in purchasing farm and household equipment to make them more like their English neighbors—by alienating land. Within three years, the English had acquired sixty-five native

plots, usually at greatly discounted prices; by 1788 the Stockbridges had moved to Oneida territory in New York for a clean start.

The Cherokees and Muskogees or Creeks resorted to similar tactics to unburden themselves of trading debts. In 1771 the Cherokees ceded sixty square miles of prime farmland on the Savannah River to a group of English traders who had advanced them considerable sums on credit both before and after the Cherokee-English war of 1760–61. Although the British Superintendent of Indian Affairs was disconcerted that the deal was closed behind his back, he acknowledged the justice of compensating the traders because they had lost all their goods and skins at the sudden outbreak of war, and after it had entrusted the destitute Cherokees for all their purchases, including high-priced woolens. But the fly in the ointment was the Creeks, who claimed the ceded land as their own by right of conquest in the war, when they fought beside the English. Understandably, they wished to use the contested land to erase their own trading debts, which had mounted even though they were “good hunters” and owned “the most extensive hunting-ground of any nation” in the Southeast.

The Creeks and Cherokees were unusual in still having large territories at their disposal well into the eighteenth century and in being able to lop off sizable chunks of unessential land to appease their creditors. Until the 1760s they also felt only modest pressure from South Carolina and Georgia settlers, cattlemen, and government officials, who needed their friendship, labor, and trade more than their land. But smaller, less insulated groups closer to European settlements felt the pressure to sell much earlier and more forcefully. If we may generalize from the behavior of the Delawares in northern New Jersey, these natives alienated their real estate in ways that prolonged their tenure on ancestral lands far longer than anyone could reasonably expect, given the growing hegemony of the colonists. The Delawares retained their autonomy for a century and a half by selling land slowly and methodically and by extracting as many concessions from the buyers as

possible. “At no time were lands sold in a scattered or random fashion.” Only parcels that abutted already alienated tracts were sold by native proprietors. In order to ingratiate themselves with their more powerful colonial neighbors and to forestall more drastic forms of aggrandizement, the natives sold cheaply. Low sale prices helped them retain use of the land until the colonists actually fenced, plowed, and built upon it. By deeds of sale, Indians all over the English colonies were permitted to hunt, trap, fish, plant, cut wood, or gather natural resources for the foreseeable future. And finally, native sellers were sometimes quite choosy about their buyers, preferring honest, peace-loving, non-speculative neighbors such as Quakers, Labadists, and members of other minority groups seeking their own fruits of toleration.

When the constriction of their land base and traditional sources of livelihood began to pinch the natives, they turned to a third strategy to ensure a future: they went to work in the colonial economy, usually on its margins but occasionally in major industries. Most of these jobs were part-time and compatible with traditional skills and occupations. The fur and skin trades required not only expert Indian hunters and trappers but guides, packhorse-men, canoemen, interpreters, and sometimes factors. Government officers in New England and elsewhere relied on swift Indian messengers and couriers. Particularly in the early eighteenth century, white southern planters and slave-dealers needed native hunters and trackers to capture Indian slaves from Spanish missions in Florida and to return African runaways. Virtually every colonial army needed the keen eyes and ears of native scouts and flankers and the daunting ferocity of guerilla warriors. On Long Island, Cape Cod, and Nantucket, experienced natives earned good salaries on English whaling vessels, especially as harpooners. Early explorers in New England and later entrepreneurs in Canada and New York relied on the practiced native eye for fugitive sassafras and ginseng, which enjoyed short boom periods on European markets. And colonial tables were often supplied by Indian hunters, who occasionally

passed off sides of the colonists' own cattle as "venison" or "moose" and tough eagle meat as tender turkey. The only role that native men found totally distasteful and inconsonant with their dignity was that of farm laborer. In the Eastern Woodlands, particularly in patrilineal New England, Indian men were not accustomed to the backbreaking drudgery of planting, weeding, chopping, and harvesting, which was women's work, nor the repetitious round of chores required on a colonial farm. They were certainly not used to having their independence curtailed, which many experienced for the first time when they sold themselves as indentured servants to make ends meet.

But these were jobs filled mostly by men. Native women were equally industrious in adjusting to the new economic order. They, too, hired out their services as farm and household servants, but more often they opted for work that guaranteed better pay and more freedom. They grew crops to feed European garrisons, where some of them had white or black husbands on duty. They handcrafted baskets, brooms, birchbark containers, porcupine-quill-decorated pouches, multi-colored reed mats and hangings, and finger-woven wool sashes for urban and country customers. They married colonial traders, taught them their language and cultural protocols, and finessed their access to the native hierarchy. Other "trading girls" only leased their charms for short periods and ample amounts of trade goods. Perhaps the most resourceful entrepreneurs of all were the women who controlled the alcohol trade among their tribesmen. Iroquois and Creek women obtained much of the rum and brandy from colonial suppliers and conveyed it in wooden rundlets and kegs to their villages, sometimes stopping to top off less-than-full containers with water. These may have been the same women who, when offered swigs of the fiery liquids by generous party-throwers, surreptitiously spit the contents into a bottle hidden beneath their blankets for later resale to the men.

Becoming a part of the colonial economy was one step away from autonomy.

Still, other Indians chose to move even farther by becoming Christian converts and cultural neophytes in European "praying towns," missions, or *reserves*. In Spanish Florida and Georgia, French Canada, and Puritan New England, native individuals and families, and sometimes whole villages and tribes, placed themselves under the spiritual and cultural guidance of Christian missionaries, who eagerly worked to exorcise their traditional "paganism," convert them to "one, holy, and apostolic faith," and acculturate them to an idealized brand of domesticated agriculture and behavior known as "civility." Frequently, commitment to the new cultural programs entailed movement away from ancestral villages and homelands and amalgamation with members of other tribes, even ancient or recent enemies. Enlisting invariably put white foreigners over them in positions of highest authority, although native leaders might still play familiar roles in secular affairs. At the same time and for many of the same reasons, some Indian parents placed their children under the cultural tutelage of white schoolmasters, usually far from home. Although colonial officials frankly regarded the native children as "hostages" for the good behavior of their tribal adults, Indian leaders willingly sent their sons—seldom their daughters—to learn the white men's ways.

From certain modern perspectives, Indians who turned to European schools and praying towns seem to have been committing cultural suicide. In submitting themselves to European institutions, values, and authorities, they appear to have abandoned their struggle for autonomy and opted to live under the heavy colonial thumb. A few individuals may indeed have acted out of cowardice or weakness, but the majority of Indian neophytes turned to the invaders' cultures and religions for empowerment, knowledge, and skills with which to sustain native identities and values in other guises. They threw in their lot with the blackrobes for three major reasons.

First, villages and tribes that reconstituted themselves in praying towns, particularly in New England and Florida, had been

so badly crippled by disease, dislocation, and depopulation that their only other alternatives were to amalgamate with other groups in a similar condition or to place themselves at the mercy of ancient enemies, neither of which seemed calculated to promote a long or happy life. They were in such danger of extinction as distinct peoples that only the distasteful but powerful remedy offered by the colonists held out any hope of long-term survival. So they swallowed the bitter prescriptions that sought to turn them into tawny replicas of "civilized" European farmers and housewives, knowing that beneath their new fitted clothes and short hair they would still be "true people" (as they identified themselves in tribal name). They would still enjoy communal property (guaranteed to some extent by colonial law) and native leaders chosen from traditional ranks of authority. In time of need, they might count on military and material assistance from their colonial sponsors. And despite the missionary idealization of farming as the only "civilized" way of life, they could in fact pursue most aspects of their tradition economies, at least part-time. In other words, accepting the circumscribed life of "praying Indians" gave them the time and protective coloration to adjust to the worst stresses of living in a dangerous new world.

Individual Indians sought in the invaders' religions and customs two other ways to cope with that world. One was to acquire some of the white men's "power" or *manitou* (as Algonquian-speakers called it) by learning to call upon their god through prayer. Although the missionaries warned that their God was supreme, all-sufficient, and intolerant of rivals, many converts reasonably added Him to their traditional pantheons in hopes of increasing their spiritual odds. For them, Christianity and its cultural attendants offered answers to serious and disturbing questions posed by the strange and sudden advent of white and black people, epidemic diseases, enlarged cosmologies and geographies, and technological wonders. The people who sailed into and shattered the natives' old world seemed most able to reassemble the old and the new pieces with some coherence and meaning.

Secondly, native neophytes sought practical as well as intellectual skills for contending with their new world. While colonial schoolmasters aimed ultimately at giving their pupils the cultural luxury of Latin and Greek, native parents sent their beloved children primarily to learn to read, write, and count—skills that would protect their people from fraudulent deeds, inflated debts, and selectively enforced laws. If they and their praying elders also learned to manage a colonial-style farm and household, to sew, knit, weave, cobble, hammer, and saw, and to manipulate the machinery of colonial courts, so much the better.

While the praying Indians were forging survival tactics in the midst of the enemy, other, more fortunate tribes armed themselves at home for the inevitable assaults upon their independence, lands, and ways of life. Of course, even in the most embattled tribes, factional divisions prevented united responses. Some parties wanted to sell out fast and relocate to avoid colonial aggression; others complained loudly and often to colonial governors and imperial officials about the criminal activities and trespassing of white hunters, traders, and cattlemen on Indian land. Most tribes made concerted efforts to play the competing European powers against each other, yet strong factions invariably pulled for each competitor as well as for strict neutrality in what they considered white men's wars. Members of pro-colonial factions sometimes risked transatlantic journeys to the dazzling courts of Europe in order to plead for more aid, effort, or justice.

Sooner or later, the strongest tribes with seductive acreage felt they had to defend their domains with force: the Powhatans in 1622 and 1644, the Pequots in 1636–37, the Wampanoags and Narragansetts in 1675, the Tuscaroras in 1711, the Yamasees and Creeks in 1715, the Cherokees in 1760, and the Ottawas and other Great Lakes tribes in 1764, to mention but a few. Typically, they did not fight alone. They either made peace with a former rival or two to coordinate action against the interlopers or to buy space

for their own, or, more rarely, they concocted larger pan-Indian alliances to eradicate the foreign menace. In 1770 the British Superintendent of Indian Affairs warned the governor of Virginia that “at this very time there are in the Creek nation deputies from the Shawnese, Delawares, and other Northern tribes, accompanied by some Cherokees, endeavouring to form a general confederacy on the principle of defending their lands from our daily encroachments.”

The natives of southern New England had perceived a similar threat as early as 1641. In the summer of that year, a Narragansett chief from Rhode Island had secretly approached the Montauks on Long Island with plans for a coordinated attack upon all the English settlements of the region. He concluded, forty-one days hence they should “fall on and kill men, women, and children, but no cows, for they will serve to eat till our deer be increased again.”

As colonial goods and values infiltrated native life, and settlers, farms, and cattle chewed up tribal lands, many Indians found themselves on the brink of despair. When none of the options we have been discussing seemed feasible, these natives faced two final alternatives. One was to lose themselves in alcoholic stupor, to forget the frightening prospect around them in the amnesia of drunkenness. The other option arose largely in the late eighteenth century, when a new breed of native prophets began to preach salvation through the purification and revitalization of Indian culture. Neolin among the Delawares and Great Lakes tribes and later Handsome Lake among the Iroquois sought to infuse native culture with new life by persuading the Indians to purge themselves of all dependence on whites, particularly by ridding themselves of trade goods and alcohol. If they returned to the “old ways” of their pre-Columbian ancestors, the invaders

would be powerless to harm them and the path to the Spirit World would be open and bright.

Fortunately, very few natives enjoyed regular access to, or commanded the resources to purchase, sufficient firewater to wash away their troubles effectively. But unfortunately, alcohol was more plentiful than prophets or hope, and too many troubled Indians found relief only in the bottom of a bottle. At the end of the colonial period, the native population of Eastern America was a small fraction of what it had been before 1492, and their landbase was comparably constricted.

It would be all too easy in the current climate of opinion to attribute the native predicament wholly to Columbus or to the European explorers and colonists who followed him to America, who were certainly responsible for a good share of it. While that might be emotionally satisfying, it would not advance our moral understanding of the past or prepare us—Indians and non-Indians alike—to face the future with equanimity, courage, and imagination. Because it would reduce the Indians to passive victims and deny them an active role in the making of history, theirs and ours together. If we wish to rectify the colonists’ worst mistake—their failure to regard the natives as not only humanly *different* from but *equal* to themselves—we must acknowledge that the Indians, in large measure, fashioned their own new world. Within certain cultural and physical constraints, which were always changing, partly by their own actions, they chose their own directions and fates. They had plenty of options, and when those ran out, they invented more, like other creative cultures who have found themselves in a bind. Perhaps the best measure of their inventive strength is that, after five hundred years of stiff competition, nearly two million Americans are proud to call themselves “Natives.”