

American indian history

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The meaning of the word “ nation” can be interpreted in different ways, but it always signifies the people, native language, traditions and a territory. Every nation has its own usages and they are inherited by its population across the generations. The people love their culture and love their land. Long time ago people learnt to cultivate the soil and to grow the crops. However, the land is not just people’s wet-nurse. It is something more for natives, because it unites them into one whole, into one nation. But when somebody deprives people of their land, the power of population as a nation weakens.

“ The world turned upside down” – wrote Colin G. Calloway trying to bring to the readers a sorry plight of Indians after blood-thirsty invasion of Englishman into their land. Peace and idyll of Native American’s life remained in the past and new era of a disaster came. One group after another endured successive waves of epidemic disease, inter-tribal and European warfare, rapid environmental change, colonial pressure for cultural change, displacement, and sometimes enslavement and servitude. Some groups disintegrated under the pressure, but others found ways to survive and some new groups came into being.

It was not easy for them to adapt to the new laws white men had brought with them. The Indians felt that something was dying for ever and their home had changed. But the main human instinct of a survival played its key role. The Indians learnt to live with colonists. In this paper we’ll discuss the various ways Indian peoples adapted to their new settlers. To open the subject perfectly we’ll look to the life of the Native Americans through the history. For thousands of years land that is now the United States belonged to the Indians. They spoke many different languages.

They lived in many different ways. Some were farmers. Some were hunters. Some lived deep in the forests in villages of strongly built houses. Others roamed over the grassy plains, carrying all they owned with them. Each Indian belonged to a tribe, which was made up of a number of bands. Just two or three families constituted some bands. Each Indian thought of himself first not as one man but as part of a band and of a tribe. All the members of a band took care of each other. They hunted or farmed together and shared whatever they caught or grew. Some tribes were warlike. Others lived in peace.

Indian religions were many. Some believed in one god, others in many, but all believed that man and nature were very close. Hunters or farmers all knew that the wind, the rain, the sun, the grass, the trees, and all the animals that lived on the earth were important to them. For thousands of years Indians wandered through the forests, over the grassy plains and great deserts. The earth was their mother, supplying all their wants. Then men arrived from Europe, men who wanted to take this land and have it for their own. These men believed that land could be cut up and bought and sold.

In 1513 the Spaniard Ponce de Leon arrived in Florida. He did not stay, but he was followed by others Europeans who came to settle the land that was to become the United States. Spaniards came and Frenchmen came. Settlers came from England to Virginia and Massachusetts. These settlers wanted the Indians' land. They wanted it for farms and cities. Englishmen cut down the forests and plowed the earth. Sometimes they made treaties with the Indians in which it was agreed that part of the land belonged to the newcomers and

part to the Indians. As more men came from Europe, then were more men who wanted Indians land.

The natives could not sell or give away all their land, but the settlers wanted it all. Eventually conflicts arose and outgrew into the Indian Wars. Because of nomadic life, small numbers, lack of weapons Indians turned out not worthy adversary for their enemy. But the Indians fought for their land. They went on fighting for almost four hundred years. Indian armed opposition was suppressed only at the end of nineteenth and their remains were driven to reservations. The Europeans carried with them not only longing to subdue the new land for all its material richness, but also brought unknown and deadly diseases.

According to Northern Plains Indian winter counts (chronologies) epidemic diseases occurred on average every 5.7 years for the area and every 9.7-15.8 years for individual groups. Disease outbreaks tended to follow episodes of famine or disease and tended to be followed by episodes of abundance of game when human mortality had been high. Epidemics preceded sustained contact with non-natives. The groups keeping winter counts recognized that epidemic diseases were spread through intergroup contact.

Recorded reactions to epidemics include population dispersal, attempts to identify effective medicines, avoidance of outsiders, and changes in religious practices. Chronological listing of references to epidemics in winter counts shows that the northern plains groups endured about thirty-six major epidemics between 1714 and 1919 (table 1). Great smallpox broke out in 1837-38 that decimated the Mandas. Unlike the Yanktonai Blue Thunder

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winter counts, the Oglala John Colhoff and Flying Hawk winter counts describe the 1844-45 epidemic as severe. Blue Thunder notes that this epidemic was very widespread.

The Hunkpapa Cranbrook winter count states that only children were affected by the 1844 measles or smallpox epidemic. Iron Crow reported a food shortage in 1817 followed by measles or smallpox in 1818. The Yanktonai John Bear recounted a severe famine in 1814, followed by a severe epidemic in 1815. It is unlikely that birth rates could increase enough to compensate for this frequent loss of life. Many aspects of native life in the Great Plains were affected by epidemics. Military might depended as much on a group's health as on the training and technology available to its warriors.

Patterns of social aggregation and dispersal, religious revivals, migrations, and survival of particular groups were affected by epidemic disease. The diseases and wars drained Indians having made them vulnerable before Englishmen. As colonists were fully aware from their negotiations for Indian land, the best way to press Indians into service was to allow them to run up debts with English merchants, then demand the balance and bring them to court when they could not pay. In such way “violation of the rights of Indians”³ continued for a long time.

There is more than one example of illegal capture of Indians in their sorrowful history. For instance on August 12, 1865 a Hopi woman wobbled into the office of Lieutenant Colonel Julius C. Show, commanding officer of Fort Wingate, New Mexico Territory. She looked appallingly: her clotted hair with blood from a hand wound hung down her face. The woman declared to Show that while she and her nine-year-old daughter were walking the wagon

road between Cubero and Fort Wingate, two men from the village overtook them, thumped her with their rifle butts and left her beside the trail.

When she regained consciousness some hours later, her daughter was missing. Retracing her steps to Cubero, she discovered that the men had kidnapped her daughter and refused her to see the child. Then she went to Fort Wingate to plead for Shaw's mediation in the kidnapping. Two accordant developments provide larger historical and cultural context for the Hopi woman's dilemma. For although discrete in certain details, the sufferings of this anonymous woman prove symptomatic of the experience of women and children caught in larger processes of violence, exchange, and state regulation in the region.

Chato Sanchez – the man who captured the girl answered Shaw's question about the mother and her daughter clearly that “ he had assumed a debt which this woman contracted and had taken both the mother and her daughter as security against that debt. ”⁴ The man probably spoke the truth as he saw it. Since the early eighteenth century, Spanish New Mexicans had engaged in the practice of “ rescate”, or rescue and redemption of captives held in the power of “ los indions barbarous”. In New Mexico “ rescate” served as the artifice by which legal and moral sanctions against Indian slavery could be subverted.

Much about Indian society and culture in southern New England had changed during Howwoswee's lifetime. From the late seventeenth century through the early nineteenth century, English merchants exploited the Indians' dependence on store credit to coerce men, women, and children alike into bonded service. County court judges complemented this effort by

indenturing native debtors who could not pay off their accounts and Indian convicts who could not meet their court fines and costs of jailing. Meanwhile, colonial officials made little but token efforts to stem such practices despite full awareness that they were occurring.

By 1700, neither Christian Indians nor colonists found it acceptable for natives to put on reed-woven clothes, skins, or just shirts with leggings, as they did in the seventeenth century. As a result Indians either had to purchase spinning wheels and get wool to their own cloth, which a minority did, or else buy finished material or clothing from local stores. “ Cloth, clothing, and sewing items constituted 16 percent of the value of native purchases at Vineyarder John Allen's store between 1732 and 1752, 63 percent at John Sumner's between 1749 and 1752, and 86 percent at Peter Norton's between 1759 and 1765 (see table 2).

Even for merchants who did not specialize in fabric, like Beriah Norton, cloth and clothing sales made up no less than 13 percent of the value of Indian transactions. ” 5 Food charges for corn, meat, and sweeteners were also significant, running as high as 26 percent at one store (see tables 1). English land purchases had so effectively restricted Indian movement that the natives' mixed subsistence base of corn-bean-squash agriculture, shellfish gathering, fishing, and hunting had been soundly compromised.

Dams prevented fish from migrating along rivers. In connecting with deer herds declined, Indians were compelled to kill their livestock or buy meat. Traditional economic activities were further undermined when Indians went to work for colonists during planting and harvest seasons in order to pay off store accounts. The laborers turned to purchased, rather than self-raised,

corn to carry them through the lean winter months until April's fish runs and the midsummer harvest of squash and beans replenished stores.

In such way cycle began: first, a native family was pressed to rely on purchased food for a season or two; then creditors forced adults to work for Englishmen; the next cold season, they were back at the store to buy things they had been unable to provide for themselves during the previous year; and thus debts mounted again and the pattern repeated itself. Bonded service affected the Indians of southern New England not only individually but culturally as well. Inevitably, having so many Indians, particularly children, living among the English promoted native acculturation to colonial ways.

Some acculturative change proved empowering for native communities. Other shifts were decidedly less welcome. In either case, groups such as the Wampanoags of Aquinnah and Mashpee, the Narragansetts, and the Pequots were forced to struggle with how to define themselves as they became more like their English neighbors. Indian children had not only to withstand separation from their parents and relatives but to adapt to the colonists' strange ways. Left with little choice, they could do nothing but adjust. By making colonial agricultural and domestic tasks an accepted part of Indian life, indentures played a key role in natives' acculturation.

In 1767, when Eleazar Wheelock put a Narragansett Indian boy to work in the fields, the boy's father having expressed a protest proclaimed: " I can as well learn him that myself ... being myself brought up with the best of Farmers. "

7 As usual women rarely recorded such statements, but changes in their work prove that they also were adopting English ways. Indians Betty

Ephraim, Patience Amos, and Experience Mamuck received credit from Richard Macy for spinning yarn and sewing — possibly on equipment that they owned themselves, given the presence of spinning wheels and looms in a few native estate inventories.

Indentures were not the only factor encouraging Indians to adopt new tasks and technology. Missionaries continued to promote the benefits of colonial work ways, no doubt persuading some listeners. Other natives distressed that their lack of accumulated capital made them chronically vulnerable to merchants and judges, carefully decided "to live more like my Christian English neighbors." 8 The enormity of servitude's impact on Indian culture is obvious. At least one-third of native children were living with the English at any given time, most under indentures that kept them in service until their late teens or early twenties.

When these servants returned home as adults, they passed on what they had learned to their children, some of whom were in turn bound out to colonists. By the second half of the eighteenth century, probably nearly all native households included at least one person who had spent an essential portion of his or her childhood as a servant. As a result of poverty and widespread indentured servitude, were the changes Indians experienced in their dress. Between the advent of English settlement and King Philip's War, Praying Indians in order to mark themselves as Christians cut their hair and donned shirts, pants, shoes, hats, and cloaks.

However, many Christian Indians refused to abide by the English dictate that people dress according to their station in the colonists' social hierarchy. Indian women, in particular, had a special liking for jewelry and clothes that

colonists considered gaudy and ungodly. Servitude also influenced the Indians' food ways. Throughout the early seventeenth century, the usual Indian dish was a corn mush that consisted of some mix of vegetables, shellfish, fish, and/or game. Water was the natives' sole drink. But soon merchants stocked alternative foods and extended Indian credit lines, as traditional sources of protein became less accessible.

As a result natives became accustomed to the food provided by colonial masters; the Indian diet began to change. Although Indians continued to consume traditional foods, by the early eighteenth century they also ate mutton, beef, cheese, and potatoes, massive quantities of molasses and sugar, and smaller amounts of peas, biscuits, and apples (see table 2). Thus, by the end of the eighteenth century the Indian life rather changed. The characteristics that previously had distinguished natives from their colonial neighbors were no longer a part of Indian existence.

Indians became more like their white neighbors in their gendered division of labor, in their food and dress, and perhaps even in their propensity to beat children. As colonists forced Indian children as well as adults into bonded labor, natives lost control not only over their workaday lives but over the very upbringing of their young people. Large numbers of children and young adults spent most of their developmental years working in colonists' homes and on their farms and ships, where they heard and spoke English, performed English work, wore English clothing, and ate English food.

Over time, they could not help but become more like their masters. Food, labor, dress, child-rearing: these are major elements of any people's cultural life. But indentured servitude's impact on Indian culture was even greater, its

reach even longer. It struck much nearer to the foundations of Indian identity when it began to interfere with the people's ability to pass on native languages through word of mouth and print. Gradually, Indians became English-only speakers and this change more than any other threatened Indian claims to distinctiveness.

During the first two-thirds of the eighteenth century, as more and more natives served indentures, Indian literacy rates stagnated or declined. This lack of progress is remarkable, considering that in the seventeenth century, colonial officials and native parents alike expected masters to instruct bound Indian children to read and write English. Some natives sent their offspring to live with colonists or attend boarding schools precisely so that they would be formally educated.

Not until the late eighteenth century, when native household servants began to receive instruction in writing from white women — who were themselves in the process of gaining full literacy — did Indian signature rates start to climb, particularly among females. About three centuries wars of annihilation against Indians continued. Because of primitive weapon and nomadic life, Indians' forces were broken. But not their spirit. Love to their land, nature and culture always lived and lives in their hearts.

Despite all the disasters which fell down their heads Indians adapted to the new life. New settlers left indelible imprint on Indians' life, traditions and language. Many groups of Native Americans did not stand cruel invasion in their life but some of them learnt to find ways to survive. And nowadays the Spirit of the chieftain lives in the heart of every Indian. They are proud of their tribal roots and their culture. Notes 1. Colin G. Calloway, The World

Turned Upside Down: Indian voices from Early America (Dartmouth College).
2.

Linea Sundstrom, Smallpox Used Them Up: References to Epidemic Disease in Northern Plains Winter Counts, 1714-1920, 309 3. Richard White and John M. Findlay, Power and Place in the North American West (Seattle and London: University Of Washington Press), 44. 4. White, Power and Place, 45. 5. David J. Silverman, The impact of Indentured Servitude on the Society and Culture of Southern New England Indians, 1680 – 1810, 626. 6. Silverman, The impact of Indentured Servitude, 627. 7. Silverman, The impact of Indentured Servitude, 652. 8. Ibid.