

Colonial impact on native americans essay



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Native Americans before contact with Europeans were set in their ways and were fairly advanced people. There is evidence to suggest that people, such as the Anasazi were living in large city like areas but had to disperse due to long droughts and disease spreading among them. The dispersed people formed various tribes and continued to live relatively simple lives in areas that were so culturally diverse it is mind boggling, especially in the California area. There were around “ 40, 000 Californians, who spoke 50 different languages belonging to at least six language families. (text, 13)

But after the Europeans come tribes are wiped out or forced to integrate with one another due to sickness or war depopulating the tribes, causing a less diverse Indian population that was being slowly pushed west. European colonization of North America destabilized Native American culture, causing a slow, steady, spiral into destruction. Indians traded with the Europeans because at first they were not perceived as a threat. But unknown to the Indians, they brought something that would wipe out half of their local population within a decade.

English and Dutch settlers brought smallpox with them. Most of the victims were between the ages of 15 and 40. These were the people who would do the lions share of the hunting, farming and caring for children. These were also the people who would be the next generation of leaders. The Iroquois were hit especially hard, and this led to conflict between the Iroquois and the Huron Indians. The Iroquois waged “ mourning wars”. The objective of these wars was not to kill the other tribe, but integrate captives among themselves.

The captives would become kin, often taking the name and place of a dead loved one. Children were the favorite targets because they were the easiest to integrate into their own society. Men were often just executed because they would not choose to integrate. These mourning wars, also known as the “ Beaver Wars”, because hunting grounds were a secondary objective of the opposing sides, continued for nine years. The Iroquois pursued the Huron from the area around lake Huron to the west side of lake Superior, around what is now Wisconsin, in a forced migration.

The mourning wars also displaced other Iroquois speaking tribes, such as the Petuin who tried to shelter the Huron from the Iroquois. Trade was what started this war and why the Iroquois were so dominant in this struggle. The Iroquois were trading with the Dutch from New Netherlands during this time and had a steady supply of Dutch firearms to reinforce their dominance in the area. Beaver pelts were highly sought after by colonists to sell back in Europe. However, colonist did not have the skill necessary to trap the Beavers. Indians would trade Beaver pelts in exchange for guns, wampum, or other metal goods.

The metal goods were often tea pots or other things the Indians didn't typically use, but would take them apart and reshape them into tools they needed such as arrowheads and other tools that they needed. These tools became such an essential part of life for the Indians that when their area would run out of beaver to hunt, they would move toward their prey. Tribes in Canada did this most notably, coming south once their area became scarce of game. This reliance on the Europeans weakened the Indians

because it made them more agreeable toward giving up their land and power.

Things like the Walking Purchase of 1742 would not have gone the way they did if the reliance on trade did not exist. The Iroquois sided with the colonists and said that the Delaware “ are altogether in the wrong in their Dealings with You. ”(reader, 56) Then basically the Iroquois in essence banished the Delaware from the area and forced them to give up all claim to that land because they had sold it some fifty years earlier. Because the Indians relied on European goods they tried to appease them by giving them gradually. However it did not work so well.

After the Seven Years War some Indians realized that the Europeans would never be pleased and tried to fight back and revert to their own religions after evangelizing to appease their European benefactors. The Native Americans originally believed that they were governed by a great Spirit and their ancestors but converted to Catholicism or Protestantism depending on their region. The Franciscan friars of Spain and the Jesuits of the French tried to force Natives to conform to their respective cultures from the start. The friars were seen as divine simply because they were not devastated by the epidemics that decimated the Indian populations.

The most successful Missions were those in New Mexico run by the Franciscans. They reformed the Pueblo and had them living peacefully in Missions mostly because the Pueblos needed the tools and support to defend against other more powerful Indian tribes such as the Apaches who raided the Pueblo constantly. To live on these Missions in peace with the Spanish

the Pueblos adopted Christianity as their religion, were baptized, and were given “ christian names” instead of their “ heathen names”. After a while the Pueblo’s revolted because they claimed they were mistreated by the Spanish.

One document says that an Indian prisoner that was interrogated about the uprising says “ the causees they gave were alleged ill treatment and injuries received from” various officials at the missions who “ beat them, took away what they had, and made them work without pay. ”(reader. 34). The leaders of this revolt wanted to return to their old ways to try to gain the power they once had and tried to expel the Europeans. They went to bathe in rivers, “ saying that they thereby washed away the waters of baptism”(reader, 34) and burned all symbols of the European’s dead god so that only their Spirit was alive.

However they were too weak to stay free and eventually were reconquered by the Spanish. European colonization of America made the Indians too reliant on foreign goods and practices to the point that as soon as their benefactors turned on them, they were too weak to do anything without help. This ultimately destroyed the Native American culture and forced them to assimilate or die. If the Indians had not traded so heavily to get ahead of their native competition then they may have been able to keep themselves separate from the Europeans but that is not the case and it destroyed them.