

voyage by kidnapping ten Indians and taking them back to France with him.

Though we shouldn't think that poorly of Jacques. Everyone did it. Taking Indians as souvenirs, it seems, was an explorer's prerogative. Columbus took ten Indians back with him on his first voyage and, on his second, rounded up Indians en masse, five hundred at a time, and shipped them back to Seville to be sold in the slave markets.

A number of years back, I wrote a children's book called *A Coyote Columbus Story* in which I suggested that it was that ubiquitous Native trickster Coyote who created Columbus and his crew, so Coyote would have someone with whom he could play baseball. Things didn't work out exactly as Coyote had planned them, which is typical, and, in the end, Columbus tells Coyote to stuff his baseball game, has his men round up as many Indians as the ships will hold, and sends them back to Spain to be sold as slaves.

One annoyed reviewer complained that, while imagination was a good thing in children's literature, I should not be inventing history in order to make a political point. She was, it turned out, angry about my suggesting that Columbus had enslaved Indians. And when I told her that this was the only part of my story that was accurate, she refused to believe me.

I wasn't trying to ruin Columbus's good name, but somebody had to pay for these voyages. Sailing the ocean blue was expensive, and slavery was a brisk and profitable business. If Africans made good slaves — and here

we have to ignore the pernicious assumptions on which that statement is based — why not give Indians a try? You can see the logic. Unfortunately Indians who were sent to the slave markets had the annoying habit of dying before they could be auctioned off, and the enterprise was soon abandoned.

Besides, Indians were a much more valuable resource to explorers. Particularly when it came to the question of what was where, and as long as Europeans were strangers in a strange land, Indians, innocent, deceitful, and naked though they may have been, were the only guides to this new world that explorers had.

Can't find the Seven Cities of Gold? Ask an Indian.

Looking for the Fountain of Youth? Ask an Indian.

Need to find a water route to the Orient? Ask an Indian.



Living together would be another matter, and, as exploration gave way to settlement, the European reaction to Indians hardened, and the language used to describe Indians intensified. Particularly among the English. While the Spanish depended on Indians as a slave labour force to work the mines and plantations in New Spain, the British and the French depended on the Indians as partners in the fur trade, and then as an adjunct mercenary force so they could fight each other, and later, of course, the Americans. But apart from these specific roles, none of these nations had much use for Indians.

This was particularly true of the Puritans in New England, who had brought with them a religion that was

space in which to establish a community, something they had not had in land-poor England. Second, it provided settlers with enough room to isolate their community, so that the worldly influences that had plagued them in England could be walled out, and the forces of darkness and the wilderness could be kept at bay.

Indians were seen as a threat both to the war effort and to the acquisition of land, and the Puritans set about creating the stories that were needed to carry the day. Indians, who had been imagined as strange and exotic in the halcyon days of exploration, were now seen, as the historian Douglas Edward Leach put it, a "graceless and savage people, dirty and slothful in their personal habits, treacherous in their relations with the superior race . . . fit only to be pushed aside and subordinated."⁵

William Morrell, in his terse verse history of New England, imagined Native people as dangerous. "They're wonderous cruel," he wrote, "Strangely base and vile/Quickly displeased, and hardly reconciled."⁶ Nathaniel Saltonstall, writing of King Philip's War in New England, 1675-76, likened Indians to wolves "and other beasts of prey that commonly do their mischiefs in the night or by stealth durst not come forth out of the woods and swamps where they lay skulking in small companies."⁷

And when they did come out of the woods and swamps, according to Benjamin Trumbull, they ate each other. Of a captive, Trumbull writes, "The Indians, kindling a large fire, violently tore him limb from limb. Barbarously cutting his flesh in pieces, they handed it

militaristic in nature and a theory of land acquisition and usage that was individualistic and private. Thanksgiving and corn-planting techniques aside, Indians were, most often, seen as impediments to progress and affronts to faith.

You might be wondering why I'm about to use an American example to discuss early Native-non-Native relations instead of a good Canadian example. I could say that it's because I'd prefer to put the Americans on the spot and pretend that Canadians treated Indians better. But that's not true. It's because I know the American example better, and because Americans started the process of eliminating Indians sooner and were more diligent about the project than were Canadians.

Don't worry, my partner, who is a staunch Canadian, has already had words with me about this rather lame bit of reasoning.

So the Puritans saw the world at war, a holy war, a war that was both philosophical and physical. Philosophically, God and the Devil were engaged in a spiritual battle for the souls of humans. Humans, in turn, fought a physical battle that pitted God's troops, in this case the Puritans, against the Devil's mercenaries. While they were in England, the Puritans had seen the manifestations of the Devil in the pomp of the Catholic church and in the impurity of the Anglican order. Transplanting themselves to America did not take them out of the battle. It simply pitted them against an old enemy in a new guise.

Land, on the other hand, was a godsend, satisfying two needs for the Puritans. First, it provided them the

round from one to another, eating it, singing and dancing round the fire, in their violent and tumultuous manner."⁸

These descriptions, these historical propagandas, made their way into a great many historical fictions, the best of which is probably John Richardson's 1852 novel *Wau-Nan-Gee, or, The Massacre at Chicago*. In it, Richardson — a Canadian, for those of you who share my partner's nationalistic tendencies — describes a group of Potawatomies, led by the arch-villain Pee-to-tum, who have just attacked a wagon. It's a sparkling passage, full of the balance and sensitivity that marks the best of Hollywood westerns.

"Squatted in a circle, and within a few feet of the wagon in which the tomahawked children lay covered with blood, and fast stiffening in the coldness of death, now sat about twenty Indians, with Pee-to-tum at their head, passing from hand to hand the quivering heart of the slain man, whose eyes, straining as it were, from their sockets, seemed to watch the horrid repast in which they were indulging, while the blood streamed disgustingly over their chins and lips and trickled over their persons. So many wolves or tigers could not have torn away more voraciously with their teeth, or smacked their lips with greater delight in the relish of human food, than did these loathsome creatures who now moistened the nauseous repast from a black bottle of rum which had been found in one of the wagons containing the medicine for the sick — and what gave additional disgust was the hideous aspect of the inflamed eye of the Chippewa, from which the bandage had fallen off, and from which the heat of the

sun's rays was fast drawing a briny, ropy, and copious discharge, resembling rather the grey and slimy mucus of the toad than the tears of a human being."⁹

Yummy.

All that in two sentences.

Indians, it seemed, could offer little inspiration or example to civilized humans, and colonists saw little need to examine either the Indian or Indian culture. Indian government was a labyrinth, confused and indecipherable. Indian religion was absurd and ridiculous. Jonas Johannis Michaluis, in a letter to the Reverend Adrianus Smoutuis, summed up the feelings that most colonists had for Indians when he described them as "savage and wild, strangers to all decency, yea, uncivil and stupid as garden poles."¹⁰

"Stupid as garden poles." It's funny, isn't it? And a little annoying, too. But there's no point in being angry. These are just the sounds and smells of empire — fear, racism, greed, arrogance — and since empire tends to be exclusive, it makes sense, doesn't it, that Indians would not be welcome?

I fear that this is beginning to sound like one of those boring litany of complaints about the past. You know, Native peoples as hapless victims, innocents in the struggle for the Americas.

Well, shame on me.

We understand, do we not, that we can't judge the past by the standards of the present? And we agree, don't we, that a religion should not be measured by the actions of the people who profess to practise it? And we've told

ourselves enough times, in one form or another, that the sins of the father — gender biases notwithstanding — should not be visited on the son.

Of course, the skeptic would point out that these axioms are little more than self-serving attempts to insure ourselves against liability, that many of our past peccadilloes — African slavery, for example — were known to be wrong at the time we committed them, while the cynic would argue that the lessons of history only serve to show us which atrocities are profitable and which are not.

But not me. Complaint is not my purpose. This little history lesson is simply my attempt to call attention to the cultural distance that separated Europeans and Indians. We don't know, for example, if there were many Indians who wanted to be Europeans, but we do know that Europeans, as a group, had little interest in being Indians. The Spanish were dead against it, the French may have lived with Indians and married Indians but that was primarily in the cause of the fur trade, and the Puritans saw any inclinations toward the forest and Aboriginal life as proof of an unsound mind and the Devil's handiwork, the terror of which is so pleasantly captured in Nathaniel