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THROUGH A GLASS DARKLY, COLONIAL ATTITUDES TOWARD THE NATIVE AMERICANS

James Axtell

"Is man a salvage at heart, skinned o'er with Manners? Or is salvagery but a faint taint in the natural man's gentility, which erupts now and again like pimples on an angel's arse?" The question posed so delicately by Mary Mungummary, "the traveling whore o' Dorset" in John Barth's *The Sot-Weed Factor*, reflected an increasingly serious concern of generations of English colonists in America.¹ In a culture that saw itself as the apotheosis and vanguard of "civilization," contact with the Indian cultures of the New World produced an unexpected and uncharacteristic uncertainty about its own identity. The Indian was important for the English mind "for what he showed civilized men they were not and must not be"—a negative force in the cosmic duel between Darkness and Light. But he also exerted a positive force, for "what he was in and of himself," what his culture actually was, posed a threat and a challenge to English culture that struck at the very heart of its existence, its identity, and perhaps most of all, its integrity.²

The most obvious threat to the English was, of course, physical. Although the first Indians the Plymouth Pilgrims encountered "ran into the wood[s] and whistled [their] dog after them," the Englishmen still expected the worst. "We know not how we should find or meet with any Indians," one of them said, "except it be to do us a mischief." And they were not disappointed. Three days later "thirty or forty" Nausets attacked a Pilgrim exploration party, having mistaken them for Captain Thomas Hunt's crew who had earlier kidnapped twenty-seven Indians and sold them for slaves. After their superior fire-power frustrated the attack, the English followed the Indians into the woods where they "shouted all together two several times" and shot off a couple of muskets to show the Indians that they "were not afraid of them nor discouraged." This may have been a piece

of spontaneous bravado, but it may also have been the first American version of whistling in the dark to hide the fear.³

There was good reason to be anxious, for the Pilgrims and their predecessors in Virginia had come to America to establish permanent residence and that required land—land that was in the firm possession of the Indians. To a society based upon the private ownership of land, this posed a troublesome question of law and morality. As the Reverend Robert Gray asked in 1609, "By what right or warrant we can enter into the land of these Savages, take away their rightful inheritance from them, and plant ourselves in their places, being unwronged or unprovoked by them."⁴

There were several different answers. The least popular answer was to purchase the land from the Indians for a fair price—fair in terms of European not Indian values—and to secure the Indians' right to hunt and fish on the unused portions of the land in perpetuity because their concept of land allowed them to alienate only the *use* of the land, not the land itself, unless the grand sachem relinquished all political and jurisdictional rights to the land by a treaty of cession. This was the policy often preached by many of the colonies but practiced consistently only by William Penn and Roger Williams, who were among the few colonial leaders who understood and respected the Indians.⁵

Far more common, however, were casuistical arguments for dispossessing the Indians of their land. The first stratagem was to deny the humanity of the Indians, thereby tacitly asserting the right of "civilized" beings to dominate them and to use them for "higher" purposes. The same Robert Gray who asked if Englishmen were entitled to "plant ourselves in their places" answered that "Although the Lord hath given the earth to children of men, . . . the greater part of it [is] possessed and wrongfully usurped by wild beasts, and unreasonable creatures, or by brutish savages, which by reason of their godles ignorance, and blasphemous Idolatrie, are worse then those beasts which are of most wilde and savage nature."⁶ By this token the Indians' inhumanity—their "barbarism" as it

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was defined by contrast with English "civility"—disqualified them from the right to possess land, John Winthrop gave the idea classic expression in 1629 when he argued that because the Indians "inclose noe land, neither have any settled habytation, or any tame Cattle to improve the Land by," they "have noe other but a Naturall Right to those Countries" (as opposed to a precedent *civil* right earned by improving the land). Thus, he concluded, "if we leave them sufficient for their use, we may lawfully take the rest, there being more than enough for them, and us . . ." The logic of dispossession was inexorable: Indians are animals; animals do not own land; therefore we, God's Chosen People, may "increase and multiplie and replenish the earth and subdue it," as the Bible directs, even if that particular spot of earth happens to be inhabited by tawny animals in human form.

A more wishful tactic was to exchange with the Indians "the pearles of earth"—their land and natural resources—for the "pearles of heaven"—Christianity and the English way of life that was seen as indistinguishable from it. Samuel Purchas, the leading promoter of English colonization in the 17th century, thought in characteristically clerical fashion that "God in wisdome . . . enriched the Savage Countries, that those riches might be attractive for Christian suters, which there may sowe spirituals and reape temporals." If the heathens resisted the cultural and religious blandishments of the English, they could be said, in Robert Gray's phrase, to have wronged and provoked the English, thereby removing the last scruple over the English "warrant" to deprive the Indians of their "rightfull inheritance."⁸

Theory had its uses, especially in inter-colonial boundary disputes, but the English colonists engaged in carving out farms from the wilderness knew, as men on-the-make have always known, that possession is nine-tenths of the law. So with proverbial energy and ingenuity they proceeded to obtain Indian land any way they could. One method was to turn livestock into an Indian's crops until he despaired and moved. The Indian who dared to kill an Englishman's marauding animals was promptly hauled into court. A second method was to get the Indian drunk and have him sign a deed that he could not in any case read. A third method was to

recognize a claim by a corrupt Indian to land that was not his and to "buy" it from him. A fourth method was a simple threat of violence. A timorous Indian would turn over his property for no other reason than the "love and goodwill" he bore toward the man behind the gun; he was then permitted to remain as a tenant on a corner of the land he had formerly owned. A fifth method, which seems to have been a favorite in New England, was the imposition of fines for a wide variety of offences against English sensibility and law, the Indian's lands becoming forfeit if the fines were not paid by their due date. Whatever the offence, the fine was likely to exceed the offender's ability to pay. An Englishman would then "rescue" him from his predicament, paying his fine for a short-term mortgage on his land, and later foreclosing when the Indian could not make restitution on time.⁹

In the face of such tactics, Indians who felt they had been victimized often sought redress in the English colonial courts. The success they enjoyed can be inferred from their relative weight on the scale of English justice. The experience of the Indians at the hands of the Roanoke colonists in 1584 prefigured the quality of English justice in the centuries to follow. When the English discovered a silver cup missing, they dispatched a punitive expedition to a nearby Indian village. When the Indians denied any knowledge of the cup, the English burned the village to the ground and destroyed the Indians' corn supply. Although the English had been "entertained with all love, and kindness" by the Indians, they could not accept the basic integrity of their hosts and under pressure substituted power for equity. As one member of the voyage admitted, "Some of our companie towards the ende or the yeare, shewed themselves too fierce, in slaying some of the people, in some towns, upon causes that on our part, might easily enough have bene borne withall."¹⁰

The New England colonies were less quick to resort to force but the eventual outcome for the Indians was much the same. Given the premises with which the Puritans started, the results could not be expected to differ. The 1621 treaty of peace between Chief Massasoit of the Wampanoags and Governor John Carver of Plymouth Colony is a case in point. Of the seven articles of agreement

two were reciprocal: tools were to be mutually respected and the signatories would assist each other in the event of attack by outside enemies. But three important articles applied only to the Indians: (1) "That neither he [Massasoit] nor any of his should injure or do hurt to any of our [English] people"—but not vice versa. (2) "And if any of his did hurt to any of ours, he should send the offender, that we might punish him"—but not vice versa. And (3) "That when their men came to us, they should leave their [weapons] behind them."—but not vice versa. It was clear from the beginning that only English law would hold sway over New England—red and white. When the Indian was regarded as little better than a roving barbarian, without law, government, or religion, the members of a civilized Christian society were understandably reluctant to share the administration of justice. That was the white man's burden.¹¹

According to the latest history of Indian-white relations in early New England, it was a burden that the Puritans carried easily and well. As Professor Alden Vaughan argues, "the Indian found fair and impartial treatment within the Puritans' legal procedure . . . Both red man and white viewed the administration of justice in Puritan New England with equanimity if not affection."¹² Revisionist history is both enjoyable and important, but when it is written at the cost of accuracy, impartiality, and common sense, it is less useful than the history it seeks to revise. In *New England Frontier*, for example, Professor Vaughan's own evidence belies his wishful conclusions. How could an Indian receive "fair and impartial" justice when no Indian ever sat as judge in an English court, no Indian ever helped devise the English laws by which he was judged, and no Indian ever sat as a juror until 1673 and then only when both principals were Indians?

And these were only institutional deficiencies. Human intangibles such as attitudes, prejudices, and images inevitably colored the judgments reached in English courts. In 1682 Sam, a Plymouth Indian, was found guilty of "laying [Sarah Freeman] down upon her backe, and entering her body with his." Ordinarily rape carried the death penalty, but the court, "considering he was but an Indian, and therefore in an incapacity to know the horribleness of the wickednes of his abomina-

ble act," commuted his sentence to a whipping and expulsion from the colony. Here, ironically, the prejudice worked in the Indian's favor; most of the time it did not. In 1659, for example, Rhode Island decided that Indians convicted of theft involving more than twenty shillings who could not make restitution might be sold into slavery "to any forraigne country of the English subjects." Certainly no Englishman was ever permanently enslaved, much less for such a trivial offence.¹³

The popular prejudice against Indians worked in many ways to influence the courts' decisions. Accused witch Sarah Good told the man who was escorting her to Ipswich Court in 1692 "that she would not own herself to be a witch unless she is proved one. She saith that there is but one evidence, and that an Indian [Tituba], and therefore she fears not." So flagrant was the prejudice against Indian testimony that Rhode Island in 1673 and Plymouth in 1674 charged their juries to give full credence to native testimony in all cases "as [if] it were the testimony of an Englishman," whether the Indian had sworn an oath on the Bible or not.¹⁴

The prejudice also worked in less covert ways. In 1638 Arthur Peach, "a lusty and desparate young man [who] had been one of the soldiers in the Pequot War," tried to run away to New York to avoid debt and a pregnant girl, enticing three servants to go with him. In the Narragansett country Peach robbed an Indian of five fathoms of wampum and three coats of cloth and then ran him through with a rapier, leaving him for dead. The Indian had been invited to their campfire to smoke tobacco, whereupon Peach told the others that "he would kill him and take what he had from him, but they were something afraid. But he said, 'Hang him, rogue, he had killed many of them.' So they let him alone to do as he would." The Indian lived long enough to finger his assailants, who were executed before some of the Indian leaders and the victim's friends to avoid a war with the powerful Narragansetts. If the occasion had not been fraught with such heavy consequences, the decision might well have been different, for "some of the rude and ignorant sort," as William Bradford called them, "murmured that any English should be put to death for the Indians." Since most cases were matters of land and theft rather than

life and death, the subtle workings of English prejudice—despite the best intentions and sincerest efforts of English leaders—undoubtedly tipped the scale of justice against the Indians. Otherwise it is difficult to see how the Indians lost the better part of New England so quickly. Although more than one Englishman believed that the American natives were descended from the Lost Tribes of Israel, the Indians would never sell their birthright for a mess of potage, much less a cask of rum.¹⁵

The question of English justice in New England is inseparable from the question of Indian land, as Professor Vaughan realized when he tried to revise the traditional history of Indian-white relations. Just as he defended the Puritan record of justice, so he argued that

the Puritan did not push the New England Indian off his land. . . . The Indian only knew that he had enough land for himself and his tribe; the remainder was as truly *vacuum domicilium* to him as it was to the Puritan The sale of land imposed no hardship on a people who subsisted primarily on agricultural crops. The area actually devoted to gardens was an infinitesimal fraction of the New England soil. Most of the rest—excepting village sites, favorite fishing and trapping areas, and the like—was surplus land to the Indians. In 1620 there were more than four square miles of land for every Indian man, woman, and child in New England. It is not surprising, therefore, that the natives were glad to sell some of it to the newcomers . . . so long as the immigrants came as friends rather than foes.¹⁶

The thrust of this incredible set of premises is to revise the traditional interpretation of the origins of King Philip's War in 1675. According to Professor Vaughan,

there is no substantial evidence that resentment over land transactions spurred any tribe . . . into violent reprisal At bottom, Philip seems to have been moved to violence by a combination of growing Puritan influence and gradual realization of his own declining power It was not *so much* that the Plymouth Puritans now had title to more land than the Wampanoag tribe or that they had maltreated the Indians [a big admission] but that they increasingly dominated the political, economic, and social life of Philip's section of New England.

In short, contrary to conventional wisdom and accepted opinion, English justice and the dispossession of Indian land were not responsible for the Indian wars in colonial New England.¹⁷

This is a soothing ointment for white

Americans wearied and bruised by generations of moral breast-beating. It promises instant relief from some of the guilt that plagues their bones. The only problem is that the Indians themselves were never consulted, and since their motivations are the central issue, it seems only fair that they should be. When the Indians speak their own piece, the conventional wisdom hardens into concrete fact.

The first major conflict in New England was the Pequot War in 1637. Lt. Lion Gardener, the commander of the English fort at Saybrook, wrote that just prior to the war a Narragansett sachem from Rhode Island tried to persuade the Long Island Indians to join with several other tribes, including the Mohawks of the Hudson Valley, to drive the English into the sea from whence they came. "So are we all Indians as the English are," he argued,

and say brother to one another; so must we be one as they are, otherwise we shall be all gone shortly, for you know our fathers had plenty of deer and skins, our plains were full of deer, as also our woods, and of turkies, and our coves full of fish and fowl. But these English having gotten our land, they with scythes cut down the grass, and with axes fell the trees; their cows and horses eat the grass, and their hogs spoil our clam banks, and we shall all be starved.

His appeal, of course, was unsuccessful, and five hundred Pequot men, women, and children were shot or burned to death and another two hundred enslaved by a combined English-Indian raid on their headquarters at Mystic Fort. One tangible result of the war was the opening of southern New England to rapid English colonization. As one English commander put it, "Thus the Lord was pleased to smite our Enemies in the hinder Parts, and to give us their Land for an Inheritance." The Mohegan and Narragansett allies of the English did not receive one square foot of land for their service.¹⁸

The Narragansetts' resentment grew in the following years as the New English colonies played them off against Uncas' Mohegans in an attempt to maintain a favorable balance of power. By 1665, when a royal commission arrived to investigate the state of New England, the Narragansetts had much to tell. "These Indian Princes," read the commissioners' report,

gave [us] a long Petition . . . complaining of many Acts of violence and injustice which the

Mattachusetts [government] had done to them, amongst others they had first caused them to be fined, then tooke their whole Country in Mortgage . . . and would have inveigled them out of it, . . . Matchewan refusing to let ye Commissioners have the hearing of Appeals.¹⁹

Indian grievances and tensions mounted until 1675 when a loose confederation of southern New England tribes under King Philip (Metacom) retaliated in force for the killing of an Indian caught pilfering a house by a young Plymouth "lad." "About a Week" before the war engulfed New England, John Easton, the Quaker deputy-governor of Rhode Island, met with Philip and his councillors in an attempt to ward off the conflict with arbitration. Easton's remarkable account of this meeting, a record that Professor Vaughan ignored altogether, presents a clear profile of the psychological causes of King Philip's War.

The Indians first reacted to Easton's proposal of arbitration. "They said that all English agreed against them, and so by Arbitration they had had much Rong; manie Miles square of Land so taken from them, for the English wold have English Arbitrators." Even when Easton proposed that the governor of New York and an Indian sachem chosen by the Indians act as arbitrators, the Indians expressed their pleasure with the innovation but were unable to overcome their painful experience of English justice. Rhode Island had won the Indians respect by "sending for Indian Rulers" when "the Crime concerned Indian Lives" to witness the punishment and so "satisfie their Subjects when they knew an Indian suffered duly." But the Indians wanted to limit English jurisdiction over them to the English townships, not over their own country as well, which was the current practice in all the New England colonies. By the same token, "they had a great Fear to have ani of ther Indians . . . caled or forced to be Christian Indians. They said that such wer in everi thing more mischievous, only Dissemblers, and then the English made them not Subject to their Kings, and by their lyving to rong ther Kings. We knew it to be true," Easton admitted.

The sale of liquor and unrestrained English animals were the subjects of other complaints, but the heart of the Indians' grievances was the role of English justice in the dispossession of Indian land. Symptomatic of the Indians' distrust was their belief that

"if 20 of there [h]onest Indians testified that a[n] Englishman had dun them Rong, it was nothing; and if but one of their worst Indians testified against any Indian or ther King, when it pleased the English it was sutfitiant" ground for prosecution. In such circumstances they could hardly expect the kind of treatment their grand sachem Massasoit, Philip's father, had given the English in 1620. "When the English first came," they emphasized, Massasoit was

as a great Man, and the English as a littell Child; he constrained other Indians from ronging the English, and gave them Corn and shewed them how to plant, and was free to do them ani Good [or evil], and let them have a 100 Times more Land than now [Philip] had for his own Peopell.

Furthermore, when an Indian sachem "sold Land, the English would say, [that the price] was more than they agreed to," and would produce an inscrutable piece of "Writing" to disprove the Indians' oral memory. Some of their sachems "had dun Rong to sell so much" land, but the usual reason was that either "the English made them drunk and cheated them in Bargains" or disinherited their rightful leaders by paper fiat and intruded a more manageable leader who "wold give or sell them these lands." In the end, the Indians "had no Hopes left to kepe ani Land" and, like any people without hope, were driven to volatile despair. They would "as good be Kiled," they told Easton, who was their last hope for justice, "as leave all their Liveflyhode." As subsequent events revealed, they were as good as their word.²⁰

The result of King Philip's War was the final demoralization and pacification of the Indians of southern New England. Enemies were sold into slavery, friends restricted to a few reservations or "praying towns," and the rest stole away in the night to join their brothers in the west, the north, or down east. Freed from the threat within their midst, the New England colonies, especially Massachusetts, directed a steady stream of settlement upon the allegedly uninhabited land of New Hampshire and Maine, creating once again a threat to the Indian way of life. The French and Indian wars that erupted with almost predictable regularity from 1689 were the result.

When it came time to sue for peace in 1717 at Georgetown on Arrowsick Island, the English and Indian parties rang changes on

a tune that had been and would be played many times in American history.

[Governor Shute of Massachusetts, to his Interpreter:]

Tell them "That the English Settlements that have lately been made in these Eastern Parts, have been promoted partly on their accounts, and that they will find the benefit of them in having Trade brought so near them, besides the advantage of the Neighbourhood and Conversation of the English, to whom I have given strict Orders, that they be very just and kind to the Indians, upon all accounts, and therefore if at any time, they meet with any Oppression, Fraud, or unfair Dealing, from the English in any of their affairs; let them make their Complaint to any of my Officers here, and then I shall soon hear of it, and take speedy and effectual care to do them right . . . I would have them look upon the English Government in *New-England* as their great and safe shelter . . . [but] They must be Obedient to KING GEORGE, and all just Offers and Usages shall be given them."

[The Indian Spokesman:] We will be very Obedient to the KING, if we are not Molested in the Improvement of our Lands.

[Governor Shute:] They must Desist from any Pretensions to Lands which the English own.

[Indian Spokesman:] This Place was formerly Settled and is now Settling at our request: And we now return Thanks that the English are come to Settle here, and will Imbrace them in our Bosoms that come to Settle on our Lands.

[Governor Shute:] They must not call it their Land, for the English have bought it of them and their Ancestors.

[Indian Spokesman:] We Desire there may be no further Settlements made. We shan't be able to hold them all in our Bosoms, and to take care to Shelter them, if it be like to be bad Weather, and Mischief be Threatned.²¹

When the "bad weather and mischief" broke upon the heads of the settlers, much of the blame could be laid at the door of English justice. John Minot, a sympathetic Englishman, met in 1725 with twenty Maine sagamores, who acknowledged that "warr was troublesome & they chus'd peace provided the English would come into just methods with them and perform what was promised at [the Arrowsick] Congress." Minot went on to tell Governor Dummer of the necessity of providing inalienable and firmly delineated reservations for the Indians, staffing missionary and trading posts with men of "blam[e]less, watchful carr[i]age," and establishing offices of justice in Maine to adjudicate Indian grievances. In relating the story of an Indian who had been made drunk at a trading house and robbed of thirty sable

skins, he provided a telling example of the inadequacy of English justice. Minot told the Indian "he must go to the Governor to Boston, for Justice." In reply "He tould me it would cost him 50 skins to goe there," Minot wrote, "and that it was a great hardship. There was no bodey appointed here to doe them justice, & then askt me, what two oxen were worth. I tould him it was a wrong way to do himself justice; he tould me he had no other way, & in a few dayes I heard the man had lost two oxen."²²

The dismal record of Indian-white relations in New England and Virginia stands in dramatic contrast to the Pennsylvania Quakers' extraordinary success in living with the Indians and avoiding war until 1756, when the matter was taken out of their hands by imperial politics. Few Puritan leaders could say, as William Penn reported in 1685, that "Our humanity has obliged them so far, that they generally leave their guns at home, when they come to our settlements; they offer us no affront, not so much as to one of our Dogs; and if any of them break our Laws, they submit to be punished by them; and to this they have tyed themselves by an obligation under their hands." The reason was deceptively simple: "We leave not the least indignity to them unrebukt, nor wrong unsatisfied. Justice gains and awes them." Even rarer were the Puritan ministers who could say that they had ventured into hostile Indian country, as the Quaker missionary John Woolman confided to his journal in 1763, "to spend some time with Indians, that I might feel and understand their Life, and the Spirit they live in, if haply I might receive some instruction from them." Despite the entreaties of men such as John Minot, the English outside Pennsylvania never learned that with the Indians "Example is before precept."²³

The anomaly of Pennsylvania's friendly relations with the Delaware helps to explain by contrast how the negative image of the Indian in the other colonies imprisoned them in a vicious circle. The English viewed the Indian as little better than an uninhibited animal. When his initial behavior did not verify the stereotype, English anxiety became so great that they often provoked the desired response and English violence bred Indian violence. Once war had broken out, of course, the English could congratulate themselves on their perspicuity in reading the Indian's char-

acter and proceed to magnify the stereotype to suit their military needs.

And their needs were plentiful, once the Indians unleashed their distinctly "uncivilized" brand of warfare. As everyone knows, English troops "beat up the drum," flew their colors, and marched in serried ranks into the nearest open field to await the enemy. But the Indians would have none of this European madness and used their own successful methods, "seldom or never daring," as a hostile witness put it, "to meet our Soldiers in the open Field, unless when they have very great Advantage as to their Numbers, or Covert of the Woods and Bushes." Some eight months after the start of King Philip's War an American author had to admit to his English readers that "we have as yet had Nothing like to a Field Battel with the Indians." Nor would they ever. As one Maine warrior told an English captain, "English Fashion is all one Fool; you kill mee, mee kill you! No, better ly somewhere, and Shoot a man, and he no see! That the best Soldier!" It is not surprising that the "perfidious Subtlety" of their "timerous and barbarous Enemy" thoroughly frustrated the English.²⁴

Frustration has a way of breaking down the most carefully laid restraints and inhibitions, especially if the cause of it possesses something of value. When the Powhatan confederacy under Opechancanough killed a third of the Virginia colonists in 1622, a note of grim satisfaction could be detected in the English accounts. Now there was no further need to pretend that the Indians were capable of being civilized and converted, and an uninhibited approach to the noxious "Indian problem" could be adopted. As one leader revealed after the attack:

Our hands which before were tied with gentleness and faire usage, are now set at liberty by the treacherous violence of the Savages . . . So that we, who hitherto have had possession of no more ground then their waste and our purchase at a valuable consideration to their owne contentment, gained; may now by right of Warre, and law of Nations, invade the Country, and destroy them who sought to destroy us; whereby wee shall enjoy their cultivated places, turning the laborious Mattocke into the victorious Sword (wherein there is more both ease, benefit, and glory) and possessing the fruits of others labours. Now their cleared grounds in all their villages (which are situate in the fruitfulest places of the land) shall be inhabited by us, whereas heretofore the grubbing of woods was the greatest labour.

While land was of such paramount importance, men could be found who thought that the massacre "will be good for the Plantation, because now we have just cause to destroy them by all meanes possible."²⁵

Just what "meanes" the Virginians felt "possible" was announced by the author who coveted the Indian land so openly. "Victorie," he wrote,

may bee gained many waies: by force, by surprize, by famine in burning their Corne, by destroying and burning their Boats, Canoes, and Houses, by breaking their fishing Weares, by assailing them in their huntings, whereby they get the greatest part of their sustenance in Winter, by pursuing and chasing them with our horses, and blood-Hounds to draw after them, and Mastives to teare them.

No one familiar with the military history of the twentieth century will fail to see that the American Indian enjoys the dubious honor of having been the first object of the European employment of unlimited warfare.²⁶

The use of dogs to hunt and "teare" the Indians was but one of several English practices and innovations used to counteract the deadly effectiveness of the uninhibited style of Indian warfare. Together they had two results, one expected but uncertain and the other unintended but inevitable. As the English had hoped, they enabled the colonists to defeat the Indians for the hegemony of North America. What the English could not foresee, however, was that in giving them victory, such practices would serve to lower their own conduct to the "barbarous" levels they deplored, thereby adding to the growing confusion and uncertainty over their own identity in the New World.

When the English began to explore the American coast they had been prepared in part by the Spanish experience in Central and South America and the American Southwest. The Hakluyts' and Samuel Purchas' popular collections of early voyages contained numerous accounts of the conquistadores' use of mastiffs against the Indians, including the humane denunciations of the practice by the Dominican friar Bartolomé de las Casas. In his *Brief Narration of the Destruction of the Indies* published in 1552, Las Casas wrote that on the Isle of Hispaniola the Indians fled into the mountains "from the men so without all manhood, emptie of all pitie, behaving them[selves] as savage

beasts, the slaughterers and deadly enemies of mankind: they taught their Hounds, fierce Dogs, to teare them in peeces at the first view, and in the space that one might say a Credo, assailed and devoured an Indian as if it had been a Swine." In Peru the outraged friar had seen that "the Spanish have made their Mastives runne upon the Indians to rent them in peeces." And in New Granado the dogs were turned loose on Indians in chains "as if they were Hogs, and kill[ed] them, making shambles of mans flesh."²⁷

It is small wonder that a mastiff could make mincemeat of a mere man's flesh when in England they were used to bait bears and bulls. In 1576 the first English book on dogs said that "One dogge or two at the uttermost" was sufficient to defeat a bull, "be the bull never so monstrous, never so feerce, never so furious, never so stearne, never so untameable. For it is a kinde of dogge capeable of courage, violent and valiaunt, striking could feare into the harts of men, but standing in feare of no man, in so much that no weapons will make him shrincke, nor abridge his boldnes." The description of his physical attributes left no room for doubt of these claims. "This kinde of Dogge," said the author, "is vaste, huge, stubborne, ougly, and eager, of a hevvy and burthenous body, and therefore but of litle swiftnesse, terrible, and frightfull to beholde." As if nature had not made them formidable enough, Englishmen "traine[d] them up in fighting and wrestling with a man having for the safegarde of this lyfe, eyther a Pikestaffe, a clubbe, or a sworde and by using them to exercises as these, they dogges become more sturdy and strong." Understandably, these were the dogs that Richard Hakluyt urged English planters to take to America "to kill heavie beastes of ravnye and for nighte watches."²⁸

But the English, like the Spanish before them, soon learned that the dogs were fearful to other "beastes of ravnye" in the American wilderness. When Captain Martin Pring sailed to Plymouth in 1603, he carried with him from Bristol "two excellent Mastives, of whom the *Indians* were more afraid, then of twentie of our men. One of these Mastives would carrie a halfe Pike in his mouth . . . And when we would be rid of the Savages company wee would let loose the Mastives, and suddenly with out-cryes they would flee away." The value of these dogs to the English

was so great that one of the first legislative acts of the Virginia General Assembly was to decree "That no man doe sell or give . . . to the Indians . . . any English dog of quality, as a mastive, greyhound, bloodhounde, lande or water spaniel, or any other dog or bitch whatsoever, of the Englishe race, upon paine of forfaiting 5s sterling."²⁹

Despite the superior firepower, technology, and numbers of the English colonists, the Indians enjoyed a superior knowledge of the woods and swamps, mobility, and the element of offensive surprise. Not infrequently these advantages gave the Indians frightening success over their more cumbersome rivals, success that often drove the English to abandon their civilized standards of warfare in a desperate search for a military equalizer. When the Reverend Solomon Stoddard of Northampton recommended to the governor of Massachusetts in 1703 that dogs be used to track Indians and to guard towns, he was well aware that he was departing from "Christian practice." "If the Indians were as other people are," he began, "and did manage their warr fairly after the manner of other nations, it might be looked upon as inhumane to pursue them in such a manner." And then, like all apologists of war, he proceeded to excuse his own "inhumane" suggestion by dehumanizing the enemy—and in the process a part of himself. "But they are to be looked upon as thieves and murderers, they doe acts of hostility, without proclaiming war, they don't appeare openly in the field to bid us battle, they use those cruelly that fall into their hands." In short, "they act like wolves, and are to be dealt withall as wolves." It was reasoning such as this, tragically flawed by hubris and lack of compassion, that allowed an order to be given in nearby Hatfield in 1675 for a female Indian captive "to be torn in peeces by dogs."³⁰

When the theater of war shifted to the middle Atlantic colonies during the final French and Indian war, the English need for effective counter-measures grew with each Indian victory. By the summer of 1763 the need was desperate as the heavy English troops lost fight after fight in the dense forests and mountains of Pennsylvania. With judicious timing, John Hughes suggested to Colonel Henry Bouquet, the English field commander, the use of dogs. "As the Enemy you are to Encounter," he wrote, "is a Cruel

Suptil, Ambushcading Enemy from whom no fair Engagement, nor Any Quarter can be Expected If they get the Better by any Means," every infantryman should receive a dog on a three-foot leash to accompany him in pursuit of the enemy. For "No Indian can well Conceal himself in a Swamp or thicket as a spy; Your Dogs Discover him & may Soon be Learnt to Destroy him too." So confident was Hughes of their effectiveness that he would "almost" venture his life that "500 men with 500 Dogs would be much more Dredfull to 2000 [Indians] than an Army of Some thousands of brave men in the Regular way."³¹

Colonel Bouquet was obviously taken with the suggestion. On the same day he received Hughes' letter he wrote Sir Jeffery Amherst, his superior in New York, that "as it is [a] pity to expose good men against [the Indians] I wish we would make use of the Spanish Method to hunt them with English Dogs, supported by Rangers and Some Light Horse, who would I think effectually extirpate or remove that Vermin." As if to underline his exceptional departure from civilized conduct, Bouquet included his suggestion in the now infamous postscript in which he volunteered "to inoculate the [Indians] with Some [small-pox] Blankets that may fall in their Hands."³²

Unfortunately, Amherst's reply did nothing to restore Christian standards to the conduct of war against the Indians. "You will Do well," he wrote, "to try to Inoculate the *Indians*, by means of Blankets, as well as to Try Every other Method, that can Serve to Extirpate this Execrable Race.—I should be very glad your [read Hughes'] Scheme for Hunting them down by Dogs could take Effect; but," he added in a note of practicality that did nothing to vitiate his responsibility, "*England* is at too great a Distance to think of that at present." As they have often been, results were more important to the military than principles, even if in victory something vital to human life was lost.³³

The second practice that diminished the colonial Englishman's humanity was scalping, which was a direct loan from the Indians. In saying this I realize that I am swimming against a strong current of Indian and liberal white opinion that believes that the European colonists, by their introduction of bounties, invented the art of scalping and taught it to their Indian allies. Indeed, this current is so

strong that it has forced its way into *The New Yorker* magazine and onto NBC Television, where "Hec Ramsey" (alias Richard Boone) recently informed a sidekick—and several million viewers—that the *Puritans* (of New England, presumably) taught the *Iroquois* (of New York, presumably) how to scalp by offering them bounties for enemy hair. Even more influential, however, is the opinion of Indian spokesmen such as Vine Deloria and Ray Fadden, the curator of his own "Six Nations Indian Museum" in the Adirondacks. When Fadden asked a reporter from *The New Yorker* if he knew that "scalping, skinning alive, and burning at the stake were European barbarian inventions, forced on Indian mercenaries?" nearly half a million readers overheard the rhetorical answer.³⁴

The best way to deal with an emotionally charged issue like this is to defuse it as quietly and gently as possible with the complete facts (as far as they can be known). Fortunately, they are known. In 1906 a painstaking German scholar made an exhaustive study of scalping in America, which established that scalping was originally an Indian practice confined to a limited area in eastern America and the lower St. Lawrence region, about equivalent to the territory held by the Iroquois and Muskogean tribes and their immediate neighbors. The European colonists, therefore, did not teach the Indians *how* to scalp—they already knew how—but they did stimulate the *spread* of scalping by offering bounties.³⁵

But a defused issue is still an issue. The real importance of the scalp bounties was *not* that Englishmen taught the Indians how to scalp but that Englishmen adopted the Indian practice of scalping when *their* culture offered no moral or religious warrant for it and the traditional standards of Christian behavior condemned it. Since the first colonial scalp bounty was offered in 1641 by Governor Kieft of New Netherland to encourage friendly Indians to kill other Indians hostile to the Dutch interest, the Puritan governments of New England were the first to encourage Englishmen in scalp-taking.³⁶

On September 12, 1694, for example, the General Court of Massachusetts passed an act to confine all friendly Indians within a cordon sanitaire and to offer bounties "for every [hostile] Indian, great or small, which they shall kill, or take and bring in prisoner."

Volunteer Indian fighters in "greater or lesser parties"—the first American bounty hunters—received £50 per head, volunteers under pay £20, and regular soldiers under pay, £10. Since the provincial treasurer was not about to trust the word of every common soldier, the enemy's scalplock had to be produced to receive the bounty, and to prevent fraud a three-month prison sentence and a fine double the amount of the bounty was threatened for trying to pass off a false scalp, especially that of a friendly Indian. (Just how a bona fide scalp was to be distinguished from a false one was not suggested.)³⁷

As the situation along the eastern frontier worsened, the government steadily increased the scalp bounties until by 1722 individual volunteers were receiving £100 per head, a small fortune to poor soldiers even during a period of inflation. But something was obviously gnawing at the New England conscience, for only two months after the initial act of 1704 was passed, the court amended it in the direction of "Christian practice." Instead of rewarding the killing of "every Indian, great or small," a scale graduated by age and sex was established, so that the scalps of "men or youth [twelve years or older] capable of bearing armes" were worth £100 to any company of volunteers, women and boys above the age of ten, only £10, and no reward was given for killing children under ten years. In a gesture of dubious compassion, such children instead were sold as slaves and transported out of the country.³⁸

Aware of the moral dangers inherent in fostering such "barbarous" practices, the General Court was careful to limit each enactment to one year. But necessity was strong throughout most of the first half of the eighteenth century, and the bounties were renewed year after year in the hope that more volunteers would turn the tide against the eastern Indians. And so they did. Selected techniques of Indian warfare, placed in the hands of a larger English population already possessed of a more advanced technology, eventually sealed the Indians' fate in New England, but not before wreaking upon the English a subtle form of moral vengeance.

It was regrettable that the English resorted to the Indian practice of scalping, but it was probably necessary if they were to survive in the New World. Furthermore, without trying to explain *away* their actions, we

should place them in historical perspective. Incredible as it may seem, scalping was actually a humane improvement upon the standard Indian treatment of their enemies, "it being the custome to cut off their heads, hand and feete, to beare home to their wives and children, as true tokens of their renowned victorie." In his *Key into the Language of America*, Roger Williams translated the ancient Algonquian word for "to cut off, or behead," observing that "when ever they wound, and their arrow sticks in the body of their enemy, they (if they be valourous, and possibly may) they follow their arrow, and falling upon the person wounded and tearing his head a little aside by his Locke, they in the twinckling of an eye fetch off his head though but with a sorry [dull] knife." Scalping simply seems to have been reserved for enemies slain a considerable distance from home, "which is their usual Manner, when it is too far to carry the Heads." As soon as the battle was ended, they always made a fire to "carefully preserve the scalps of the head, drying the inside with hot ashes; and so carry them home as trophies of their valour, for which they are rewarded." It was a similar need for proof that prompted the English to encourage the taking of scalps.³⁹

But the historical context of scalping included not only the practices of New England but those of old England as well. And even there "barbarism" was not unknown, as Colonel Daniel Axtell discovered in 1660. For his part in the beheading of King Charles I, he was "drawne upon a hardle" to the "Tyborne gallow tree," where he was "hanged, cut downe, his body quickly opened and his intrealls burnt; hee was quartred and brought back to Newgate Prison to be boyled [in oil] and then, as the [nine] others, [his head] to be sett up [on London Bridge or the Tower] as his Majesty pleased." In the seventeenth century, the standards of English justice and Indian revenge were never far apart, and the objects of both had little chance of survival. At least the victims of scalping occasionally lived to a ripe old age.⁴⁰

If the dominant colonial attitude toward the Indian enabled Englishmen to overcome their civilized standards and take his scalp, it is not surprising that they were capable of even more barbarous behavior under pressure. In early July 1677 the ketch *William and Sarah* out of Salem was fishing the

grounds off Cape Sable in Nova Scotia when it was captured by nine or ten armed Indians. With four other captured vessels they were ordered to sail to an Indian rendezvous at Penobscot where, they were told, they would all be killed. On route the *William and Sarah* was ordered by the Indians to overtake another English vessel, but the captain refused, which incited a fight. In the scuffle four of the six Indians were thrown overboard and the other two, a young and an old sagamore, were taken prisoner. The boat promptly headed south where it hauled into Marblehead on July 15.

What happened upon their arrival is best described by an eye-witness, Robert Roules, a thirty-year-old sailor from Marblehead who was on the captured boat.

News had reached this place that we were all killed & many people flocked to the water side to learn who we were & what other news they could, concerning the many vessels that had been taken by the Indians. They hailed us, & then some came on board; and when they saw the Indians, they demanded why we kept them alive & why we had not killed them. We answered them, that we had lost everything, even to our clothes, & we thought if we brought them in alive, we might get somewhat by them towards our losses. But this did not satisfy the people, who were angry at the sight of the Indians, & now began to grow clamorous. [It should be remembered that King Philip's War had ended only the previous year, that the Indians of Maine were not involved in that war and had their own quarrel with the English, and that several of the missing boats belonged to Marblehead.] We told them we should take them on shore & deliver them into the hands of the constable of the town, that they might be answerable to the court at Boston; & so we carried them on shore with their hands bound behind them.

Being on shore, the whole town flocked about them, beginning at first to insult them, & soon after, the women surrounded them, drove us by force from them, (we escaping at no little peril,) & laid violent hands upon the captives, some stoning us in the mean time, because we would protect them, others swang them by the hair, got full possession of them, nor was there any way left by which we could rescue them. Then with stones, billets of wood, & what else they might, they made an end of these Indians. We were kept at such distance that we could not see them till they were dead, & then we found them with their heads off & gone, & their flesh in a manner pulled from their bones. And such was the tumultation these women made, that for my life I could not tell who these women were, or the names of any of them. They cried out & said that if the Indians had been carried to Boston, that would have been the end of it, & they would have been set at liberty; but, said they, if there had been forty of the best

Indians in the country here, they would have killed them all, though they should be hanged for it. They suffered neither constable nor mandrake, nor any other person to come near them, until they had finished their bloody purpose.⁴¹

Sixteen years ago Wilcomb Washburn warned us that when we study "the contact of two cultures, value problems—that is, moral problems—immediately spring up to challenge" us. And eight years later Scott Momaday repeated the warning when he argued that "more important than the tangible history of white-Indian relations . . . is the interaction of ideas and attitudes which inform the relationship and transcend it. Those ideas and attitudes," he said, "are on both sides matters of morale and morality." So the moral dimensions of the colonial attitudes we have been examining should come as no surprise.⁴²

But how should we handle them, as historians and human beings? Should we, on the one hand, shrug our shoulders, put our hands in our moral pockets, and walk away muttering, "War is hell"? But if we did, who would know or care enough to stop the wars of the future? Or should we cry out in self-righteous rage against white racist-capitalist-imperialist aggression, forgetting for the moment that "we have met the enemy," as Pogo says "and he is us?" But if we did, who would benefit from our rage? Not the victims of the past, for they are all mute, nor their antagonists, for so are they; and not the aggressors of the present and future, for our rage would only confirm their worst suspicions.

The best answer, I think, is to take the full measure of those dimensions in all their complexity with the moral yardstick of their own time, and if that proves too short, with the most universal rule of humanity. This is a task for the hard-head, not the bleeding-heart, because, as Van Wyck Brooks once wrote, "the life of the heart thrives when people are hard-headed, while the tender-minded play into the hands of the tough in heart. When people's heads are soft, their hearts grow hard. It is the tough-minded who achieve the hopes and aims of the tender in heart."⁴³ When we truly know and understand the past—with our heads as well as our hearts—we will be able to sympathize with it; sympathizing with it, we will be able to accept it for what it was; and accepting it, we will perhaps be able to begin to free

ourselves from the limitations it imposes upon us and to use more intelligently and humanely the opportunities it offers us.

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