



I

The Indian Point of View

AN AMERICAN INDIAN arose from the circle around a council fire to address his fellow tribesmen and his brothers, the white men. It matters not who, or when, or where. It was a treaty council at the close of a brief but bloody racial war, the inevitable outcome of which had been a crushing defeat for the Indians. The terms, of course, were settled; to his white listeners, therefore, the Indian spoke to no purpose save that of repentance. His talk was the description of a dream, by which he meant to symbolize his message, which was the narrative of the history of his tribe. In this dream he had seen his people as the original people of the world living on an island. They lived by the hunt and never lacked for food and clothing and shelter, which were provided by the game and vegetable

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growth that abounded in the forests, salt licks, and river bottoms of their island home. One morning a ship appeared on the horizon and, ushered in by the sun, revealed to their wondering eyes a great number of fair-skinned visitors. "Behold," said the Indians, "the gods have come to visit us."

The Indians received these gods with reverence and provided them with food and water. In return the gods gave them strange, roaring, fire-belching weapons, which, though they frightened the game, could kill at a much greater distance than bows and arrows. The gods told them not to be dismayed if these weapons frightened the game away so that it did not come back, but to go farther into the forests and bring back furs and skins from regions where the Indians had never hunted before. They did so, but found other Indians, who resisted their coming and told them to go home and hunt in their own forests. The gods, however, were angry, and told the Indians that the forests belonged to the Great Spirit. "Go," they commanded, "and hunt in those distant forests. If bad men impede your progress, tell them that you are sent by the Great Spirit. And if they still resist, tell them that the Great Spirit has commanded that they die. Do not fear. We will buy all your furs and skins, and will provide you with new guns when the old ones wear out, and you will never want for bullets and powder."

Evil days thus fell upon the island; man had been set against man, and the forest was stained with the blood of the Indians. The anger of the Great Spirit stirred, and he sent other gods to befriend the enemies of the Indians. And all the time the game became less and less plentiful and war more and more frequent. When the game disappeared, the Indians had no need for the lands, and the white gods bought them for their children to build homes upon. But the children of the gods were undutiful and forgot the precepts of their parents. They were unkind to the Indians and treated them with contempt. And so the red men had fought against the children of the gods, who were more powerful and had defeated the Indians.

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The Indian speaker paused before the council fire, as the interpreter translated his words to the American general and his advisers. He saw the proud and dignified bearing of these conquerors, resplendent in their military uniforms, as his dream was conveyed to them. He became conscious that his words were falling on the ears of men who did not understand dreams. He was a fool in the eyes of these soldiers, who thought that his words ill befitted a man and a warrior who had just come from the battlefield. The Indian was abashed and humiliated. His fellow warriors in the council circle who had heard him speak cast their countenances and eyes upon the ground. Then, in the shadow of the great fortress near which all treaties with the white men must be held, he turned to the American general with words of apology, and said, "This is the finishing of the dream. I am but a foolish man that you see here standing."

This is, of course, an allegory. Yet something very similar actually took place many times in those years in which the American Indians were expelled from their native hunting grounds. It took place in the forests of the upper Ohio Valley, where from time to time the tribes assembled to settle the problems involved in the great racial struggle between the red men of that part of the world and their white antagonists. And in these assemblies and their proceedings is illustrated a phase of Indian-American diplomacy that tempts the philosopher and disturbs the patriot.

The story here narrated is one of a conflict between two civilizations, that of the Indians and that of the white men; or, more definitively, between two methods of living, one based on hunting and fishing, the other on farming and commerce. This conflict, grim and unceasing, was born of the utter incompatibility of two different sets of folkways, and it was nourished by the profound conviction of each race that its ways were superior to those of the other. In the white man this conviction was aggressive and militant and justified the displacement or extermination of the Indian. In the Indian

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it was defensive and heroic and gave strength, in the face of despair and overwhelming force, for resistance against the hated conqueror.

It is easy to understand why the whites considered themselves superior to the Indians. The civilization of the white men has today triumphantly displaced that of the red men, and judgment on the relative merits of the two civilizations is rendered accordingly. Likewise, in other days, the onward march of the white race produced the same sense of superiority. To the whites of the generation living in 1774 the Indians were savages—untamed and wild—mere children of nature. In their roving life they were thriftless and improvident, wasteful of a land that was intended by God to be parceled out into farms for a more thickly settled population. The Indians were not versed in the finer arts; above all, they were illiterate—a manifest sign of inferiority. Nor were they much more fortunate in the material arts. They knew little of the efficient cultivation of the soil. Their home life was primitive and crude. In their natural state they hunted with the bow and arrow. In the use of the gun and rifle they were quite dependent upon the whites. Moreover, they were heathen, whose Mannitto was not God and whose pagan rites and beliefs must be changed by the Christian missionary.

With this attitude toward the red men as a racial heritage, it is naturally quite difficult for white men today to understand how the Indians could possibly have considered themselves a superior race. Yet in all sincerity they believed themselves to be a chosen people in the sight of God. This belief was justified, in their opinion, by the fact that the whites were a race of mongrels, while they themselves were thoroughbreds. The uniformity of their physical characteristics revealed them as aristocrats among the races of men. According to the Moravian missionary, John Heckewelder, the Delawares said of the white men, "The hair of their heads, their features, the various colours of their eyes, evince that they are not . . . *Lenni Lenape*, an ORIGINAL PEOPLE, a race of men that

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has existed unchanged from the beginning of time." Their neighbors, the Wyandot, also relied, with a simple and intense faith, upon the belief that, in their homes on the shores of Lakes Erie and Huron, their nation "was the first . . . that the Great Spirit Placed upon this Ground."

Moreover, in this world in which they dwelt as an original and favored people, the Indians believed that they lived a life superior to that of their pale-faced brothers. The Delawares declared that the great Mannitto had ordained that the whites should "till the ground and raise by cultivation the fruits of the earth" but that he had assigned to the Indians "the nobler employment of hunting, and the supreme dominion over all the rest of the animal creation." The Indians believed themselves highly favored by the Great Mannitto "not only in having been created different in shape and in mental and bodily powers from other animals, but in being enabled to controul and master them all, even those of an enormous size and of the most ferocious kinds."¹

The Indians believed they were an original, a superior, race, and the student of American Indian affairs should master this concept if he is to hope to understand his subject. Before the white man came to disillusion the Indians there was no world other than theirs; they were the only existing race. They were the supreme earthly creatures, the chosen of God, and the only other forms of animal life were the beasts of forest and field, the fish of the river and sea, the birds of the air. These constituted the other "races," over which it was given them to rule. Implicit in this conviction that they were God's favorites was the belief that "if the Great Mannitto could reside on earth he would associate with them and be their great chief." Thus it was natural for these forest folk, when Henry Hudson sailed into their vision in 1609, to believe that the gods had come to visit them.² Mannitto, the Great Spirit, had come to his chosen people. Little did they dream of the

¹ Heckewelder, *History . . . of the Indian Nations*, 100, 187; Draper MSS, 23U116.

² Heckewelder, *History . . . of the Indian Nations*, 72, 100.

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doom that this visit foretold, or that these men were not gods, but the representatives of a great and conquering race to whose mastery the Indians, once masters of all "races" known to them, were destined in their turn to be subjected.

A glimpse at certain techniques and characteristics contributive to this concept of Indian mastery will lead to a more intelligent appreciation of it. The Indians were quite conscious that they were more skilled in certain arts than the white men. These were the arts of hunting, trapping, and fishing, all of which required a versatility and a craftsmanship of a type superior to that of the farmer, the trader, and the mechanic. In contrast with wild game, the plants and tools and domestic animals of the white men were tame and easily controlled.

The young Indian's object in life was to acquire a mastery of these arts. The ambition of every Indian boy was "by following the advice of the most admired and extolled hunter, trapper or warrior," to attain a degree of fame equal to that possessed by his superior. This was an Indian's education. It was part of the normal process of living unaccompanied by such artificial devices as schools, elections, and written law codes. This living produced, without friction, a body of skilled hunters and warriors, from whose ranks were selected the rulers, or, as they were called, the "wise men." "Thus," writes Heckewelder, "has been maintained for ages, without convulsions and without civil discords, this traditional government . . . a government in which there are no positive laws, but only long established habits and customs, no code of jurisprudence, but the experience of former times, no magistrates, but advisers, to whom the people, nevertheless, pay a willing and implicit obedience, in which age confers rank, wisdom gives power, and moral goodness secures a title to universal respect." Nor did the Indians' sense of superiority suffer when measured by the tests of character frequently made the standards of merit and virtue by white men. For genuine integrity, bravery, mercy, and hospitality, the Indian was not to be despised, and he was conscious of his own high standing. The

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Delawares believed that the Great Spirit, knowing the wickedness of the white men's disposition, had given them "a great Book" and taught them to read it, but that the Indians "had sufficient discernment given to them to distinguish good from evil, and by following that guide, they are sure not to err."

Having found a sense of rest and of social equilibrium in the great forces of nature, the Indians seem to have attained a state of peace and contentment in which the pressure of population on subsistence did not produce a concept of private property with its attendant evils, artificial privacies, and defense institutions. Hospitality, good will, and a general spirit of sharing in common permeated their relations with one another. They believed that the Great Spirit "made the earth and all that it contains for the common good of mankind . . . Every thing was given in common to the sons of men. Whatever liveth on the land, whatsoever groweth out of the earth, and all that is in the rivers and waters flowing through the same, was given jointly to all, and every one is entitled to his share."⁸

Nature constituted reality and therefore defined the Indians' virtues for them, and comparisons with white standards did not lessen their self-esteem. Their lives stood the daily test of direct comparisons with nature and natural forces. The sincerity with which they lived according to their beliefs is evidenced in their spoken language, in which there were no abstractions, but in which natural objects and forces were used to create ideologies and definitions. Their leaders were "wise and beloved men"; other tribes were brothers, nephews, cousins, or grandfathers; the whites might be elder brothers or great fathers. The United States were the thirteen fires; time was expressed in terms of sun and moon. To make friends was to "take by the hand"; to confer was to smoke together; to pray was to entrust the spoken word to the rising smoke. To trade was to keep the road open, and when trade was interrupted, trees and branches had fallen across the road.

⁸ Heckewelder, *History . . . of the Indian Nations*, 101, 114, 117, 187.

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When there was friendship between nations, the council fire burned brightly; when trouble was brewing, it was obscured. In times of peace the tomahawk was buried, but in war it was taken up, brightened, and made sharp. Treaties or conferences were invariably begun by the ceremony of wiping tears from the eyes and dust from the faces, opening the ears, cleansing the hearts, and covering the bones of those killed in conflict. Treaties were symbolized by wampum (belts of many strings of beads woven together in different designs), which was passed around from tribe to tribe. White wampum signified peace and property; black was used to indicate war, sorrow, and mourning. Soldiers were warriors, and the Virginians were the "Long Knives." Wisdom was to these naïve savages a synonym for right.

The Indians most directly concerned in the narrative that follows were the Iroquois or Six Nations, the Shawnee, the Delawares, and the Mingo. The Iroquois were really a confederacy consisting of the Seneca, Onondaga, Oneida, Tuscarora, Mohawk, and Cayuga. Their domain in which their towns were located and in which they did most of their hunting extended from the upper Allegheny in Pennsylvania to the Adirondack Mountains in eastern New York. In the course of Dutch- and British-inspired imperialism during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Iroquois made enemies of many tribes, among which were the Shawnee and the Delawares, the two largest tribes that were to make their homes in western Pennsylvania. There was a certain amount of intertribal conflict even before the coming of the white man; and gradually the practice of the Indian theory that "every one is entitled to his share" had come to be limited to Indians within their own tribes. The dissent between tribes was furthered by the whites for their own ends. Thus by the end of the seventeenth century the Iroquois, spurred on by Dutch and British fur traders, with whom they had established friendly relations, had extended their authority, in some cases by direct warfare and in others by more subtle methods, over

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a territory from the Ottawa River in Canada to the Tennessee River and from the Kennebec in the district of Maine to the Illinois River and Lake Michigan.

The Shawnee nation during most of the seventeenth century existed in two widely separated groups, one in the lower Cumberland River Valley and the neighboring Illinois country, and the other on the South Carolina frontier. Their own traditions were that the island of Cuba was their native habitat, whence they were expelled by the Spaniards,⁴ although ethnologists have been able to trace them definitely only as far south as the Cumberland River.⁵ About 1690 the Indians of the southern section were at war with their neighbors, the Catawba, and those of the Cumberland group were uneasy as a result of their unsatisfactory relations with the tribes of the Illinois. Hence by 1690 both sections of the tribe were ready to migrate into Pennsylvania. Circumstances had thus made this nation a migratory one—a fact that put them in a most dependent situation, as their moving from place to place worked repeatedly to their disadvantage.

The Delawares, or Lenni Lenape, were a tribe inhabiting the Delaware River Valley both in New Jersey and in Pennsylvania and whose towns and hunting grounds extended as far west as the Susquehanna River. They were nominally dependents of the Iroquois, but actual dependence did not exist until somewhat later. The Mingo did not exist as a tribe in 1690 but became a separate group in the years after 1754 when Iroquois who had moved into the upper Ohio Valley since 1690 returned to New York and left behind some of their brethren. The Indians that remained became known as the Mingo.

These Indian nations felt that their actual relations with the whites need not necessarily be belligerent; they believed that the two races could maintain separate existence side by side. The history of Indian trade relations with the whites,

⁴ Draper MSS, 3U613.

⁵ Hodge, *Handbook of American Indians*, 2:531.

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however, shows that no tribe was able to preserve its territorial integrity, because the white man desired land more than trade. Moreover, the white man chose to ignore the deeply rooted beliefs and concepts of the Indians. The whites learned the forms of Indian address and procedure at treaties and followed them in order to placate the tribes, but it is doubtful if many of them ever rightly understood the true meanings of Indian symbolism or attempted to abide by the Indian code. Faced with repeated evidences of aggression and often of bad faith, the naïve belief of the tribes in the possibility of harmonious living with the whites began to fade, until, in bewilderment and indignation, the Indians finally came to consider the white men as dangerous and powerful enemies. The frontier then became to them a place of drunkenness, debauchery, and disease, where the old beliefs were vitiated by contact with Christianity and where the tribes gradually were forced to surrender to an agricultural mode of living with the despised tameness of domestic animals and plant life. It came to mean contact with and forced adoption of the white man's great weapon of "divide and conquer," which set tribe against tribe, man against man, friend against friend; it became the scene of humiliation, of scuffles and fights and murders resulting from the contempt in which a proud people were held by frontier riffraff; and it became the scene of the destruction of a natural way of life and of the substitution of an unnatural code represented by such things as money, parcels of land, fences, and branded stock. In short, the triumph of the white man on the frontier came to be synonymous to the Indian with the triumph of chicanery and of false values.

Out of the disparity between the two civilizations grew long decades of conflict on the North American continent. This disparity may be illustrated by the respective attitudes of the whites and the Indians in regard to the hunting grounds of the Shawnee, which were transferred by the Iroquois to the English at the treaty of Fort Stanwix in 1768. The causes and the results of this cession of land will be dealt with in another

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chapter; the situation arising from it was one of the immediate sources of Indian discontent that culminated, in 1774, in the first episode, known as Dunmore's War, of the long contest between the Indians and the whites. It is sufficient to point out here that when the Indian title to the land south of the Ohio River, especially the Kentucky country, was ceded to the English, the rights of the Shawnee, who hunted in the region, were ignored. As the white hunters began to appear in these hunting grounds, the Shawnee, in defense of what they considered their rights, made resistance.

One of the first of these white hunters was Daniel Boone. It has been customary for historians to laud the skill and self-reliance of this rugged frontiersman and to point with pride to his service in blazing a trail for civilization into Kentucky. As a matter of fact, Boone's hunting and exploring was more destructive and hateful to the Indians than the buccaneering of Drake and other Elizabethan sea dogs was to the Spaniards of another generation. For Boone and his "long hunters" threatened to wipe out the game of the forest—the very essence of the domain over which the Indians considered themselves rulers.

On Boone's very first trip to Kentucky—the famous one of 1769—this menace was clearly perceived and emphatically dealt with by the Shawnee, the dominant hunters of this ground. Boone's partner in this expedition was John Findlay, a fellow Pennsylvanian and Indian trader, whom the Shawnee had guided in 1752 to the salt licks of Kentucky. There Findlay had beheld the thousands of buffalo and deer that now, seventeen years later, enticed Boone across the Cumberland Gap. Visions of the profits from the sale of the skins of these animals lured Boone and Findlay to these haunts on a mission fraught with peril to the Indians. After seven months of slaughtering and curing and packing at various camps in the valley of the Kentucky River, the party was suddenly surprised by a band of Shawnee returning from a fall hunt on Green River, led by the chief, Captain Will. The

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Indians immediately noticed the telltale evidence of wasteful hunting and “sternly demanded” that the traders “show their camps.” Although Boone, made prisoner, sought to give his camp guards warnings of the approach of the Shawnee, the camps were surprised, one by one, and the pelts, guns, ammunition, horses, and all other appurtenances of this forbidden business were either destroyed or confiscated.

Having thus rendered Boone’s expedition fruitless, the Shawnee, with true Indian generosity and consideration, “dismissed their captives, presenting each with two pairs of moccasins, a doe-skin for patch-leather, a little trading gun, and a few loads of powder and shot, so that they might supply themselves with meat on their way back to the settlements.” Most significant of all, they gave Boone this parting advice, which shows in clear and simple terms the Indian view of this invasion of their rights: “Now, brothers, go home and stay there. Don’t come here any more, for this is the Indians’ hunting ground, and all the animals, skins and furs are ours; and if you are so foolish as to venture here again, you may be sure the wasps and yellow-jackets will sting you severely.”⁶ Thus is illustrated the truth of the statement made by a well-known historian of border warfare: “An Indian sees no difference . . . between the right of property, acquired by the actual cultivation of the earth, and that which arises from its appropriation to other uses.”⁷

From the Indian standpoint the encounter had been handled with the utmost restraint and generosity. A destructive party had invaded the hunting grounds that had belonged to the Indians since the beginning of time and had begun a policy of butchering the game that eventually would have completely exterminated it and rendered the country useless to hunters. Indeed, this slaughtering of game in such a way that the meat was thrown away and the herds threatened with irreparable destruction must have excited in the Indian

⁶ Draper MSS, 2B169.

⁷ Withers, *Border Warfare*, 140.

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breast an attitude toward wastefulness akin to that of the whites, who considered the Indian wasteful and improvident of land. Moreover, the expulsion of the intruders was accomplished without bloodshed—without the hum and sting of the wasps and yellow jackets. He who remembers only the tales of Indian cruelties, of scalplings and torturings, might well ponder the significance of this treatment of these intruders into Kentucky, when the whites were sent back home well provided for by the red men.

The whites, however, considered their treatment by the Indians an outrage—a wanton destruction of the fruits of seven months' hunting. Boone immediately, but unsuccessfully, sought to recover his horses so that his hunt might still be fruitful with the aid of rifles and ammunition that could be brought back from the East. Repetition and retaliation were the only thoughts of the whites, who believed that they had as much right to hunt as had the Indians. The rights of property and labor were at stake. Lyman C. Draper comments that Boone and his party had worked hard and suffered much hardship, that "the deer they had killed belonged no more to the Indians than to themselves, and as for the horses, guns and other articles, the Indians had not the shadow of a claim to them."⁸

Encouraged by Boone's discoveries in the hunting field, new parties of long hunters crossed the mountains into Kentucky to continue the slaughter. Boone himself returned early in 1770 for a winter hunt and again in 1771, when he was again plundered. A party under Casper Mansker, including Abraham and Isaac Bledsoe, was organized on New River in June, 1769, and, although robbed by Cherokee, who likewise hunted in the Kentucky wilderness, obtained enough ammunition to return and complete the hunt. In 1772 a party under Benjamin Cleveland set out from the Yadkin River in North Carolina and was plundered by Cherokee. Late in 1771 Joseph Drake and Henry Skaggs conducted a large party to

⁸ Draper MSS, 2B170.

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the region, some of whose members were plundered by the Shawnee at one of their camps, where the returning Skaggs, upon discovering the disaster, engraved upon a tree, "Fifteen hundred skins gone to ruination." This setback, however, did not prevent the return of the party to the East "well laden with peltries."⁹

So the toll went on. Plunder and destruction of the hunters' camps by the Indians did not improve matters, because the determined hunters could too easily obtain the necessary munitions to make their labor productive. There is evidence to indicate that the kind of white hunter typified by Boone had characteristics that lost him not only the respect of the Indians, but also that of some of the whites. Sir William Johnson, British superintendent of Indian affairs in the northern department, wrote in 1774 that "for more than ten years past the most dissolute fellows united with debtors, and persons of a wandering disposition" had been migrating from Pennsylvania and Virginia into Indian territory. He spoke of them as idle persons who occupied themselves with hunting, "in which they interfere much more with the Indians than if they pursued agriculture alone, and the Indian hunters . . . already begin to feel the scarcity this has occasioned, which greatly increases their resentment."¹⁰

Not only does this Kentucky example serve to illustrate the difference between the Indian and the white civilizations, but it also indicates the disadvantages under which the Indians labored. In the general conflict between the two races, the Indians were at similar disadvantages throughout. They might win the day as in the massacres that took place in 1755-57, 1763, and 1777-82 and in such conflicts as those that ended in William Crawford's defeat, in the battle of the Blue Licks, and in the defeats of Generals Harmar and St. Clair. But such victories always had a sequel of disaster for the Indians. After 1757 came Forbes, after 1763 came Bouquet and Bradstreet,

⁹ Draper MSS, 3B179ff., 223, 227, 229, 238, 245-247.

¹⁰ *New York Colonial Documents*, 8:460.

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after 1782 came the American invasion of the Northwest, and after Harmar and St. Clair came Wayne. The reasons for the inevitable defeat of the Indians are not hard to find. Knowing only the simpler arts needed to sustain a small population in a state of nature, they were no match for those whose arts were capable of harnessing nature to more effective uses in sustaining large units of population. Even though in the days of conflict the Indians were not greatly outnumbered by the actual frontier invaders, there were always the legions of white people to the east who could be hired to crush the red men. Unable to make a gun or to repair it and supply it with powder and bullet, lacking horses and wagons needed to move them quickly to battle and facilities to sustain a siege, they were forced to rely on foreign allies and on bush fighting. Unfortunately they chose the wrong allies for their purposes: first the French and then the English. And as for their methods of fighting, a knowledge of these was easily acquired by the American frontiersman, who, with superior force of arms and ammunition, soon learned not only ways in which to defend himself, but also ways by which the Indians could be deprived of their main source of sustenance, their hunting grounds.