

Question 1—Discuss the interrelation of the Indian trade, disease, settlement, and warfare in North America. How are these four factors related? How do they impact American Indians? How did American Indians try to negotiate/manage this impact?

Colonization: This Land is Our Land

*This land is ours, not theirs; therefore, we say, if you will be at peace with us, we will send the French home.*¹

This quote is lifted from document that highlights the words the Delaware (Lenapes) dictated to a Moravian ambassador in Pennsylvania in 1758. Spoken in the context of the Seven Years' War, it clearly demonstrates the authority the Natives believed they held over the terrain: "This land is ours," and if only the British would keep peace, they would eject the French and allow the British rights to unrivaled trade in the region. The long eighteenth century may be categorized by a series of deteriorating relationships between colonizer and colonized. Though borders between the European imperial interests there had not yet hardened by the close of the 1600s, settlement and colonization was in full swing, especially along the eastern seaboard of the Atlantic. These colonies would eventually mingle, merge, and unite: push into western spaces, and come into contact with myriad Indigenous Nations as they spread into the borderlands. The process by which this coalescence took place occurred in several contexts, generally beginning with trade.

¹ "Delaware Indians Discuss the French and Indian War, 1758," in *Major Problems in American Indian History: Documents and Essays*, eds. Albert L. Hurtado, Peter Iverson, William J. Bauer, Jr., and Stephen Kent Amerman (Stamford, CT: Cengage Learning, 2015), 169.

This initial vector of exchange brought disease, continuous additional outposts that would bulge and spill into the hinterlands, and inexorably lead to conflict. Consequently, as the borders of colonial settlements expanded, entrenched, and expanded again, so too did antagonistic attitudes between the Europeans and the Indians. These hostilities only worsened as Native Americans lost ground, physically and spiritually, to Euro-American. Eventually the interrelated processes of trade, disease, settlement, and warfare became like an ouroboros; and so, this ravenous snake eating its own tail circled as progress fed destruction, over and over again. This would leave little autonomous territory for the Indigenous to claim as they succumbed to colonial influence and were pressured, under the weight of these four pillars of colonization (trade-disease-settlement-warfare), to acclimate to the all-consuming hegemonic authority of their Euro-American neighbors.

This essay will examine how separate Indigenous American groups dealt with the formulaic, subjugating efforts of their colonizers. By progressing methodologies, they learned from the mistakes of both their forebears and contemporaries how to assert their sovereignty during the long eighteenth century. Although the interconnection of trade, disease, settlement and warfare exposed Indian vulnerabilities, each community adapted to the instability of Native-Colonial relations in separate and evolving ways, up to and including by methods that mirrored their colonial oppressors. Ultimately, however, even these techniques proved fruitless; by the end of the long-eighteenth century, Natives' temporal and spiritual abodes eroded grain by grain, leaving little ground, literally and figuratively, for them to control according to their own terms.

In looking to the earliest part of this period, one excellent case that illustrates the interrelation of these four factors is the Yamassee War. This Nation, natal to areas of what is

now South Carolina and Florida, established a trading relationship with European migrants in the seventeenth century. This relationship, revolving around the buckskin trade, soon came to incorporate enslavement of Indigenous from rival Nations. As the Yamassee hunted the deer, so they pushed further into the backcountry, becoming a vector of disease and turmoil for rival Native tribes. In the interest of monopolizing the trading rights to the nascent British colony and its outposts, the Yamassee not only overhunted the deer, depleting their trade resource, they also antagonized and enslaved their competition, at once eliminating a potential adversary, but also a prospective ally should the relationship between Carolinians and Natives degenerate.

By the mid-1680s, the decline in the Yamassee warriors due to a confluence of factors, including war and disease, meant overexploitation led to the dwindling of commodities, and trading debts to the British were accruing rapidly. Richard Haan points out that, “During the first decade and a half of the 18th century, the hunting of whitetail deer, the expansion of cattle and pig raising, the rapid development of rice cultivation, and the elimination of the Spanish mission Indians of Florida and Georgia combined to exhaust the Yamassees’ trade resources. It was this depletion which forced the Yamassees deeper into debt and eventually into a position where war was the only alternative.”² Though debts were at first actually cancelled by South Carolinian authorities, Euro-American behavior set a tenor of aggression that the Yamassee could not ignore. Settlers stole food and resources from Natives, and their techniques of keeping livestock ran contrary and destructive to their Indigenous neighbors’ methods. Furthermore, Europeans propagated sexual violence against Indian women, and moreover began to directly enslave the Natives, leap-frogging over the trade relationship that was established as well as posing an

² Richard L. Haan. “The ‘Trade Do’s Not Flourish as Formerly’: The Ecological Origins of the Yamassee War of 1715.” *Ethnohistory* 28, no. 4 (1981): 343.

increasing threat directly to the Yamassee themselves.³ When they realized English interest was gradually constrictive and really only served itself,⁴ the tribes went to war with them in the spring of 1715 in a bid to prevent further enslavement.⁵ Though it was over by 1717, this conflict ensnared not only the Yamassee, but every Native community in the region.⁶

Thus, the interrelation is laid bare. In this case, after initial contact, trade relationships were established. As the exploitation of resources at the behest of this trade with Europeans and Natives intensified, so too did interdependence between Native and European, drawing settlers ever deeper into the hinterlands and into prolonged contact with Natives. The increase in settler colonial population inexorably led to the propagation of disease. As disease wiped out the populations and land emptied of Native, so it filled with emigrating settlers also attempting to extract wealth from the abundance of resources the Americas offered, including the enslaved labor of its Indigenous people.

The Yamassee War ended disastrously for the Yamassee, however, the policies the English were beginning to adopt as to the enslavement of Natives was consequently stopped.⁷ Still, although this conflict marked the terminus of British enslavement of the Indians, it was not without precedent. During the span of seventeenth century colonization of North America, Natives often pursued enslavement of their aboriginal brethren (though not always allies) not only to leverage more power in reference to their landscape, but also to manipulate greater

³ Haan, "The 'Trade Do's Not Flourish as Formerly,'" 341.

⁴ Michelle LeMaster. "History of North American Indians." Lecture presented at Lehigh University, October 3, 2022.

⁵ Haan, "The 'Trade Do's Not Flourish as Formerly,'" 342-43.

⁶ Eric Bowne. "From Westo to Comanche: The Role of Commercial Indian Slaving in the Development of Colonial North America," chapter in Bonnie Martin. *Linking the Histories of Slavery*. first ed., (Santa Fe: SAR Press, 2015), 36.

⁷ LeMaster, "History of North American Indians," September 28, 2022.

positional authority between rival Europeans. Furthermore, enslavement of “other” tribes might also stave off their own eventual bondage.

Contrasting the Yamasee with tribes to the north, Eric Bowne states that, “The Hurons had been so harried by Iroquois slavers and Old World diseases that their population plummeted, and the Ottawas took over as the primary trading partner of the French.”⁸ Though characteristics of the correlation between southern tribes and the English differ from the northern tribes and French, the connection between trade-disease-settlement-warfare is parallel, rendering this interrelationship in sharp relief. Bowne continues, “throughout eastern North America a positive feedback loop existed between disease epidemics (as spread through trade) and slave raids that heightened Native vulnerability to both. As these twin hammers battered North America, Indian populations were pushed and pulled across the continent by a growing vortex of violence and uncertainty.”⁹ This loop relentlessly decreased the supply of market fodder – peltry, deerskins, and Indians – insidiously eroding disparate Native powers and consolidating, to the Europeans, a hegemonic authority that extended from north to south as their foothold on the eastern seaboard strengthened year after year. By the time the Indians realized the source of their blight was the trades and traders themselves, they too were dependent upon European trade goods, their way of life having adapted in large part to the commodities on offer from the other side of the Atlantic.¹⁰

Thus, the interrelationship of trade-disease-settlement-warfare exposes preliminary dependency of the European colonials upon the knowledge and expertise of the Indians, as well as the concomitant growing dependency of the Natives upon European trade goods. The

⁸ Bowne, “From Westo to Comanche,” 35-61.

⁹ *Idem.*, 49.

¹⁰ LeMaster, “History of North American Indians,” October 12, 2022.

“Columbian Exchange,”¹¹ which oftentimes is myopically perceived to focus upon biological factors impacting the flora and fauna –plants, animals, and germs—as introduced to the Americas, should also highlight the incredible impact of the cloth, crockery, guns, and steel upon the Indigenous way of life that were equally part of this equation.¹² But as the Natives adopted European cultural practices and methods, so too did Europeans learn from the Indians. As John Grenier points out in *The First Way of War: American War Making on the Frontier, 1607-1814*, the earliest colonists were dependent upon the benevolence of their Indian allies, however, as relationships degenerated due to influx of colonials and European greed for land, partnerships between Indian enemies and colonists soon sprang up to destroy the initially allied ones.¹³ From there, it was only a short hop for colonists to learn the practicality of extirpative warfare and forced miscegenation practices.¹⁴ Thus, violence beget violence, and the instability of Euro-Indian relations led directly to the emergence of racism.¹⁵

On the other hand, some conflicts between Euro-American and Indigenous had little to do with matters pertaining to land and resources alone. On the western side of the continent, other imperial powers advanced their methods of control over Natives, with varying results. In California, for instance, missions advanced their Hispanicization project as begun in Mesoamerica. Departing from their land-and-trade-hungry eastern counterparts, the Spanish were instead concerned with the immortal souls of the Indians they considered their vassals.¹⁶

¹¹ LeMaster, “History of North American Indians,” September 5, 2022.

¹² *Idem.*, September 12, 2022.

¹³ John Grenier. *The First Way of War: American War Making on the Frontier, 1607-1814*, (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 28.

¹⁴ *Ibidem.*

¹⁵ *Idem.*, 12.

¹⁶ Albert L. Hurtado. “Western Transformations: Indians, Sexuality, and the California Missions, 1760-1840” in *Major Problems in American Indian History: Documents and Essays*, eds. Albert L. Hurtado, Peter Iverson, William J. Bauer, Jr., and Stephen Kent Amerman (Stamford, CT: Cengage Learning, 2015), 229-40.

Disastrously, in an era where contact led to disease, the Spanish mission system meant concentrating disparate Indian tribes around few centers, the better to exert control over condensed groups. This policy had a tragic outcome, and as Albert Hurtado points out, “the missions facilitated the spread of illnesses because they concentrated native populations that had formerly been dispersed.”¹⁷ Though this unforeseen consequence was not intended by the Spanish, only repopulation through procreative sex might assist in averting extinction of the Indigenous Californians. However, from the beginning of this Christianization project, the priests fixated on amending, through courses of discipline and punishment, how the Indians might engage in intercourse.

Power over the procreative process notwithstanding, Spanish control over the missionized Indians’ way of life was not met without resistance. Development of the *mestizo* race had been underway since the first moments of the Spanish colonization of the New World,¹⁸ so the priests “labored to restrict sexual activity” in what they viewed as a mixed and hedonistic “world of philanderers, concubines, prostitutes, lovers, and lawful spouses,” to create Christianized and Catholic-sanctioned unions under their holy cross.¹⁹ Though one method was to segregate women and keep them behind locked doors, as seen in one instance of resistance that proved deadly for a priest: “After a short time the young unmarried women arrived... The young people of both sexes got together and had their pleasure.”²⁰ Thus, the spiritual colonization is seen to affect the physical reality of the Indians in this region. Because sexuality

¹⁷ Hurtado, “Western Transformations,” 229.

¹⁸ Laura Catelli, “‘Y de Esta Manera Quedaron Todos Los Hombres Sin Mujeres’: El Mestizaje Como Estrategia de Colonización En La Española (1501-1503),” *Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana* 37, no. 74 (2011): p. 221.

¹⁹ Hurtado, “Western Transformations,” 233.

²⁰ “Lorenzo Asisara (Costanoan) Tells of an Indian Response to a Priest’s Authority, 1812,” in *Major Problems in American Indian History: Documents and Essays*, eds. Albert L. Hurtado, Peter Iverson, William J. Bauer, Jr., and Stephen Kent Amerman (Stamford, CT: Cengage Learning, 2015), 216.

threatened to topple Spanish control, missionaries exerted vast pressure on the Indians to align with Catholic practices and beliefs through surveillance and Inquisitorial-type interrogations.²¹ Ultimately, this did nothing to propagate the population, and only led to further diminishing of the Native Californian populace.

This period also saw the emergence of Russian colonization in the westernmost outposts of colonial settlement, crossing the Bering Strait and starting off in the Aleutian Islands from the 1740s, moving into Alaska by 1784, and eventually reaching as far south as northern California in the early 1800s.²² Though the majority of the Russians were fur traders, there was also a small number of Orthodox missionaries. Clearly, here, the four pillars of colonization would also prove useful to the Russian colonizing project. However, Russians were even less accommodating to the Natives than their European colleagues, and their distance from the Russian metropole and the scarcity of immigrants signals a reluctance of colonists to participate in the settlement.²³

Therefore, given the steady loss of power on the Indians' part, how did they manage to adapt to Euro-American pressure? Looking to the Trans-Appalachian wilderness of the Ohio River Valley, Susan Sleeper-Smith highlights the confederation of Indians who, due to increasing colonial population density and relentless conflict, found their way to a utopia in what was considered the old Northwest.²⁴ There, where French control had prevailed until the end of the Seven Years' War, a cluster of Indians comprised of a mixture of remnant eastern Nations, those who had been pushed ever westward by Euro-American expansion, as well as aboriginal

²¹ Hurtado, "Western Transformations," 239.

²² LeMaster, "History of North American Indians," October 12, 2022.

²³ *Idem.*, September 26, and October 12, 2022.

²⁴ Susan Sleeper-Smith. *Indigenous Prosperity and American Conquest: Indian Women of the Ohio River Valley, 1690-1792*. (Williamsburg, Virginia : Chapel Hill: Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture ; University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 319.

Natives, found refuge and a place to rebuild. It was only a matter of time until Americans, under the direction of first president George Washington, would challenge Indians' right to live peacefully upon their own sovereign territory.

Though Sleeper-Smith points to myriad factors which led to the destruction of the idyllic landscape that comprised the Ohio Valley confederation, it is looking back to European doctrinal thinking that provides the basis upon which the Indians' independence was destroyed. At the end of the Seven Years' War, the French signed over the rights to their trading posts to the English. Though these were in large part merely isolated outposts, the British viewed the adjoining and distant lands they nominally provided basis of exploration and trade for, as conjunct with ownership of the forts. Therefore, by right of conquest, a European doctrine, British retained overlordship of what had been French trading domains. While the French might not necessarily have exercised colonial practices that exerted regional dominance over the Indigenous inhabiting the domain (which, clearly, was not actually theirs to exert), the British Americans looked to these newly-won territories ravenously. Soon, settler colonists were spilling over the Appalachian Mountains, and conflict between Natives and colonists ensued. Concurrently, tensions over taxation and the question of American self-governance simmered to a boil between Britain and their colonies in North America. This led to the American War of Independence in 1776.

It is telling that as Thomas Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence, one complaint cited for breakage from imperial Britain was indeed their excitation of the "merciless Indian savages" against the Americans along the frontiers.²⁵ Euro-American settlers coveted the

²⁵ Thomas Jefferson. "The Declaration of Independence." 1776. Retrieved from <https://etc.usf.edu/lit2go/133/historic-american-documents/4957/the-declaration-of-independence/>

lands that lay ever further west, and they desired the *carte blanche* to deal with them as defeated enemy combatants, rather than as unconquered sovereign nations. This *fait accompli* is seen at the Treaty of Fort Stanwix (1784), when the Six Nations of the Iroquois signed a peace treaty with the newly formed United States.²⁶ Under duress, the Natives agreed to the cession of lands including Ohio, however the Iroquois had absolutely no claim to that territory. On this basis, the United States insinuated their ownership of Ohio, and when challenged by the confederation of native residents who were reacting poorly to continued settlers in their territories, they met the opposition with a hostile force that did nothing short of burn and destroy the pastoral utopia they had built.

The question remains: if Indian sovereignty could not be preserved from the creep of American colonization through defiance, hostile action, or treaty, perhaps meeting the Euro-Americans on their own intellectual territory might communicate to the colonizers the depth of Indian resistance. What would happen if Native Americans met the new “Americans” with a political document that established their sovereignty, defined their territories, set out their laws—creating an immortal document of governance that in large part mimicked the Americans’ own assertions of ability to self-govern with one of their own?

In July, 1827 the terrain of this battlefield was as yet unknown when the Cherokee Nation set forth their Constitution in New Echota.²⁷ In it, the Cherokee utilized the principles of Enlightenment to speak their autonomy through governing political documents to the U.S.

²⁶ “The Iroquois and the U.S. Make the Treaty of Fort Stanwix, 1784,” in *Major Problems in American Indian History: Documents and Essays*, eds. Albert L. Hurtado, Peter Iverson, William J. Bauer, Jr., and Stephen Kent Amerman (Stamford, CT: Cengage Learning, 2015), 210-11.

²⁷ Theda Perdue, and Michael D. Green. *The Cherokee Removal: A Brief History with Documents*. 2nd ed. (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2005), 60-70.

government. In many ways, it signals an acculturation to American society and a determination to meet the United States measure for measure. However, it served to fan political flames, and ultimately, with the Removal of the Cherokee to the far west onto reservations anyways, was rendered toothless.²⁸ Unfortunately, the state of Georgia had already extracted promises of the lands from the United States that the Cherokees claimed, and that set forth a course of animosity, divisive actions, subjection, and ultimately removal.²⁹

This final example demonstrates how Native Americans developed to deal with the four pillars of colonization, trade, disease, settlement, and warfare. Nevertheless, its overthrow by the U.S. government it also shows how little settler colonists cared for the opinions or the autonomy of the Indians. Although Alfred Hurtado claims that often, “Indians and newcomers talked past each other, not with each other,” this final example reveals that even if the Indians are talking, the newcomers might not be listening.³⁰ However, as was seen with the Yamassee, Californians, and Iroquois, as well as the confederation in the Ohio River Valley, it was not always simply a matter of talking past, but of Euro-Americans disingenuously adopting policies that leveraged power over the Native Americans without their consent. In attempts to negotiate these pillars, they develop religious and social syncretism, or even acculturate in whole or part. It never seemed to be enough, though.³¹ These four factors were not only interrelated, they also created a feedback loop that, like an ouroboros, continuously destroyed even as it established. The long eighteenth century served as a proving ground for the authority of the Indians as well as the

²⁸ Perdue, *The Cherokee Removal: A Brief History with Documents*, 157-58.

²⁹ LeMaster, “History of North American Indians,” October 19, 2022.

³⁰ Hurtado, “Western Transformations,” 240.

³¹ LeMaster, “History of North American Indians,” October 19, 2022. In addition to the Constitution, the Cherokee Nation developed their own written language, published a newspaper, write their own laws, create a police force, etc.

hegemony of the Euro-American, but due to these pillars of colonization and by removing the agency and voice of the Native Americans, ultimately, there was little competition.

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