

Imagining the New World: Indians, Colonists, and the Environment in the Early Settlements of New England

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Abstract

The following three chapters will discuss the role of Native Americans, Colonists, and the Environment in the establishing settlements in New England. The main argument of the thesis is that Native Americans must be included in historical studies of the colonial period not just as bystanders but as active participants. Through trade and agricultural exchange with colonists, Indians contributed greatly to the success of the colonies of New England.

The Introduction sets the stage for the direction which this thesis argument takes. Additionally, a brief historiographical review is provided to contextualize this work within the broader scheme of previous scholarship.

Chapter One engages with primary documents, including the works of Richard Hakluyt, Thomas Budd, and John Josselyn, and shows how prevalent hyperbolic language, exaggerations, and misconceptions were in pro-colonial rhetoric and writings from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The many facets of such works are explored including, but not limited to, the content of such writings, the context into which they were written, and the purposes and motivation of such authors. It is clear that colonial rhetoric inflated the positives traits of the New World and glossed over the negatives with the intent of encouraging settlement. Such writings portrayed the New World in a way that differed greatly from reality. Chapter Two will show, it was through trade and exchange with Indians that this gap was narrowed.

Chapter Two continues in the tradition set forth by scholars Neal Salisbury and others who present Native American history, material culture, trade patterns and agricultural practice as existing before the arrival of Europeans. Trade and exchange were central parts of Native American practice in New England and Britons entered into this dynamic upon their arrival to the New World. Reciprocity and notions of equality are explored and presented as central

components of the relationship between Indians and Colonists. It is suggested in this chapter, and further in Chapter Three, that colonial stability was directly dependent on Indian willingness to engage in trade.

Chapter Three uses a counterfactual study, as employed in the scholarship of James Axtell, to question how colonial settlement in New England might have differed were Native Americans not present in the New World. A counterfactual study removing Indians from situations of trade, exchange, and agricultural development will reveal how central Indians were in stabilizing the colonies of New England.

The Concluding Thoughts problematize the somewhat peaceful and reciprocal dynamics at play among Indian and colonial communities in the earliest moments of settlement. Through a discussion of differing views of land use, property rights, the installation of enclosures, and the domestication of cattle, it is clear that Indian and colonial cultures clashed more and more as British colonial settlements moved increasingly west. The overall message of this thesis is not discredited by the history of violence and conflict between settlers and Indians. Instead, in their contrast it is made clear that within the context of the first months and years of settlement in New England, colonists needed Indians. Indian contributions to colonial life allowed for the wealth and stability of New England to grow into the eighteenth century and beyond.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments.....	p. 5
Early British Colonists, Native Americans and the Environment: An Introduction.....	p. 6
Chapter One: An Imagined New World: Pro-Colonialism Rhetoric in the Formation of British Understandings of the Colonies.....	p.16
Chapter Two: Trade, Agricultural Exchange and Colonization: Native Americans and their Central Role in Early American History.....	p. 33
Chapter Three: The Empty Continent: Exploring the Capacity of New England Colonies to Survive without Native Americans.....	p. 53
Concluding Thoughts on the Nature of Anglo-Indian Relations in the American Colonies.....	p. 70
Annotated Bibliography.....	p.78

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Early British Colonists, Native Americans and the Environment

An Introduction

British settlement in the New England colonies took permanent root with the establishment of the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1630. Despite the hardships of trans-Atlantic travel, the difficulties of transplanting British life into a foreign land, and being confronted with unfamiliar environmental and geographical conditions, the colonists of New England managed to survive. While earlier scholarship on the colonial period in America often focused tightly on the British experience in the New World, more recent historical study is looking at these formative years in the American past through a broader and more inclusive lens. British colonists were able to stabilize their economic, social and agricultural systems in impressive ways through the application of European practice and the adoption of new methods, but this success was not the result of their ingenuity alone. Trade and agricultural exchange with Native Americans played a central and shaping role in the stabilizing of settlements in New England, and this thesis will argue that not only were Indians beneficial influences in the earliest moments of colonization, but that they were necessary parts in the mechanism of colonial development.

Primary sources from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by authors suggest a British obsession with expanding horizons and creating economically viable settlements in various corners of the globe. Writings from this period often portrayed the New World as a land of plenty with unlimited resources where Britons would “hasten and further every man to his power...into those temperate and fertile partes of America, which being within sixe weekes

sailing of England are yet unpossessed.”¹ For many pro-colonial propagandists the goal was to persuade merchants and capitalists to make the journey across the Atlantic to expand commercial markets and acquire wealth for the Crown. Additionally, the New World would provide new labor opportunities for Britain’s unemployed and afford land ownership to those who could never have owned property in England. Crowded British cities were wrought with disease and poverty and “the only logical solution to this intolerable situation was for the English to embrace the offerings of the Americas.”² Downtrodden Britons and pioneering capitalists alike displaced their anxieties about life in England and embraced the prosperity that the New World, as represented in pro-colonial rhetoric, promised.

The language and imagery employed by pro-colonial authors created a New World that was vastly different from the land experienced in reality, and it was through exchange with Indian communities and the adoption of Indian practice that this gap was narrowed for colonists. Historical study once restricted the agency of Indians as bystanders to colonial development, as threats to the safety of nascent British communities in America, or as hindrances to expansion into the American interior. This thesis will continue in the tradition of more recent study that rejects the former stereotypes and places Indians at the center of a dynamic and multifaceted colonial history. Native American histories run parallel and perpendicular to British experiences, not as subordinate stories in the margin of the European record.

The first thing this thesis seeks to address is the degree to which understandings of the environment, informed by pro-colonial rhetoric, shaped colonial settlement. From there it will

¹ David B. Quinn and Alison M. Quinn, “A Hakluyt Chronology,” in David B. Quinn, ed., *The Hakluyt Handbook*, 2 vols., Hakluyt Society, 2nd Ser., 144-145 (London, 1974), 1:263-331

² Mancall, Peter. *Hakluyt’s Promise: An Elizabethan’s Obsession for an English America*. New Haven, Connecticut, Yale University Press, 2007. P. 141

discuss how the disconnect between preconceived notions of the environment of the New World and how, in reality, it became narrowed by Indian contributions to trade and agriculture. Colonists' responses to the environmental realities of the New World formed a key part of colonial identity by forging a mindset of transformation and adaptation among communities. Relations with Native Americans contributed to the emergence of a distinctly British colonial identity, one starkly different from that of British societies abroad. This thesis will argue that many dimensions of the colonial experience, from areas of trade, agriculture, and economics to the formation of the British-colonial identity, would have been drastically different were America the empty and expansive wilderness suggested by seventeenth century pro-colonial rhetoric.

Historiographical Review: Selected Works of Importance in the Study of Early Colonial American History

The rise of environmentalism in the nineteen seventies spurred an increased awareness of the natural environment and humanity's place in it, and it was not until this period that revised thinking about Indians and the environment in colonial history emerged. Historiography of the American environment, particularly during the early colonial period, offers an interpretation in which human history and natural history intersect and engage in dialogue. As this brief introduction to recent scholarship on Native American history and the colonial American environment will show, new insights concerning the interplay of humans and the natural world suggest that each entity, society and nature, is dependent on the other; each affects the other in direct and indirect ways.

Environmental histories of the early American colonial period tend to focus on specific dynamics surrounding human experiences within the environment. Works by scholars like William Cronon, and his book *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists and the Ecology of New England*, are central to emerging discussions of the interplay between social development and the environment. Cronon acknowledges that well-rounded historical scholarship about the environment must accommodate occurrences before and beyond human involvement. He writes that previous understandings held that, “humanity was somehow outside of...ecological change... [previously] history was more or less absent” within the context of the natural world.³ The approach reflected in Cronon’s work mirrors broader trends in scholarship in which this thesis will continue.

Cronon’s method reflects a well-rounded and interdisciplinary approach. In union with primary documents from colonists and visitors to the New World, Cronon draws his information from ecological textbooks, ecological and economic anthropology sources, and primary documents accounting both British and Indian affairs, as well as a hybrid of more classical works from the nineteenth and early twentieth century.⁴ It is the goal of my research to follow in this tradition and provide a multi-layered interpretation of the colonial period with a focus on the relationship between Native Americans and colonists centered on trade and agriculture.

³ Cronon, William. *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England*. New York: Hill and Want, 1996. Pp. 10

⁴ Sources that Cronon cites as central to the formation of his argument include: Neil Jorgensen’s *A Sierra Club Naturalist’s Guide to Southern New England*, San Francisco, 1978. Cronon writes that Jorgensen’s text provides a better understanding of the plant and animal life of the region including a breakdown of local species etc. For his anthropological approach Cronon cites work by scholars like Emilio Moran and his work *Human Adaptability: An Introduction to Ecological Anthropology*, 1979. This text will likely be useful in my thesis as I explore human adaptability and adjustment in the face of natural disaster and struggle. For information on Native American populations, Cronon suggests the fifteenth volume of *Handbook of North American Indians* (1978) While Cronon cites several sources from the late nineteenth century; I am looking to keep the scholarship used more current in belief that it will insert my argument into more contemporary and relevant discourse.

A major component of the early colonial American experience was the relationship between Native Americans and colonists. Differing and intersecting understandings of land use, agriculture and trade (centered on the exchange of natural resources) dictated the tone of Anglo-Indian relations in New England. Historian Neal Salisbury makes a clear argument for the insertion of Native American histories within the retelling of this shaping period in colonial history. Salisbury argues that Native American history did not begin with European contact and that contemporary scholarship must be mindful of this. Salisbury sheds new light on the intricate, methodological, and interconnected socio-economic infrastructure that was essential to the North American experience both before and after colonialism. Salisbury breaks free of Eurocentric constraints and explores the experiences of Native Americans and colonists through the lens of exchange. And while it is more often assumed that European customs were adopted by native populations, Salisbury shows that Europeans incorporated Indian notions of reciprocity and cooperation in their economic and agricultural interactions with Native Americans and each other.⁵

Cultural and economic exchange created codependence between Native American groups and colonists. Historian Timothy J. Shannon and his work on the Albany Congress show the establishment of the “Covenant Chain” in the late 1600s, which made the Iroquois nations the key political and economic allies of Britain, and ushered in increasing cultural exchange in clothing, food and alcohol as European goods penetrated Indian communities. Shannon writes of diplomatic relations, “intercultural diplomacy helped...trade... [colonists were] particularly

⁵ Salisbury, Neal. “The Indians’ Old World: Native Americans and the Coming of Europeans”. *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 53, 1996 : pp.452

skillful at using material goods to impress and please the Indians.”⁶ While the Albany Congress is a degree beyond the chronological scope of this thesis, the central message of Shannon’s contribution can be appreciated; Shannon’s scholarship has furthered notions of the importance of material exchange in the formation of trade alliances and political entities in the colonies. Work like Shannon’s and Salisbury’s depart from earlier assumptions that Europeans arrived to a New World void of culture and economic practice. The ability of British trade to take root in the colonies speaks to the existence of a pre-European economic systems and material culture. Indian communities had material cultures and trade, based in the exchange of goods, before the arrival of Europeans. My thesis, particularly the second chapter, will insert itself within this understanding which raises Native American culture as its own entity.

Virginia Anderson, author of *Creatures of Empire*, uses a discussion of agriculture, livestock, and the domestication of animals in the early colonies to argue that differing notions of animal husbandry, appropriate ways to grow crops, and allot land dictated where colonists settled as well as how they interacted with Native Americans. More specifically, as Anderson writes, “almost from the moment they arrived in the New World, English settlers urged Indians to acquire livestock, believing...that this would help native peoples progress.”⁷ Anderson’s text analyzes specific instances of interactions between colonists and Native Americans in which environmental understandings and practices dictated the nature of their relationship to one another, and this will provide valuable information for my thesis. Accounts of the differences in Native American and European practices in regard to agriculture and livestock also reveal cultural exchange and the cross-over of ideas between each group. Anderson’s research draws

⁶ Shannon, Timothy J. *Indians and Colonists at the Crossroads of Empire*. New York. Cornell University Press, 2000. Pp. 37

⁷ Anderson, Virginia DeJohn. *Creatures of Empire*. Oxford University Press, London, 2004, pp. 221

conclusions about understandings of land ownership, property, and Native American communities through the exchange of animals and for this reason her work stands apart.

Professor Anderson uses her extensive familiarity with legal documents, mostly chronicling property disputes, to bolster her broader claims about Anglo-Indian relations. Because environmental history is a relatively new branch of historical study there are many dimensions which remain less explored. Anderson's scholarship identifies the lack of information on the area of livestock and property exchange and sheds new light on information which proved invaluable to my thesis.

Historian Peter C. Mancall's *Hakluyt's Promise: An Elizabethan Obsession for an English America* was one of the central sources in the writing of this thesis, particularly the first and second chapters. His in-depth study of the life and work of Richard Hakluyt, one of the foremost proponents of colonial expansion into the Americas during the Elizabethan era, covers a multitude of dynamics at play in the argument to colonize. Not only does Mancall contextualize American colonialism as a part of a European race to expand and dominate the Americas, but, through the intimate perspective provided by his writings on Hakluyt specifically, a better sense of how Britons saw the New World and colonial development is achieved.

Mancall's representation of Hakluyt's writings encapsulates the pioneering spirit of Elizabethan explorers, the enthusiasm for capital gain and commercial growth that dominated economic discourse in early-modern England, and the hyperbolic nature of pro-colonial rhetoric. This thesis will use the information Mancall provided to show not only the differences between the environment and geography of the imagined New World, found in the writings of Hakluyt

and others, and that which colonists encountered, but will suggest that Indians were active participants in closing this gap.

Historian James Axtell's *Colonial America without the Indians: Counterfactual Reflections* contributed greatly to the argument made in the third chapter of this thesis. The use of counterfactual information, for Axtell, is beneficial when examining specific moments in the past and decisively removing one element from the equation to explore what might have occurred. While there is a degree of creativity in this practice, Axtell's writings maintain a close proximity to the historical past and imaginatively remove Indians from the equation to further suggest their importance in the colonial system. The third chapter of this thesis employs similar methods as used in Axtell's work and pushes them a step further.

Axtell suggests the importance of Indians to the colonial projects of New England by claiming how agriculture, hunting, and trade would have been different without Native Americans. Chapter three of this thesis furthers this argument claiming that in its difference, the New World without Indians would have been a more difficult place for Britain to colonize. The myth of the empty continent, represented in pro-colonial rhetoric, serves as the discussion point for the argument first made by Axtell and further discussed in this thesis.

While I have merely scratched the surface of the wealth of scholarship available on the topic of the environment and colonial development it is clear that its breadth is, in part, the result of the amount of primary source information available from the seventeenth century in particular. Pamphlets, journal entries, personal correspondence, and state-sanctioned documents from the period reflect a sincere interest among colonists in interpreting, understanding and working within the environments in which their societies were to grow. This thesis draws in particular

from the works of Richard Hakluyt, Thomas Budd, and John Josselyn to explore the nature of pro-colonial writing during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Whether for promoting economic growth, informing the masses in England, or for poetic expression, texts that brought to life the environment first encountered by early settlers give insight into the mindset of the day as well as fuel present-day research. In *An Account of the Colony of the Lord Baron of Baltimore, 1633* the author wrote, “It is acknowledged that the situation of the country is excellent and very advantageous, as it is...in location and climate not unlike Seville, Sicily, Jerusalem, and the best parts of Arabia Felix and China.”⁸ This quotation reflects the shortcomings of geographical and scientific understandings of the time, particularly misapplications of longitude and latitude. Misunderstandings like this informed opinion and when reality did not meet expectation upon arrival the colonists were forced to adapt to the environments first encountered.

While this introduction to the historiographical information on colonialism within an environmental context is brief it has become clear that historical pursuit which positions humans in their natural environment as actors of change is coming to the fore of scholarly discourse. Environmental understandings in the seventeenth century manifested themselves in ecological practices, agricultural systems, and trade relationships that proved central to the emergent colonial American identity, and, as this thesis will show, it was in their interactions with Native Americans that colonists secured their settlements in the New World.

In addition to this, recent scholarship, like that of Neal Salisbury, seeks to bring to the fore the Native American experience in the colonial context and it is apparent that environmental

⁸ Ed. Clayton Colman Hall. *Narratives of Early Maryland 1633-1684*. Charles Scribner's Sons. New York, New York, 1910. Pp. 7

history is one of the more relevant and available vehicles through which this often-overlooked but invaluable viewpoint can be magnified. The America of today has roots in the earliest colonial settlements and, as my thesis will suggest, the environment played a central role in shaping the colonial image. This image encompassed the many facets of the colonial experience, for there were few spheres of private or public life in which the environment did not have reach. Where people settled, what they farmed, how they traded and sold their goods, and how they perceived themselves to be as stewards and subjects of the land directly shaped colonial understandings of self and identity. Furthermore, there is a relevance to environmental discussions that does not drop off outside the historical context for, as current environmental realities show, human development and the natural world continue to shape each other, and revealing this is central to the motivations of environmental histories, as Cronon and others suggest.

Chapter One

An Imagined New World: Pro-Colonialism Rhetoric in the Formation of British Understandings of the Colonies

In the seventeenth century, British colonists who departed to North America took leaps of faith, embarking on grueling journeys across the Atlantic in hopes of finding the economic, agricultural, and social success that was not available to them in England. To present this period in history without discussing the natural setting of the colonies as well as the colonists' interactions with Indian communities would be to project an incomplete image. While previous scholarship has positioned colonists as subject to the natural environment and Native Americans on the periphery of the colonial experience, emergent historical study is further defining and expanding the role of settlers, Indians, and the environment in the shaping of the early-American story. The natural environment undoubtedly presented challenges to early British settlements in New England; however, adaptive behaviors brought from Britain and those learned through exchange with Native populations in the New World allowed for success in the face of unfamiliarity. The myth that the New World was a vast, empty, and unpopulated land was quickly dispelled as colonists first encountered Indian groups across the East coast of North America in the seventeenth century. The following discussion seeks to present an early America born out of the interplay among British colonists, Native Americans, and the natural environment to bring each to an equal level of importance

Throughout the seventeenth century, first-hand accounts of early exploration and settlement along the eastern coast of North America shaped popular British opinions and imaginings of the New World. Publications in England and correspondence from the colonies to Britain often painted idyllic portraits of new areas of exploration and settlement. Today, these sources allow readers access to the rhetoric employed to promote British colonialism in the

Americas. While there are countless available documents from this period, this chapter will provide a focused discussion of the works of Richard Hakluyt, Thomas Budd, and John Josselyn, and I will show the stark contrast between the America imagined in such works and that experienced by the colonists themselves. While the writings of Hakluyt, Budd, and Josselyn are not geographically specific to the Northeast they provide valuable insights that will lay the foundations for understanding the broader dynamics at play between the colonists and the natural environment, and the central role of exchange with Native Americans in the survival of British settlements in America. This chapter seeks to shed light on the misconceptions about the New World and will serve as the foundation for further discussion concerning what awaited settlers when contact was first made. Pro-colonialism literature created a gap in the minds of prospective colonists between the imagined New World and how the New World really was; it was in exchange with Native Americans that this gap was narrowed.

Literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries presented a New World that differed greatly from that experienced by colonists. Writings from this time by the aforementioned authors and their contemporaries contributed to the formation of an envisioned America, an idealized land onto which many personal and commercial aspirations were projected. It was through resilience, trial-and-error, adaptive practices, and exchange with Indian communities that colonists were able to survive the realities of the New World. Colonists' abilities to adapt to unfamiliar conditions could ensure greater social, economic, and agricultural stability.

Commercial ventures with a promise of financial gain led some Britons in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to look across the Atlantic in the hopes of finding wealth in both land and resources. In fact, it was through an examination of the land and its bounty that proponents of colonialism bolstered their arguments and encouraged those abroad to make the journey to the

New World. One such supporter, Richard Hakluyt, penned his *Discourse on Western Planting* (1584) with the purpose of attracting British gentry and merchants to look westward for economic prosperity.

Richard Hakluyt's interest in cartography, geography and exploration was sparked while attending Christ Church at Oxford University in 1577.⁹ Hakluyt's work, which began as an academic pursuit, gained public notice as British competition with Spain rose in the late sixteenth century. Hakluyt advised members of the British court under Queen Elizabeth I and rose to prominence in the latter part of the sixteenth century as the British monarchy increased its funding and interest in colonial projects with the desire to match the naval and commercial powers of Spain. Historian Peter Mancall notes that, "he [Hakluyt] became a source of information and inspiration for England's policy makers, including the queen" and was understood to be one of the foremost "authorities on overseas exploration."¹⁰ The failure of several ventures in the Americas, including the settlement of Roanoke, challenged British trust in foreign transplantation; however, according to some scholars, Hakluyt's prolific writing kept enterprise afloat by presenting a New World that was both appealing and promising.¹¹

Hakluyt was not an extensive traveler and never set foot in the New World. His representations of the Americas were the result of the interpretation of other individuals' accounts, products of the stitching together of countless journal entries, correspondences, and personal retelling with which he came into contact. Hakluyt's passion for colonialism propelled his life's works, as he saw in expansion "the necessary cure for the nation's ills."¹² For Hakluyt

⁹ Mancall, Peter. *Hakluyt's Promise: An Elizabethan's Obsession for an English America*. Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, 2007. P. 28

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 3

¹¹ Ibid., p. 4

¹² Ibid., p. 94

and his contemporaries, the New World held promise as a vast land with abundant natural resources, opportunity for market expansion and social growth. It was through the publishing of documents like *Discourse*, that the importance of colonialism for British society was made known to the general public. Through an exchange with Jean Ribault, a visitor to the American Southeast, Hakluyt recorded the many “splendors” to be found in the region, including “abundant game, dense forests, silkworms...fertile fields, a place where the meadows were so filled with birds” that hunting would be a joy.”¹³ He also drew the attentions of investors with promises of “pearls, turquoise, copper, silver, and gold.”¹⁴ Extracting evidence from numerous first-hand accounts, Hakluyt created the most comprehensive and convincing argument for colonization available in his lifetime, and his contribution both inspired and informed prospective merchants and colonists alike.

The tendency of such writers to propagandize their messages created a disparity in the minds of potential settlers between the New World as promised and as it really was. Hakluyt claimed that the Americas would be “answerable in climate to...Egypt, Syria, Persia, Turkey, Greece...Italy, Spain, Portugal, France, Flanders...Poland, and Muscovy.”¹⁵ The sweeping breadth of the regions that Hakluyt presented as having similar climates to the New World shows the tendency for exaggeration that other pro-colonialism authors employed. For a prospective colonist, reading descriptions such as this would lead one to imagine an Eden-like refuge boasting a natural and geographic diversity that would surpass all other known earthly-realms.

¹³ Ibid., p. 141

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Hakluyt, Richard. *Discourse on Western Planting*. Taken from <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/amerbegin/exploration/text5/hakluyt.pdf>

Hakluyt's *Discourse* presented the colonization of the New World as the necessary next step for Britain in the sixteenth century. He often makes mention of commercial and naval competition with Spain, placing colonial settlements at the fore of measures taken to secure British security in the increasingly-global world. Hakluyt says of colonial expansion,

what noble man, what gentleman, what merchant, what citizen or countryman will not offer himself to contribute in the action, foreseeing that...the purchasing of rich commodities, to the planting of younger brethren, to the employment of our idle people, and to so many noble ends, and great joining in contribution upon so happy beginnings gives ability to fortify, to defend all foreign force¹⁶

As this excerpt shows, Hakluyt was pleading with his audience, prospective colonists, to make the trans-Atlantic journey to the New World to establish wealth and prosperity in the name of the Crown. Within the context of competition among European powers, Hakluyt strongly felt that settlements in the New World would not only better British society, through the extraction of natural resources and by the increasing of employment, but that they would secure Britain a place along the expanding commercial and political horizons of Europe. In *Discourse* Hakluyt was calling upon the sensibilities of nobility and loyal citizenship to urge Britons to settle in the colonies.

The message of Hakluyt's publication was well received among various circles of British society. For the working and middle classes the prospect of owning land in England was out of reach, but it was not beyond reason for an individual to imagine a landed, more prosperous version of himself living in the New World that Hakluyt described. Hakluyt wrote, "This western voyage will yield unto us all the commodities of Europe, Africa and Asia as far as were want."¹⁷ The sprawling, untouched lands of the Americas coupled with a supposed availability of resources surpassing what all corners of the known world could offer would provide respite and

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 6

¹⁷ Ibid.

renewal for the downtrodden and disenfranchised in England. As a master of propaganda, Hakluyt introduced his audience, potential colonists, to a land of unmatched richness. Hakluyt skillfully played directly into the needs of the common person, providing answer to what life in England lacked. Hakluyt wrote that in the New World colonists would find “all naturall desire which we have to serch out the commodities to live happily, plentifully, and at ease” and for those living in England the prospect of a life of comfort and prosperity was very appealing.¹⁸

Pro-colonial writings, including those of Richard Hakluyt, often focused on the potential for commercial gain and gave little mention of Native Americans. When mention was made, it was often in the context of fear. Britons understood Indians as a group to be feared, and colonists understood that if Indians were displeased with the location of a settlement, they would “guide and assist any nation that shall come to invade.”¹⁹ Jointly, early colonists also understood that they needed to form positive trade relationships with local populations upon arrival in the event that their crops might fail in which case Britons would “turn to indigenou famers for food.”²⁰ Images of Indians beyond the context of pro-colonialism writings presented them both as people to be feared and necessary for trade but “despite the danger, Hakluyt filled much of his report with the commodities” to be found in the New World rather than the risk of violent conflict with Indians.²¹ The omission of detailed descriptions of Native American populations as the first inhabitants of the New World were, in part, due to the desire of Hakluyt and other writers to portray America as a vast, empty land, ready to be tamed and turned to profit by British hands. Indians were often presented within the Christian paradigm, as a people needing to “be brought to civilitie [in the] embracing of the true religion”; Indians were often thought to be uncivilized

¹⁸ Mancall, p. 171

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 262

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., p. 112

and backward and colonial descriptions of them rarely deviated from this standard.²² However, as later discussion will show, Native American communities were vital players in America's history even before the arrival of Europeans.

The promise of untouched and available excesses of land in the New World fell upon willing audiences in sixteenth-century England. The latter part of the century ushered in periods of increased population density in London and other urban centers. Fears rose as agricultural production failed to meet the needs of growing communities. In fact, a restriction on new construction was enacted under Queen Elizabeth I in an attempt to slow down the seemingly-exponential growth of the cities.²³ It is said that the population of London increased by over fifty thousand people between the 1560s to the close of the century, further straining the availability of resources.²⁴ By the start of the seventeenth century, London had become plagued by disease and was unable to provide its burgeoning population with necessities like food, clean water, and housing. The dire situation at home promulgated pro-colonial authors to create in their writings a new land that allowed people to hope for a better life.

Hakluyt's message also had appeal to the merchant and commercial class in England. He saw in the Americas an answer to the increased rate of unemployment and crime. According to Hakluyt, individuals without work were given to idle time and often became involved in corrupt dealings.²⁵ Hakluyt perceived a decline in piracy among the Spanish and Portuguese that he credited to their colonial expansion into the Americas. The increase in trade and mercantilism employed countless men and left no space for inactivity or crime. The continuing occurrence of

²² Ibid., p. 201

²³ Ibid. p. 73

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 143

piracy and theft aboard British naval vessels and upon British soil was, according to Hakluyt, the result of unemployment, and it was through commercial ventures in the New World that the problem could be resolved.²⁶ Additionally, the colonies in the Americas promised British markets expansion and the increased access to goods and natural resources that colonial development would bring could bolster the British economy.

Hakluyt and fellow pro-colonialism authors spun language and imagery in a way that enticed rather than informed. *A Discourse on Western Planting* is remembered by scholars as “an extended work of propaganda.”²⁷ Mancall claims that, “the bleak markets on the Continent should have been enough to motivate any English merchant to seek new targets...but Hakluyt added more than economics.”²⁸ Hakluyt’s *Discourse* placed Britain in the running of a European race for domination in the Americas in which the central values of the Protestant faith and politics were threatened by Spain’s increasing dominance at sea and abroad. Hakluyt’s depiction of the New World is directly tied to the belief that Britain’s success in the seventeenth century would correspond to its ability to colonize North America in the name of the Crown and create sustainable markets with strong foundations in morality and the Protestant religion. The colonies were to be an experiment in which the conviction, capabilities, and prowess of the British character would be tested under the watchful eye of other powerful European states. The New World presented in Hakluyt’s writings would serve as an opportunity for growth in which England could secure for itself a foot in the door to an ever-expanding world.

While Hakluyt made the commercial benefits of expansion to the Americas very clear, he failed to convey the degree of hardship and struggle that would mark the journey and early stages

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 139

²⁸ Ibid.

of settlement. Life aboard seventeenth-century ships put into place the foundations onto which societies on land would be formed.²⁹ Atlantic journeys were marked by isolation, close living quarters, and poor diet and health conditions, and they were made worse by the colonists' anxiety in the face of uncertainty. Unstable conditions aboard ships as well as the unpredictable environmental conditions at sea fueled colonists' unease. Those aboard ships making the earliest trans-Atlantic journeys were forced to rely upon each other and their faith. A sense of community often emerged and was rooted not in class distinction, as could be said of English society, but rather in the commonality of their shared experience crossing the Atlantic to forge a new success in a new land.³⁰

The pioneering spirit of seventeenth-century British settlers to the Americas was tested by struggle and failure in the face of the hardships of life aboard the ships. Rough seas with torrential rain and violent waves compounded the fears of an already-anxious community making its way to a new and unfamiliar life. David Cressy argues that it was the communal bonds and sense of interconnectedness formed on ships that, in part, allowed for settlers to survive the earliest days upon the unfamiliar landscape of the New World.³¹ Cressy's claim is supported as "communal settlements of the classic New England type" were established with close ties to religious observances provided a social unity that extended to the development of collective agricultural and social practice.³²

Anxiety at sea was fueled by folkloric imagery of ocean monsters and other terrors, but reality was the greatest source of fear as talk of ship-devouring storms and terrible winds made

²⁹ Cressy, David. "The Vast and Furious Ocean". *New England Quarterly* Vol. 57, No. 4 (December, 1984) pp. 511-533, p. 511

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 513

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 514

³² Axtell, James. "Colonial America without the Indians: Counterfactual Reflections". *The Journal of American History*, Volume 73, Issue 4 (March, 1987), p. 987

their way into popular discourse. For professional merchants and sailors, life at sea had a degree of familiarity, but for the average colonist this was not the case. Up until the 1630s the vast majority of British society had never stepped foot aboard a ship, further contributing to their nervousness and fear. Hakluyt's writing neither fueled or calmed fears regarding the journey and instead glossed over the matter almost entirely. From his exchanges with those who had made such voyages, Hakluyt was well aware of the rigor and risks of trans-Atlantic travel and still focused his writing on the commodities of the New World rather than the amount of time the trip would take, the level of discomfort aboard the ships, or the environmental conditions that would potentially threaten the safety of ships.³³ Hakluyt's exclusion of such topics reinforces the understanding that he, and his fellow supporters of colonialism, were writing more as salespeople than chroniclers of truth.

The Atlantic wind and weather patterns were often unpredictable, and violent storms threatened the safety of many voyages. Atlantic conditions made it both difficult and unrealistic for those making the journey to predict the length of their voyages, let alone guarantee a safe arrival to the New World. While Hakluyt claimed the trip was "neither too long nor too short, but easy," accounts from various ships' records suggest otherwise.³⁴ One ship, "The James," left Southampton and reached Boston harbor in just over five weeks while another left Bristol in the same year and took a staggering three months to reach New England.³⁵ Information like this was not included in Hakluyt's *Discourse*. Hakluyt's central pro-colonialism work, was drafted not as an informative study in the dimensions of trans-Atlantic travel so much as it was created as a work of propaganda to encourage Britons to transplant their lives to the New World. While

³³ Mancall, p. 112

³⁴ Hakluyt, p. 2

³⁵ Cressy, p. 520

“Hakluyt’s travels were limited...the expanse of his imagination was unique”; in his texts he created a New World that was an edited version of reality, and his writings portrayed that imagined world to his audiences.³⁶ Hakluyt wrote, “In this voyage we may see by the globe that weare not to pass the burnt zone nor to pass through the frozen seas, but in a temperate climate [that] may be sailed in five or six weeks”.³⁷ Hakluyt presented the trans-Atlantic trip as a manageable endeavor while ships’ records suggest that this was not necessarily the case.

Hakluyt was not alone in his quest to sell the concept of a British America to his contemporaries. In fact, propagandistic messages and misinterpretations of information are present even in the writings of those who experienced the colonies first hand. Proponents of colonialism, like Thomas Budd, in their eagerness to gain support from merchants and investors, laced exaggerations and falsehoods throughout their accounts and downplayed the risks of colonial ventures with the sole purpose of attracting settlers and capital. Budd, who settled in the colonies as a merchant, came to the New World to escape oppression under the Church of England. He documented his time spent in the American Northeast in *Good Order Established in Pennsylvania and New Jersey*. The tendency of pro-colonialism authors to emphasize the potential commercial gains of expansion while disregarding the dangers and risks is reflected in Budd’s writings. A well-known work, *Good Order* is marked by sweeping generalizations about the geography and climate of present-day Pennsylvania and New Jersey. Like Hakluyt, Budd was sensitive to the plight of the common person in seventeenth-century England. As a Quaker, Budd was victimized and oppressed by the Church of England and saw in colonial development a remedy for the “distressed condition...deadness of trade and want of work” that those in

³⁶ Mancall, p. 155

³⁷ Hakluyt, p. 4

England were suffering.³⁸ The prospect of increased commerce and markets in the New World was emphasized by many supporters of colonialism as rhetoric from the early-colonial period shows. In any settlement, mercantilism and trade were dependent upon access to waterways to both garner natural resources and transport goods. Of the colonies in present-day New Jersey, Budd writes, “The country is well Watered... [with a] safe and excellent Harbor for any Fleet of Ships which can lie there in all weathers.”³⁹ Following this excerpt, Budd asserts that there would be no reason why the sea and waterways could not operate as ports for commerce throughout all times of year. There is no hint of the harsh New England winters or difficult maritime conditions that complicated colonial trade routes and commerce. This reflects the tendency of some sixteenth and seventeenth century authors to inflate the positive realities of the colonies.

Richard Hakluyt, Thomas Budd, and their contemporaries anticipated comparable climates to the Mediterranean and parts of Western Europe as a result of misapplications of early understandings of longitude and latitude. In *Good Order*, Budd writes that, “It is supposed that we may make so wines as in France....for the climate is as proper as any part of France, therefore it is rational to believe that the Wines will be as rich.”⁴⁰ While there are parts of the Northeast that can grow grapes, the rich soil and temperate climate of the Mediterranean is not mirrored in New England, making the pursuit a challenge. To encourage commercial expansion to America, Budd suggested the colonies would be able to rival the wine production of France. The colonies were part of a larger context of competition among European states, predominantly Spain, Portugal, France and Britain, to secure territories and markets in various corners of the

³⁸ Budd, Thomas. *Good Order Established in Pennsylvania and New Jersey*. The Burrows Brothers Co., Cleveland, Ohio, 1902.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

globe. Budd's optimism about colonial wine production was the result of a sincere misunderstanding of the application of latitude but, with the information he formulated about the climate of New England, he continued a tradition, established by writers like Hakluyt, that trumped up the capacity of the colonies to produce wealth.

Ideally, the colonies would bring increased wealth and prestige to their monarchies and to the members of the elite classes. In reality, however, it was members of the working and middle classes that made the voyages to the colonies. Hakluyt asserted that in the colonies Britons "shall have their livings, and many cities, towns, villages, havens, and creeks near adjoining unto the seacoast...as brewers, bouchers, smiths, ropers, shipwrights, tailors, shoemakers."⁴¹ Hakluyt's New World was one in which colonists would find employment and a wealth of land ready for use by British colonists. However, the commercial benefits that Hakluyt and Budd highlighted in their writings would not be immediately enjoyed by those at the forefront of settlement, the colonists. Instead, the colonists were presented with the challenges of the trans-Atlantic journey and of recreating familiar society and family life in an unfamiliar setting with the commercial hopes of those in Britain upon their shoulders. The target audiences of such writings were not being provided with important information on the realities of New England, including its harsh winters, rocky soil, and population of Native Americans. The potential for wealth and access to land captivated audiences who would, upon their arrival to America, encounter the harsh realities of crop failure, bitter winters, disease, and other destabilizing forces long before a trace of economic prosperity could be detected.

While discussion thus far has shown the style and language used in pro-colonialism documents, it would be a falsehood to claim that all writings about the American colonies were

⁴¹ Hakluyt, p.5

warped, removed from truth, or motivated by capital gain and political competition. Some visitors to the American colonies entered the scene as interested observers, removed from the economic agenda and, instead, interested in understanding the land as it really was. One such individual was John Josselyn, whose encounters in the colonies reflect curiosity in the pursuit of understanding that is not obscured by the need to push a pro-colonialism message.

John Josselyn visited the American colonies in the middle of the seventeenth century, documented his experiences, and then returned to England to publish his discoveries. In one of his better known publications, *New England's Rarities Discovered*, Josselyn wrote extensively on the natural environment. According to *Colonial Prose and Poetry*, a work highlighting particular moments in the early-American record through the discussion of figures of particular interest and their works, Josselyn was a “writer of almost incredible credulity.”⁴² Josselyn’s writings conveyed to his readers a hunger to learn and the importance of observation and information more for the sake of understanding rather than for the sake of fueling interest in settlement among those in Britain. He describes New England as rocky and “extremely overgrown with wood, yet...with large rich valleys, wherein are Lakes ten, twenty, yea sixty miles.”⁴³ He goes on to describe the terrain as “daunting” and “terrible,” plagued by rocky areas “as thick as mole-hills.”⁴⁴ Josselyn discussed the mosquito infestations and painful scabbing and swelling resulting from their bites, claiming that the colony is “strangely incommodated with flies.”⁴⁵ While an excess of flies does not necessarily detract from the appeal of the New World,

⁴² *Colonial Prose and Poetry, Volume 1*. Edited by Trent, William P. and Benjamin W. Wells. Thomas Y. Crowell Company, New York New York, 1903. P. 61

⁴³ Josselyn, John. *New England's Rarities Discovered*. Applewood Books, Bedford Massachusetts

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Trent, William P. p. 65

it adds to its character an accessible and real dynamic that suggests that life in the colonies was not all positive, as was often presented to be in the works of Richard Hakluyt and Thomas Budd.

Josselyn documented observations of birds, fish, reptiles, insects, and plant life that were never before encountered. Throughout the text one senses his delight in his role as newcomer, able to explore and catalog unfamiliar findings and share them with audiences abroad. It is interesting to note that Josselyn also included mention of Native Americans and some of their practices. One such example is his writings about their hunting practices. After observing the special ritual importance placed by Indians on an animal known as a “tree buck,” Josselyn wrote, “what they are good for I know not, but there is some more than ordinary virtue in them.”⁴⁶ The significance of this particular moment observed in Indian practice will be more fully explored in the following chapter, but, at this moment, it is significant that Josselyn introduces his audience to Indians not as threats to safety but as a part of the New World he explored. One can appreciate that Josselyn sought to experience the New World in a way unattained by the rhetoric of the colonial agenda. In his writings, he expanded upon what he knew and did not shy away from what he did not understand. Instead, Josselyn documented it all and presented it to his audiences in a way that is earnest and accessible. While Hakluyt and Budd presented themselves as authoritative sources of information on colonial enterprise, Josselyn served as an honest and sensitive guide through one man’s encounters in an American colony.

The difference in material and tone between Josselyn’s works and that of his peers is due to several factors. Undoubtedly, each has his own style and manner of speaking; the employment of imagery, hyperbolic language, and exaggeration in Hakluyt’s writing, for example, affects audiences in a different way than the observational style of Josselyn’s writing does. The

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 65

motivations of each of these authors were also very different. Hakluyt and Budd positioned themselves in British society as authorities on the benefits of colonialism because their sphere of reference was within the commercial and political interests of England. Josselyn, a traveler with an inclination toward the science of plant and animal life, presented a much more observational and unbiased view of the colonies. His inclusion of information on Native American practice is markedly different than the works of pro-colonialist authors. As an observer, Josselyn did not push the same agenda that Hakluyt and Budd did the inclusion of discussion of Indians reinforces this. For Hakluyt and Budd, the presence of Indians complicated the image of the New World that they sought to project, one that was ready for British colonialism. For Josselyn, Indians were one of many points of fascination and study to be found in the colonies. Works printed under the banner of pro-colonialism employ methods to entice Britons to make the journey abroad. Such authors provided their audiences escape from the dismal urban settings of England with retellings of the sprawling and untainted Eden of the New World.

In the examining of the sources available from the time, it can be said that the motivations of Hakluyt, Budd, and their contemporaries reflected the emergent need for British society to expand and gain control in other parts of the world. Authors of pro-colonialism works played important roles in the creation of British understandings of the New World. The broader messages of such publications as Hakluyt's *Discourse* and Budd's *Good Order* built up an America of bounty, of expansive landscapes and immeasurable wealth in natural resources. While settlers arriving to northeastern America in the seventeenth century would find thick forests, diverse animal and plant life, and waterways ideal for navigation, the harsh climates, rocky soil, and other environmental components challenged the colonists' abilities to succeed.

It is at the point of arrival to the New World that colonists would attempt communal survival through the application of agricultural methods employed in England, and, more importantly, would engage with local Indian populations to achieve sustainability. The writings of Richard Hakluyt and Thomas Budd created a gap in the minds of potential settlers between the American they created and the American that settlers would encounter. It was not an empty land ripe for the picking by European hands but rather a land long inhabited by advanced societies of Native Americans who would first come into contact with British settlers in New England in the early seventeenth century. The role of Native Americans in the establishment of settlements in New England was one of great importance and leads one to question to what degree settlement in early America would have been able to progress had the New World truly been an empty continent.

Chapter Two

Trade, Agricultural Exchange and Colonization: Native Americans and their Central Role in Early American History

While earlier scholarship on colonial American often presented Indians as either obstacles to or victims of settlement, it is important and necessary to reexamine the past with a heightened awareness of the rich cultural, political, economic and social histories of Native American groups. Presently, more thoughtful scholarship highlighting the role of Indian communities in the shaping of America is paving the way for a fuller understanding of sixteenth and seventeenth -century settlements in the New World. In portraying a more all-encompassing image of this formative period, historians are bringing Indians to their proper place at the forefront of scholarly discussion. To continue to tell the early-American story with Indians on the periphery would be to perpetuate a partial history, dominated by European ideologies, paradigms, and experiences. The British colonial experience in New England has often been retold as an account of the triumph of European ingenuity, resilience, and perseverance, and it has not been until more recently that historical scholars have recognized the incomplete nature of such recreations of the past. Native Americans were undoubtedly impacted by British colonialism in America, but histories focusing solely on what the presence of Indians meant to colonists no longer suffice. Indians were agents of change in the colonial setting, as this chapter's discussion of trade and agriculture will show.

It is only recently that scholarship has begun moving toward an inclusive and balanced portrayal of the past. Daniel Thorp said, "In the United States the story of cultural contact and assimilation has largely been the story of a white, English, Protestant culture...affecting and

being affected by waves of cultural impedimenta.”⁴⁷ This has meant that the role of Native Americans in the reconstruction of American colonial history has often been diminished. When Indians were mentioned in such scholarship, they were often presented as hindrances to colonial development, as problems to be dealt with in the course of settlement and expansion. Pro-colonial rhetoric contributed to such thinking that marginalized Indians by, “unintentionally conjuring up images of America as unpeopled, by talking of wilderness being opened;” the presence of Native American communities complicated the idealized portrait of the colonies as a place where land was uninhabited and ready for European conquest.⁴⁸ Historians who once made a habit of ignoring or reducing Indian involvement in American history were, to a degree, guilty of making the same omissions of and generalizations about Indian groups that were made by sixteenth and seventeenth century writers like Richard Hakluyt and his contemporaries. Such generalizations were formulated by uncritical analyses of the past in which the desire to extract information about the European experience of colonialism overshadowed the experiences of all others. Indians are becoming less associated with their former roles as hindrances to colonial expansion and are rising as participants in a dynamic and multidimensional American history.

While there is a degree of accountability that all scholarship must be held to, it is true that contemporary historians have the benefit of increased access to information and archaeological records that better enable historical writings to include Indians as more than mere subjects of European power. The advent of colonialism in America forever impacted Indians and Europeans in the New World, but, as James Merrell says, “an Indian community was touched by people and

⁴⁷ Thorp, Daniel B. “Assimilation in North Carolina’s Moravian Community”. *Journal of Southern History*. LII (1986), p. 19

⁴⁸ Merrell, James, “Some Thoughts on Colonial Historians and American Indians”. *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Ser., 46 (1989) p. 112

events beyond its borders even more deeply than was its colonial counterpart.”⁴⁹ Indians were directly affected by colonial settlement in ways arguably unmatched by European settlers, but they must not be remembered solely within the context of how colonialism shaped them. Indian communities shaped colonial settlement in return. Native Americans and colonists engaged in trade and exchange that brought each group to a level of interconnectedness that previous scholarship has often failed to point out. The mutual dependence displayed by colonists and Indians upon each other suggests a level of equality between the groups that has not been fully explored in historical study.

Contrary to the portrait of the New World painted in writings and pro-colonial rhetoric from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the New England early colonists encountered was far from empty. In fact, colonists making the trans-Atlantic journey to the Americas “arrived not in a virgin land, but in one that was teeming with several million people.”⁵⁰ Quests for the Northwest Passage brought some explorers into contact with Inuit communities in present-day Canada in the mid sixteenth century. In 1576, Britons arrived “somewhere near 60 degrees North latitude” and met Inuit communities who were likely to have had encounters few Europeans.⁵¹ Explorers documented their observations of the people saying they had “broad faces, flat wry noses... [and were] swart and tawny color...painted about the eyes and balls of the Cheeke with a deepe Azure colour.”⁵² Audiences abroad, including Hakluyt, were eager to receive news about “what lay beyond the intellectual and physical horizons of the English world.”⁵³ It is important to note that while pro-colonial writings often omitted information about indigenous peoples

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 118

⁵⁰ Salisbury, Neal. “The Indians’ Old World: Native Americans and the Coming of Europeans”. *The William and Mary Quarterly*. Third Series, Vol. 53, No. 3, *Indians and Others in Early America* (Jul. 1996) p. 435

⁵¹ Mancall, p. 39

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

throughout the Americas, there was a degree of awareness of their existence, but it was overshadowed by preoccupation with commercial and economic gain to be found through colonial development.

The New World before the arrival of Europeans was populated by a wide variety of Indian groups from the Micmacs in the Northeast to the Anasazis in the Southwest, and each was marked by distinct and wide-reaching cultural identities. While it was often acknowledged that Indian societies were “divided into at least two thousand cultures [that] practiced a multiplicity of customs, lifestyles” and beliefs, some suggested that these societies operated as isolated entities saying Indians “did not conceive of themselves as a single people-if they knew about each other at all.”⁵⁴ Neal Salisbury suggests that Indians did in fact have an awareness of societies beyond their immediate networks, and that interconnectedness with those neighboring communities existed and was central to their formation of cosmological and social order. Indian groups from the American Northeast to the Southwest participated in highly organized and systematized socio-political systems that included trade routes linking them across geographical distances.

Archaeological evidence has allowed historians to piece together a more inclusive and holistic representation of the American past in which Native American societies are included not in the margins of the British colonial experience but at its center, as independent entities that not only existed, but thrived, long before the arrival of the first British colonists to New England. Despite what Euro-centric views of colonialism might suggest, evidence shows material culture and trade among Native American societies was not introduced by Europeans but was imbedded in Indian cultures long before colonial settlements arrived. Excavations have found significant

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 437

stores of “Great Lakes copper, Rocky Mountain obsidian, and marine shells from the Gulf and Atlantic coasts...in sites hundreds and even thousands of miles away.”⁵⁵ This not only suggests that long-distance trade was being practiced before the arrival of Europeans but also shows that communication, exchange, and interaction among Indian communities was not limited by geographical distances. Understanding how interconnected and sophisticated Indian societies in New England were before contact provides the necessary background to better understand the colonial experiences of many in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Before the arrival of Europeans, Native American communities in New England practiced reciprocal trade and formed relationships and alliances based on the exchange of agricultural products, goods, and even people. It is a common misconception that trade was ignited with the arrival of Europeans and their novel goods. Native American communities in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were “deeply rooted in imperatives of reciprocity and exchange” as trade of goods like animal hides, semi-precious stones, metals, and other natural resources contributed to the solidification of some of the Northeast’s greatest alliances, including the Iroquois Confederacy.⁵⁶ This suggests that those Europeans who first engaged in trade with Indians upon their arrival to the New World were participating not in a new practice, but in one that had been a part of Native American societies for centuries.

As was made clear by the analysis of the works of Richard Hakluyt and his contemporaries, ideas of commerce and exchange were paramount in the minds of British capitalists and colonists who saw in the New World the opportunity for growth. Trade, the extraction of natural resources, and agricultural development played a great role in the growth of

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 438

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 449

the colonies, and in the conceptualizing and execution of settlement. Upon their arrival to the Americas, British settlers quickly discovered that notions of gain from exchange and of the potential for commercial relationships to secure political power were not inherently European; in fact, while earlier historical literature maintained that Native Americans were absorbed into British systems of trade and commerce, it is becoming increasingly apparent that “Indians as much as Europeans dictated the form and content of their exchanges.”⁵⁷ While the cultural divide between Britons and Indians was arguably great, economic and commercial exchange served, to a certain extent, as a unifying force; the commonality of material gain helped narrow the gap between each group in the first stages of settlement.

During the early 1600s, both Indians and Britons were aware of the differences between their own cultures and those that they were encountering. British preconceptions of Indian inferiority were fueled by Euro-centric ideas of Christian superiority. While not specific to the Northeast, the documentation of John Smith’s account of his time in what would become Virginia speaks to the delicate nature of Indian relations and how they informed British assessments of Indian communities. In his *True Relation*, Smith wrote that the Indians “treated them well...in exchange colonists offered pins, bells, beads, needles, and glass objects.”⁵⁸ Understandings of Indians by early colonists were formulated by *how* Indians served British interests. While there is record of an attack on the British fort at which Smith was residing, historians have understood his experience in early Virginia as reflective of broader realities saying, “Despite the hardships, Smith’s pamphlet also revealed that the surviving colonists had begun to learn how to manage in their new environment. He [Smith] frequently mentioned

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 454

⁵⁸ Mancall, p. 266

trading with locals for food.”⁵⁹ This case gives a glimpse of the emergence of colonial dependence on Native Americans for survival, and the importance of this dynamic will be furthered as discussion of trade and agriculture continues.

As Willcom E. Washburn has pointed out, “the idea of the ‘noble savage’ developed its greatest force when the white man was dependent on the Indian for his safety and sustenance.”⁶⁰ While it cannot be said that all colonists shared a mutual respect for Native Americans and their capacity, through trade, to aid in settler survival, it is clear that there was a “sense of trust earned from mutual respect” and that mutual respect was the result of positive trade relations between colonists and Indians.⁶¹ The cultural differences between Indians and Europeans were not fully obscured by positive trade relations, but exchange did, to a degree, bring a heightened sense of awareness by Indians and British about those with whom they were interacting.

While Indians recognized that Europeans were different from their own people, “they interacted with them and their materials in ways that were consistent with their own customs and beliefs.”⁶² This point is significant because it suggests a degree of agency among New England’s American communities within the colonial context. Trade narrowed the gap of unfamiliarity between Indians and European settlers. For the Indians of the Northeast coastal regions, the Europeans who arrived with their “facial hair and strange clothes and...strange boats” were initially perceived as supernatural beings, and the goods they brought were incidentally regarded as extraordinary as well.⁶³ Scholars present the trade dynamic between Indians and colonists as

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 267

⁶⁰ Washburn, Willcom E. “A Moral History of Indian-White Relations: Needs and Opportunities. *Ethnohistory*, Vol. 4, no.1 (Winter) pp. 47-61, Bloomington, America, from the Indian Ethnohistoric Conference.

⁶¹ Mancall, p. 268

⁶² Salisbury., p. 453

⁶³ Ibid.

one born out of mutual benefit and necessity, not from British acts of violent control or Indian impositions of traditional custom.

While the experience of being colonized by Europeans was unfamiliar, Indians dealt with it in the best manner they knew how; they carried their age-old customs of trade and exchange, social reciprocity, and alliances into the colonial setting to survive. The intersecting of Indian and European societies is often presented in discussion of conflict and war, but it is important to highlight that there were benefits to colonial exchange to both parties. Trade alliances ensured a measure of protection for Indians within the setting of early colonialism and allowed for the nurturing of reciprocal relationships that yielded both status and security. Through relations with Native Americans, Europeans secured themselves natural resources, social power, and knowledge about the environment that would likely not have been afforded them were the New World truly a vast, empty expanse. A more case-specific discussion of New England in the seventeenth century will reinforce how important trade and agriculture were in not only defining Indian relations with the British, but will reveal how knowledge of the environment contributed to success and stability in the colonies.

The interconnectedness of New England's Indian societies and their success at subsistence living was directly related to their ability to engage with the natural environment.⁶⁴ Indian communities in the Northeast were settled in regions where access to waterways was ideal for fishing, transportation, and irrigation. In more general terms, the availability of water and land for farming and hunting was a central part in the decision about where Indians would settle. The dependence of Native Americans on conditions in nature and the impermanent structure of their settlements which were given to relocation in times of scarcity, created vastly different

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 437

conceptions of the land and its ownership than those held by their European counterparts.⁶⁵

Native American communities in the Northeast were subject to the environmental conditions under which they carried out their hunting and farming needs. Their ability to survive and sustain periods of drought and other hardships was directly related to the community's flexibility and capacity to relocate. Not only was survival rooted in daily practice but it was connected to a higher order, one which existed in the spiritual realm.⁶⁶

The cosmological view of many Indian communities in the American Northeast and beyond was directly linked to their way of life. A brief discussion of the Eastern Algonquin Indians reveals the connection between spirituality and practices such as hunting. While members of Indian communities in the Northeast and Britons were all "avid consumers of animal protein...Indian and English hunters held profoundly different views about the nature of their relationship to prey animals."⁶⁷ Indian hunters were connected to the powers held in animal spirits and "treated prey with respect and performed rituals defined by reciprocity."⁶⁸ Unlike their European counterparts, Indians did not traditionally engage in sport hunting, believing that survival was the only justification to kill wildlife. A Native American at the close of the eighteenth century recalled that before the arrival of Europeans his community had not killed more animals than was required for survival, saying, "There was none to barter with them that would have tempted them to waste their animals, as they did after the...white people came on this island."⁶⁹ In this brief example reciprocity rises, once again, as a central theme in the Indian

⁶⁵ Cronon. p. 38

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Anderson, Virginia, DeJohn. *Creatures of Empire: How Domestic Animals Transformed Early America*. Oxford University Press, New York, 2004. P. 57-58

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 58

⁶⁹ Cronon, p. 98

custom and behavior. The inherently reciprocal nature of Indian relations was to greatly benefit colonial settlement and arguably contribute to British success in New England and beyond.

In Indian communities, hunting, farming, and the collections of natural resources not only promised to meet the needs of an individual and his family but also had the capacity to secure one's place in society and in the spiritual realm.⁷⁰ In trading, Indians not only showed they had more than enough to provide for their own community, but they established networks of allies within which trust and security could develop. By exchanging goods, Indian traders in New England understood that reciprocal acts of generosity were expected of them, and this ensured a degree of stability within networks of various Indian groups. Archaeological findings in the burial sites of Indian communities show the important role that goods, both handmade and acquired through trade, played in Indian societies and, in New England, Indians were often eager to trade with Europeans.⁷¹

In the early seventeenth century, Samuel Champlain was told by the leader of a group of Indians who were "eager for trade" that, "no greater good could come to them than to have our friendship."⁷² Trade was often beneficial to colonists and Indians and, as this instance suggests, relationships built on exchange were formed between Native Americans and colonists with the understanding that security and stability could be gained. New England traders like Bartholomew Gosnold acquired valuable goods from Indians including "the skins of beavers, otters, martens, foxes, rabbits, seals, and deer" in exchange for "trifles".⁷³ From the earliest moments of exploration and settlement in New England, Indian groups were ready and willing to trade with

⁷⁰ Salisbury, p. 452

⁷¹ Cronon, p. 84

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

Europeans, and, in appreciation of the value of goods that they received from Native American communities, Europeans displayed similar enthusiasm.

Before briefly entering into discussion of the discrepancies between British and Indian applications of the concepts of wealth and financial gain, the significance of such a gap in thinking must be clarified. For many, the apparent lack of motivation for commercial gain, as Europeans defined it, among Native American communities served as a reminder that European society was, in many ways, superior to colonized peoples. For John Locke, Indians had a perceived inability to “improve their land and so remained a people devoid of wealth and comfort.”⁷⁴ It will become clear that British understandings of the improvement of land were centered on property rights, enclosures, and the domestication of animals, but what is important to first note is the difference in Indian and European thoughts about wealth, which undoubtedly affected the nature of trade relations between the two groups. John Locke’s opinions were shaped by the dominant paradigms of the early colonial world in which dichotomies of the *familiar* and the *other* dictated European views about colonized people. There are shortcomings in Locke’s observation in that he “failed to notice that...Indians did not recognize themselves as poor. The endless accumulation of capital which he [Locke] saw as a natural consequence of human love for wealth made little sense to them [Native Americans].”⁷⁵ Given the apparent differences between European desires to trade and gain wealth and Indian practice, it is interesting to explore potential motivations for Indians to engage in trade with Europeans at all.

One might question what incentives encouraged Native Americans to engage in trade with Europeans. The answer, according to Neal Salisbury, is found in the study of pre-contact

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 79

⁷⁵ Ibid.

Indian practices. In the American Northeast objects like copper and shells maintained particular significance. Indians assigned each a degree of sanctity believing that certain items held spiritual powers that connected the individual and his community to the cosmos.⁷⁶ Through the exchange of such items, Indians created traditions of reciprocity and kinship that brought order both on earth and in the afterlife. In appreciation of the centrality of trade among Native American groups, it is only natural, then, that Europeans were enveloped in such practices when first setting foot on the soil of the New World. Glass beads, mirrors and other uniquely-European products were well received by Native Americans as they were similar to goods like quartz, seashells, and mica that were of long-standing spiritual importance to Indian communities before contact. For Native Americans, trade was the means by which “people maintained and extended their social, cultural and spiritual horizons.”⁷⁷

Notions of reciprocity were present in the earliest stages of trade relations between Native Americans and Europeans but were eventually diluted and even corrupted as colonial presences placed more demand on land. It is important to clarify that by the mid -seventeenth century the need for increased space for agriculture and settlement in the colonies pushed Native communities west and “indigenous exchange was giving way to one in which Native Americans had no certain place.”⁷⁸ This important fact led to some of America’s most brutal and bloody warfare, but within the context of the earliest moments of settlement the reciprocal trade relationships enjoyed by British settlers and Indians were the result of the interaction of each group more as equals than as a dominant and submissive party respectively.

⁷⁶ Salisbury., p. 452

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid. 458

Indian-made wampum, strings of beads, became of particular interest to British traders in the seventeenth century and positioned Native Americans at the center of exchange. For Europeans, wampum was the perfect vehicle through which trade could become commercialized- Britons equated wampum with currency and this allowed for the assignment of value to various goods.⁷⁹ Access to wampum secured access to trade for New England settlers with “Pequots, Mohegans, Narragansetts, and villages on long island” and, while previously a status symbol among Indian groups, wampum became equally important to English traders. In southern Massachusetts, Indians became powerful as wampum enabled them to acquire guns, posing a check to colonial expansion.⁸⁰ For Indians within the colonial setting, the ability to control wampum’s trade and distribution allowed them to impact markets of corn and fur which operated on the currency-like exchange of wampum.

While Indians and Britons engaged in trade with each other from different angles, they were united by emergent trends in the valuing of specific goods over others. British understandings of commodities and value were brought with them to the Americas. These concepts were “shaped by the social and ecological circumstances of Northern Europe, and so perceived New England as a landscape of great natural wealth.”⁸¹ In other words, the strains placed upon natural resources and the land in Europe by burgeoning populations were so great that the New World served as respite from the deprivation and scarcity in England. In fact, while fish, fur, and lumber were found in plenty in the American Northeast, Europeans assigned them extremely high values of importance because of their scarcity in England.⁸² While Native Americans had access to goods valued as commodities by Europeans prior to their arrival, once

⁷⁹ Cronon, p. 96

⁸⁰ Ibid. p. 96

⁸¹ Cronon. 168

⁸² Ibid., p. 168

Britons arrived, Indians went “out of their way to trap beaver and trade the skins for glass, beads, mirrors, copper kettles” and other British-made goods in the name of preserving reciprocity and positive relationships as they had done long before Britain made its claims in the New World.⁸³

While the same cannot be said of Britons, for Native Americans trade in traditional goods like shells and native copper dominated even after the entrance of British goods to the market suggesting that, contrary to popular belief, “trade did not suddenly trigger a massive craving for the [British] objects themselves.”⁸⁴

British colonists who first arrived to the New World were perplexed by the differences between Indian and European sensibilities concerning the consumption of resources and goods. For Britons, the stark contrast between England’s depleted landscape and the bounty of the colonies was clear upon witnessing the multitude of birds, fish and animal life present. One observer of fish migrations in Massachusetts wrote they “arrive in such multitudes as is almost incredible, pressing up such shallow waters as will scarce permit them to swim.”⁸⁵ John Smith wrote of the Virginia colonies, “nature and liberty affords us that freely which in *England* we want, or it costeth us dearly.”⁸⁶ The storing of surplus was of central concern to English colonists while, they observed, Indians had an “apparent refusal to store more than a small amount of the summer’s plenty for winter’s use.”⁸⁷ William Cronon has labeled this the “paradox of want in a land of plenty” in which English settlers observed the minimalistic habits of Indians despite the abundance of natural resources with which they were surrounded.⁸⁸ British observers often criticized Native American practices of enforced “starving times” in which food intake in the

⁸³ Salisbury., p. 452

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 452

⁸⁵ Cronon. p. 22

⁸⁶ Cronon, p. 37

⁸⁷ Ibid. p. 40

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 41

winter is decreased rather than working excessively hard in the summer to maintain a surplus but, in fact, Indians suffered periods of starvation far less often than their colonial counterparts.⁸⁹ The relatively low population densities of New England Indian groups allowed for minimal impact to be made on the environment and guaranteed periods of abundance in springtime which was “contributing to the overall stability of human relationships to the ecosystem.”⁹⁰ British understandings of wealth and stability, often measured in surplus and excess, were not mirrored in Indian communities. This led some Britons to criticize the practices of Native Americans as being unsophisticated or underdeveloped; however, Indians’ ability to survive the harsh New England winters as colonists struggled suggests otherwise.

The willingness of Indians to engage in trade was not directly tied to an inherent need or desire among their communities to possess the foreign and enticing goods that the British introduced. While the inclusion of goods like mirrors and glass beads in Indian burial sites does suggest interest in European goods, the continued dominance of Indian-produced items in Native American trade networks and grave sites suggests not only were Native Americans not completely overcome by the influx of European goods, but that they engaged in trade with the English to cement friendly relationships more than gain access to European commodities.⁹¹

In addition to appreciating the culture of Native American trade into which British colonists entered, the agricultural practices of the precontact New World are also a central topic of exploration in emergent historical study, a trend which this thesis further develops. It contributes to a better understanding of the dynamic at play between Indians and colonists concerning issues like land use, the growing of crops, and the raising of livestock. Upon their

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 94

first encounters with one another, Britons and Indians alike noticed starkly different trends in the way either group carried out agricultural development, and it was in the clashing of such practices that some of the most telling implications of colonialism on Native American communities in particular are seen.

The village was the primary economic and social system of organization for Indian society.⁹² This meant that economic dealings were carried out with the goal of supporting and caring for a demarcated group of people. A sense of responsibility to one's community made trade with other Indians and Europeans an appealing and necessary practice. It was within the context of the village that involvement with the natural world took place.⁹³ Village systems were fluid and not tied to specific areas of land. The decision about when and where Indians in New England would relocate was directly related to the seasons and the cyclical patterns of weather, precipitation, and the movement of animals that supplied food. In fact, communities were often impermanent and relocated to areas in which they could anticipate the greatest supply of food; the success of Indian villages in this region depended upon their social structure that allowed them physical mobility.⁹⁴ To British settlers who arrived in New England in the seventeenth century, the contrast between traditional practices in Europe and those in place among Native American settlements was both interesting and problematic.

Europeans who first encountered Indian populations in present-day Massachusetts and the surrounding areas failed to understand the nature of such a system and often interpreted it as being disorderly and chaotic. Samuel de Champlain noted of Indian agriculture, "with the corn they put in each hill three or four Brazilian beans...they interlace with the corn....we saw there

⁹²Ibid p. 38.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid. 38

many squashes, and pumpkins, and tobacco, which they likewise cultivate.”⁹⁵ While monoculture, in which a plot of land is planted with one type of crop, was the standard practice in England, in the Americas it was more common to find a variety of crops growing in a single area. It was observed by individuals such as John Winthrop, Jr., that Native Americans in New England had a habit of “loading the Ground with as much as it will beare and Indians often planted multiple varieties of crops within the same area of land.”⁹⁶ This practice was beneficial in that it decreased the capacity of weeds to grow, preserved soil moisture levels, and contributed to greater diversity in dietary health, but it appeared, in the eyes of British onlookers, as disorganized and primitive.

British paradigms during the early-colonial period held that European culture and practice were superior to all others. This was to be challenged by the colonial system in America. Upon their arrivals to New England, British colonists faced environmental and social hardships that threatened not only their survival but also challenged the supremacy of the British way of life in the context of an unfamiliar land. For the first few years of settlement in New England, “before European subsistence patterns had been reproduced, colonists found themselves forced to rely either on what little they had brought with them or on what New England’s inhabitants...were willing to provide.”⁹⁷ Colonists entered into the pre-existing and substantial socio-economic systems that Indian communities had established. Success in agricultural practice and trade was to emerge from the interplay between British individuals and Native Americans. While there were numerous factors that contributed to the permanent and successful establishment of British settler communities in the New World, the exchange between Indians

⁹⁵ Ibid. p. 43

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 36

and colonists was one of the primary forces that contributed to colonial success. This serves as reason to explore Native American history in the moments before colonialism as well as during its foundations to better understand just how central Indians were in the early experience of colonists in America.

Contemporary scholars are becoming increasingly critical of the once-popular view that presented Native Americans more as subjects of colonial rule rather than as active participants in history. Previously scholars studied the past through a lens that was tightly focused on what colonialism meant for colonists. This type of approach often left Indians out of the scenario. Current work in this area calls “into question historians’ synchronic maps and verbal descriptions of pre-contact Indians- their cultures, their communities, their ethnic and political designations and affiliations, and their relations with one another” and seeks to expand this period in American history from its formerly-myopic state to a more inclusive and equal representation.⁹⁸ American history was not “set in motion by the arrival of European explorers” and that for Indian groups, colonialism was not an endpoint but rather a single, shaping moment along a chronology that began long before European settlement and which continued long after.⁹⁹

From the first days of settlements in New England in the seventeenth century, British colonists observed the agricultural practices of Native Americans and formulated their perceptions of the Indians they encountered according to what they saw. Many colonists took note of the gendered nature of agricultural work among Indian villages. It can be said that for many colonists, “only Indian women appeared to do legitimate work; the men idled away their

⁹⁸ Salisbury., p. 436

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 435

time in hunting, fishing, and wantonly burning the woods.”¹⁰⁰ Just as Locke had perceived native populations as incapable of enjoying wealth or comfort, British colonists in New England were puzzled by the seemingly disproportionate amount of work that women performed in Indian communities.¹⁰¹ Beyond the sphere of many European societies in which commercial enterprise, including agricultural practice, was dominated by men, women played central roles in the growing and harvesting of food. One English observer noted, “It is almost incredible...what burthens the poore women carry of *Corne, of Fish, of Beanes*...and a childe besides.”¹⁰² Indian women in New England assumed much responsibility for agriculture and domestic duties while men engaged in hunting and defensive practices but for Europeans this was unsettling and suggested a disorder and imbalance in the hierarchy of Indian society. This detail, however particular, signifies a broader trend among European observers of Indian practice. What deviated from the norm, as established by time-tested practice in Europe, was seen as backward, disordered, or even chaotic.

Societal and environmental realities impacted agriculture for Native Americans and British settlers alike and were not at all suggestive of superiority or inferiority in practice. Both Britons and Indians were subject to weather patterns and cyclical rotations of precipitation and drought. Both groups planted in “late March, April and also March...[and] killed large game in December” and colonial and Indian successes in either agriculture or hunting were subject to the availability of wild game, the right amount of rain, and the conditions of the soil. Survival in the New World boiled down to the meeting of similar conditions for both Indians and colonists but it

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 52

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

was contributions by Native Americans that allowed for colonial settlement in the seventeenth century to move from a place of precarious survival to one of security.

Contributions by recent scholarship not only call into question the way in which history portrays Native Americans, but it is becoming increasingly important to present Indian communities as entities existing beyond the shadow of colonialism and of European actions. The contributions of scholars like Neal Salisbury and William Cronon have brought clarity to areas of study that once obscured the agency of Indian groups in their engagement with the natural environment as well as with Europeans. Work highlighting the interplay between European and Indian practices has raised Indians to a level of new importance, and the next chapter will pick up where such historical study has left off. It is of interest to question not only to what extent European practices influenced Indian behaviors but also to show the extent to which British settlers absorbed Indian practice. The next chapter will further address the centrality of Indians in colonial America's history by reimagining an America without Indian communities, a method set forth in historian James Axtell's work on colonialism in the New World. His contributions to this area of historical study, through the employment of "counterfactual study," will serve as the taking-off point from which the argument will follow. This creative application of academic study will question how stable colonial development in New England would have been were the New World empty as was once promised.

Chapter Three

The Empty Continent: Exploring the Capacity of New England Colonies to Survive without Native Americans

Indians in America have been “one of the principle determinants of historical events,” but historians have only recently begun to highlight how central Native Americans were in the early colonial experience.¹⁰³ Presented as either “victims or obstacles, Indians [had] no textbook existence” beyond how they suffered under colonial development or hindered the expansion of settlement; historical study is only recently breaking away from the confines of such thought as scholars are expressing greater interest in and appreciation for the contributions of Indians to early American history.¹⁰⁴ Trade and agricultural exchange with Indians bolstered the New England colonies from their foundations. While scholars are increasingly in agreement that in “seventeenth...century Anglo-America, the adaptive changes whites made in response to their contacts with Indians significantly shaped agriculture, transport and economic life,” there has been little discourse about what colonial development would have been like if America were the untouched and unpopulated expanse that pro-colonial rhetoric often presented. This chapter will explore how central Indians were in the formative stages of colonial development in New England by calling into question whether or not colonialism could have been sustained were America the empty land Europeans had long idealized.

In approaching this subject, there are several vehicles through which a better understanding of the influence Native American populations had on settlement can be reached. Through examining focused examples of trade and agricultural exchanges between British colonists and Native Americans in New England, the argument that Indians were important to the foundations of colonialism can be made; however, scholarly discourse has presented another, perhaps less traditional method of counterfactual study that will also be employed in this chapter.

¹⁰³ Devoto, Bernard. “Preface in Joseph Kinsey Howard’s *Strange Empire: A Narrative of the Northwest*. New York, 1952, p. 8-9

¹⁰⁴ Vogel, Virgil J. *The Indian in American History*, Chicago, 1968

By imagining the early New England landscape without Indians, their significant role can be better appreciated. As James Axtell has articulated, such a creative practice requires “historical control, not the free flight of fancy.”¹⁰⁵ Allowing analysis of the past to get swept away by “what might have been” could land the argument in a “speculative quagmire” where all the social, economic, political and cultural variables of British colonies in the barren America could have developed in numerous, and equally unverifiable ways.¹⁰⁶ Keeping closely to the events of the past and at “selected points imaginatively removing Indians from the picture” allows for a more authentic study and limits the “opportunity for conjectural mayhem.”¹⁰⁷ While there is no way to say definitively how the colonial past would have differed without Native Americans, creative applications within the context of an historical framework serves in the interest of uncovering Indian communities’ central roles in establishing colonial stability. Coupling this with further discussion of the factual events of the past will provide a well-rounded and multidimensional look at this formative period in the colonial experience in New England.

The use of counterfactual information to better understand the past is not a device first employed in this chapter, but rather it has been used by historians in various fields of study, including within the Colonial American context. This chapter will push this method a step beyond its traditional application. The removal of Indians from the dynamics at play during the early seventeenth-century settlements in New England will reveal not only how important Indians were in colonial development but question the capacity of British colonists to succeed had they arrived to an empty land. In exercising control and restraint, and working within, not beyond, the scope of what history has presented, the “counterfactual” can breathe new life into historical analysis of this period. The intent is to not only to show what might have been different in the colonies without Indians but to suggest that the differences would not necessarily be to the benefit of colonists. This approach will continue in the tradition set forth by previous scholars by presenting Native Americans as equal and important players in America’s history.

¹⁰⁵ Axtell, James. “Colonial America without the Indians: Counterfactual Reflections”. *The Journal of American History*, Volume 73, Issue 4 (March, 1987). P. 983

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

The main motivations for Britain to first explore and eventually colonize the New World were to gain economic and commercial control and prosperity. The presence of Native Americans was arguably not an incentive for most British colonists, excluding Christian evangelizers seeking to convert non-Christians, to make the grueling trans-Atlantic journey. As James Axtell argues, if America was truly unpopulated, “sooner or later, the English would have established colonies in America as a safety valve for the felt pressures of population growth and economic reorganization.”¹⁰⁸ Without Native Americans British colonists would likely have attempted colonization in the New World; however, the experience of colonists arriving to the open and empty New World would have been arguably more difficult and undeniably different.

In an uninhabited New World, colonists would have experienced competition for land in a very different way than was experienced in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. There would have been no pre-existing communities to come into contact with. Colonists would not have displaced hundreds of thousands of people or subjected them to “catastrophic decline, by as much as 90 percent, through warfare, injustice, forced migrations, and epidemics of imported diseases- the widowing of the once-virgin land, as Francis Jennings” astutely called it, would not have taken place.¹⁰⁹

Colonial settlements were often established on lands left empty by Indian communities who declined in numbers due to exposure to European diseases.¹¹⁰ According to William Cronon, “Indian depopulation as a result of European diseases ironically made it easier for Europeans to justify taking Indians lands.”¹¹¹ John Winthrop believed that British expansion into Indian lands was ordained by a higher order, saying that God “hath hereby cleared [their] title to this place” and the visible reduction of Indian populations, by disease, furthered sentiments of entitlement to the land in the minds of many

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 986

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 989

¹¹⁰ Cronon, p. 90

¹¹¹ Ibid.

colonists.¹¹² The colony at Plymouth was established “where there [was] a great deale of Lande cleared, and hath been planted with Corne three or foure years agoe.”¹¹³ In Plymouth, Indian populations decreased by significant numbers following an epidemic in 1616; disease left land that had been readied for agriculture by Indians in the hands of eager British colonists.¹¹⁴ Without efforts made by Indians within their own communities, through the clearing of land and the preparation of fields for agriculture and irrigation more labor and preparation would have been required in establishing settlements.

The devastating effects of disease on Indian populations throughout the Americas has been one of the most lasting legacies of the colonial period because it decimated Native American communities and weakened their social and economic systems in drastic ways. The introduction of European diseases to the colonies in New England “was instrumental in disrupting the Indians’ ...systems so as to encourage their participation in...trade” and, additionally, the spread of disease cleared the land of Indian settlements “facilitating its conquest by European settlers.”¹¹⁵ Disease threatened the stability of Indian trade networks and agricultural systems and simultaneously enabled Europeans to expand into former Indian territories.

It is interesting to note that Indians, even in their absence, affected settlement. Colonists appreciated that lands formerly inhabited by Indians were more conducive to agriculture and settlement. William Wood noted “where the Indians died of the plague” land was overgrown with “much underwood because it had not been burned.”¹¹⁶ To a certain extent colonists in parts of New England did encounter an empty New World because of the impact of disease. As William Cronon asserts, when provided with the opportunity to settle lands once inhabited by Indians, colonists would take it. He writes that “over and over again, New England towns made their first settlements on the sites of destroyed Indian villages” to

¹¹² Ibid., p. 90

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 161

¹¹⁶ Ibid. p. 90

benefit from the cleared land and open spaces created by Indians.¹¹⁷ If the New World were truly uninhabited colonial history would not have a legacy in which Britons in New England are associated with the eventual decimation of Indian communities.

If America were unpopulated, the course of its history would not be so visibly marked by the inhumane treatment of Indians, the establishment of reservations, and the deliberate disenfranchisement of native groups that were present in the nineteenth and twentieth century. It is not the intent of this chapter in any way to diminish or disregard the amount of suffering and injustices endured by Indian groups in the year when the colonies grew into the America we know today, but rather to capture moments at the beginning of colonial settlement in which Indians actively participated in their history and impacted British colonists in significant ways.

Without Native Americans British the nature of British claims to land would have been different. In the seventeenth century, land ownership in New England was derived from either “purchases from Indians or grants from the English Crown [in which] the latter tended to quickly absorb the former.”¹¹⁸ The “failure of Indians to adequately subdue the soil” according to Biblical prescription” justified, for many, British expansion into Indian territory.”¹¹⁹ With the exception of some colonies in parts of Plymouth which purchased land from Indians, the majority of land acquisitions in early New England were the result of British ordinances placing the Crown as superior to all other claims, including those made by Native Americans.¹²⁰

It was often difficult for colonies to regulate the purchase of Indian territories and in the early years of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, the General Court ordered that “noe person whatsoever shall buy any land of any Indean without leave of from the Court.”¹²¹ This regulation was put into place to check

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, p. 69

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 70

the power of Indians because the ability to sell land would provide them a degree of sovereignty and agency in the face of colonial assertions of control; the capacity of Indians to exert control over their land directly threatened colonial expansion.¹²² While British appropriations of land worked around the presence of Indians, either through purchase or the process of forced removal that would become increasingly common in the eighteenth century, it is clear that without Native Americans, there would be little checks to the power of Britons to acquire land and lay claim in the New World.

In the imagined, uninhabited New World the notion of the “frontier,” long romanticized in the writings of nineteenth-century historian and theorist Frederick Jackson Turner, would not have come to be.¹²³ As James Axtell has asserted,

The movement of one people into an uninhabited land is merely exploration or settlement....without viable Indian societies, colonial America would have more nearly resembled [a frontier] in which Indians are treated more as geographical features than as sociological teachers.¹²⁴

The colliding of European and Indian cultures established distinct boundaries, both culturally and geographically, in the minds of colonists; these boundaries formed early understandings of the American frontier. From European accounts of contact with Indians it is clear that the formation of the British colonial identity was shaped, in large part, by comparisons made between European society and Native American ways of life. Observations of Native American dress, religious practice, agricultural development, and trade behaviors contributed not only to the formation of British colonial understandings of Indians but also nurtured the emergent colonial British identity.

In their observed close connection to nature, Indians were sometimes seen as the “most gentle, loving, and faithful” uncorrupted human component of the natural world.¹²⁵ This being said, other accounts were not as benign. John Locke saw Indians as a people “whom Nature having furnished as

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Mancall 161

liberally as any other people....yet for want of improving it by labour, have not one hundredth part of the Conveniences we enjoy;....[in the New World] there feeds, lodges, and is clad worse than any day Labourer in *England*.”¹²⁶ For Locke, and those sharing his sensibilities, Indians were provided with all the bounties of nature and because of their perceived incapacity to tame the land, were, in contrast to the English, idle and backward.

Britons often formulated their own identities in how they differed from the observed practices and traits of Indians. The frontier became a land beyond the familiar colony in which Indians and their unfamiliar ways of life existed. Without the presence of Indians in the New World the formation of a colonial identity would likely have been more deeply connected to British norms as established in England and would not have emerged through comparison with Native American culture. Relations with Indians not only contributed to the development of British colonial economics and material culture but led to the development of a distinct colonial- American identity. Britons in America established how they were different from Indians as well as what made them different from Englishmen abroad, and this, in turn, dictated the nature of Indian relations in centuries to follow as the American identity emerged.

How colonists engaged with the land in the New World is of great interest both in the context of the historical record and in the imagining of the counterfactual past. Through a detailed discussion of various elements of agriculture a better appreciation of the shaping role of Indians in the colonial setting can be achieved. Euro-centric paradigms have often associated British colonists with advancements in agriculture that contributed to sustainability. It is important to note that practices such as irrigation, fertilizing, and clearing were carried out in America long before the arrival of the British. It is said that, “in clearing land for planting and thus concentrating the food base, southern [Massachusetts] Indians were taking a most important step in reshaping and manipulating the ecosystem.”¹²⁷ Indians actively engaged in

¹²⁶ Cronon, P. 79

¹²⁷ Ibid. p. 48

their environmental settings and were not so much subjects of nature, or even parts of nature, as sixteenth and seventeenth century thought had suggested.

Clearing that prepared fields for planting contributed greatly to the agricultural stability of Indian communities. Women, the main actors in Indian agriculture in Massachusetts, burned trees and created rich soil amid the “leafless skeletons that were left” in which corn, a staple, could be grown.¹²⁸ While soil exhaustion was sometimes the result of the reuse of fields for upwards of ten to twelve years, the planting of various types of beans allowed for nitrogen levels to be controlled and this maintained the soil for longer periods of time than the British practice of monoculture. Certain agricultural practices of Indians proved more environmentally sustainable than those employed by Britons and were thus incorporated into colonial practice over time. As later discussion will show, the introduction of corn, by Indians, into the colonial agricultural system of New England proved central to the stability of the region.

Trade and export of domestic goods like lumber and fur to European markets allowed colonies in New England to become financially stable. Without Native Americans, the establishment of such markets would have been delayed as agriculture would have been the initial method of survival for British colonists.¹²⁹ Without Indians with whom colonists could trade, agriculture would not have developed beyond the scope of “family subsistence” or small-scale market economies within the colonial setting itself; the ability of colonists to trade with Indians allowed for an increase in markets that could accommodate larger volumes of agricultural production.¹³⁰ Additionally, Britons who struggled to adapt “traditional European cereal crops to the American climate and soils” in the first years of settlement in New England used trade with Indians as a means of survival.¹³¹

Without Indians the establishment of farmland would have taken a lot more labor and efforts by British colonists. Without the “meadows and park-like woods produced by seasonal Indian burning, and

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ James Axtell, 988

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid. p, 989

especially without the cleared expanses of Indian corn fields and village sites” agriculture in New England would have taken a longer amount of time to develop.¹³² By exchanging cloth items, glassware, mirrors, and livestock, colonists were able to acquire Indian lands that had already been prepared for agriculture, and this greatly decreased the amount of time and labor required for colonial farming. While Indian clearing was carried out with the purpose of benefitting Indian society, it unknowingly prepared the land for British colonists to more successfully grow crops.

One of the most influential crops in British colonial history, corn, would not have been harvested in North America were there no Indian communities. In 1630 Englishman Francis Higginson announced that in New England grains familiar to those in Britain grew “verie well” and William Wood, a colonist in Plymouth, shared his opinion claiming that wheat would “grow as well as any other grain” in no time at all.¹³³ These optimistic opinions were challenged as environmental conditions like poor rainfall and harsh winters challenged the success of the wheat crop. However precarious the position of early grain farming in New England was in the 1630s, the 1640s were marked by natural disasters taking agriculture in Plymouth to a heightened level of instability. When caterpillars “ate their way through ripening stalks... [that] withered the leaves of wheat plants before the grain had matured” crops barely survived.¹³⁴ A fungus was brought to the New World aboard colonial ships and was carried on plants transported from England that threatened the security of wheat crop. Wheat would not prove to be a viable source of food or income until later in the century and British colonists in Massachusetts were forced to look elsewhere for an agricultural staple.¹³⁵ Corn proved to be a hardy and dependable match for the climate and geography of much of New England.

Indians in New England had been cultivating corn for centuries before the first British settlements of the early 1600s were established. Colonists learned from Indians how to grow the crop, and it proved

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Virginian DeJohn Anderson, p. 144

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

invaluable to colonial stability. Not only did corn provide a source of food, for both settlers and their livestock, but it served as “legal tender for payments of debts and taxes.”¹³⁶ While corn was quickly commoditized in the colonies, the demand for it abroad remained relatively low through the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. It was seen as “peasant fare” abroad and because of this colonists often produced corn in quantities meeting only the needs of the small-scale community.¹³⁷ Corn entered into the British colonial sphere not as a cash crop to be traded abroad but as a basic ingredient for survival. Without Native Americans, the colonists of New England would not have been exposed to corn and would likely have struggled to find a crop as dependable. Wheat was eventually stabilized in New England but “did not serve New England farmers nearly so well.”¹³⁸

In the unpopulated version of the New World, corn would not have been available for colonial farmers. The contribution of corn to colonial societies in New England was one of the greatest factors in stabilizing settlement. Francis Higginson, a Puritan minister in New England, said that “Little children here by setting of Corne...may earne much more than their own maintenance.”¹³⁹ Not only was corn used in the preparation of various foods, but it fed livestock, and allowed “most colonists to produce enough to meet family needs on farms large enough to sustain their economic independence, preferably into the next generation.”¹⁴⁰

Over the centuries before colonial development first took root in America, Indians had gradually adopted Mexican strains of corn to survive in the cooler and more humid climate of the Northeast.¹⁴¹ It took British colonists several years to adapt various grain crops to the climate and soil of New England and corn met the needs of British communities in the meantime. Corn was so important to colonial

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Axtell, p. 988

stability that without it, British colonial expansion westward would have been greatly challenged.¹⁴²

Indian allies to colonists taught them how to properly farm corn and set into place traditions of “hilling, fertilizing by annual burning, and co-planting with...beans” that colonists would employ.¹⁴³ Native Americans and their contribution of corn to colonial agriculture were central in the agricultural stability of New England colonies in the seventeenth century.

Without Native Americans, the face of trade in the colonies would have appeared drastically different. The colonies in Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and the Carolinas acquired a good deal of their profits from trading in fur and other goods.¹⁴⁴ In the early eighteenth century, upwards of fifty percent of New York and Pennsylvania’s exports to England were the products garnered through Indian exchange.¹⁴⁵ Without Indians, the fur trade would not have been possible. William Cronon writes, “in order for the English to exploit beavers and other furbearers, it was essential that they have the willing cooperation of Indian partners...the very hunting skills which English observers regarded as “laziness” in Indian” hunters made them skillful in ways that the English could not amount to alone.¹⁴⁶ Colonist William Wood said of beavers, “these beasts are too cunning for the English, who seldom or never catch any of them; therefore we leave them to those skillful hunters [Indian males] whose time is not so precious.”¹⁴⁷ The time of British colonists was not better employed or more valuable than that of the Indians but rather Indian techniques in hunting were far more efficient. Indians were familiar with the landscape, and knew where and when to hunt, and this familiarity gave them an edge over the first colonists. For British colonists to secure the aid of Indians in the hunting of beaver, they needed to present Indians with goods they desired in exchange for their expertise.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 989

¹⁴³ Ibid., p. 988

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 989

¹⁴⁵ William Cronon, p. 92

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ William Cronon, p. 92

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

Some early settlers were aware of the existing networks of trade among Indian groups in New England. Roger Williams said, “Amongst themselves...they trade their Corne, skins, Coates, Venison, Fish, etc” and it was into these networks that colonists entered.¹⁴⁹ Colonists needed to secure themselves positions among these trade systems and according to Williams, patriarch of one of America’s “first families,” colonial traders would “beate all markets and try all places, and runne twenty thirty, yea forty mile and more, and lodge in the Woods” to trade with Indians who were becoming increasingly shrewd in the competitive colonial market.¹⁵⁰ Indians became more selective about their terms of trade as they became aware of their power over colonists; withholding of assistance in hunting or of goods in trade allowed Indians to dictate their terms of trade and what gains would be enjoyed from such trade. The control of wampum production mentioned in the previous chapter is just one example of several in which Indians had control over English access to goods. British colonists needed access to Indian trade to sustain successful settlements and agriculture. As the seventeenth century unfolded, colonists and Indians became increasingly aware of the delicate nature of such relationships, and shifts in power and control were directly linked to either group’s ability to control and affect trade. Without Indian communities, colonists would have struggled to establish trade with English markets, and colonial economies potentially would have developed at a much slower rate than was witnessed in parts of the Northeast including New York, Pennsylvania, and Massachusetts.

William Bradford, governor of the colony at Plymouth, was sensitive to the precarious position of colonists amid the networks of Indian trade. The ability to secure trade alliances with Indians was the difference between success and failure for colonies, and Bradford, noting this, wrote a poem further articulating British anxiety concerning trade:

But now they know their advantage so well,
And will not stick, to some, the same to tell,
That now they can, when they please or will,

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 96

The English drive away, or else them kill¹⁵¹

Bradford's poem speaks to the central role of Indians in colonial trade in New England. Without the Indians, trade would not have developed to the degree it did during the seventeenth century. For Bradford the power dynamic between colonists and Indians had shifted as a result of trade so that Indians were in a position of control within the colonial setting. While not all colonists experienced the anxieties reflected in Bradford's poem, colonial awareness about the impact of Indians on British settlement increased as trade networks between colonists and Native Americans expanded. The financial framework established in the colonies by trade with Indians paved the way for colonies in the Northeast to gain wealth. James Axtell claims that were it not for the planting of corn and trade in fur, the colonies would not "have begun to accumulate wealth *so* soon in the form of ships, slaves, rice, tobacco, or real estate."¹⁵²

While Puritanical sensibilities often criticized Indians as being "savages," the needs of English colonists meant that perceptions of Indians as either "noble" or "ignoble" depended on the social, economic and agricultural circumstances of English communities.¹⁵³ On the frontier of settlement, colonists often incorporated elements of Indian practices and culture when it proved advantageous; whether through adopting Indian ways of dress, of hunting, of farming, or of defense, colonists did not *become* Indians as many in the colonies had feared. Instead, colonists who incorporated Indian practices to survive contextualized the process within the broader scheme of necessity. Without Indians from which to learn, trade and farming would have been much more difficult for colonists to establish in the New World.¹⁵⁴

Indian contributions to colonial stability extended beyond the areas of farming and trade and forever shaped settlement. Native Americans who were familiar with the terrain of New England proved

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p. 97

¹⁵² James Axtell p. 989

¹⁵³ Ibid, p. 993

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

indispensible to the first settlers as guides.¹⁵⁵ The earliest visitors to New England rarely journeyed beyond points of easy access to the coast and “for many years, the only New England known to Europe was near salt water.”¹⁵⁶ Indians cleared land and forged paths to the interior. Even before the arrival of Europeans, southern Massachusetts was relatively open as the result of Indian burning practices, and this made farming and the movement of goods easier for colonists. The dense forests of Massachusetts were made more manageable by the actions taken by Indians before European arrival. William Wood observed the practice of burning saying the fire,

consumes all the underwood and rubbish which otherwise would overgrow the country, making it unpassable, and spoil their much affected hunting...In those places where Indians inhabit...there is scarce a bush or bramble or an cumbersome underwood to be seen in the more champion ground.¹⁵⁷

Indian practices of burning and clearing made the landscape of parts of New England much more manageable than it would have been were Indians never to have populated the Americas. Indians and their trade networks, agricultural practices and social systems paved the way for colonial development to succeed.

Scholars such as Neal Salisbury and James Axtell discourage historical study of this period from getting bogged down in the lasting impacts of Indian culture on material culture and linguistic traditions, believing that a focus on such examples “restrict discussion to a narrow range of additions to contemporary American “life” (i.e., material culture) rather than opening it up to the cultural and social fullness of American *history*.”¹⁵⁸ While the impact of Indians on colonial life in New England cannot be restricted to material culture, it is true that without the contributions of such items like moccasins, allowing colonists to traverse the rocky terrain and snow, tomahawks, for hunting and warfare, the canoe,

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ William Cronon, p. 19

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 49-50

¹⁵⁸ James Axtell, 982

for navigating the interior of the Northeast, and other Indian-made goods, British transplantation in America would have suffered.¹⁵⁹

Hunting in colonial New England would have been more of a challenge was it not for Indian contributions to British methods. Without Indians colonists may have continued to hunt with rifles whose “unsmoked glint of their musket barrels frightened the game” and would potentially have continued to wear “gaudy colors and torn English garments” while patrolling the woods for game.¹⁶⁰ Indian hunting practices were adopted by colonists and proved highly beneficial. Indians often “snared [game] with traps especially designed to capture specific species...[or] game [was] run between specially planted hedges more than a mile in length until it was finally driven onto weapons of waiting hunters.”¹⁶¹ Indian traditions and understandings of the land, animals, and geography of New England afforded them more prowess than hunters arriving from Britain and it was in the exchange of Indian practices that Britons were able to adjust to the unfamiliar conditions of hunting in New England. Colonists’ who adopted the use of snow shoes and sleds were able to hunt throughout the winter months and thus further ensure survival through the harsh New England winters. Indian approaches to farming and hunting proved better suited to the conditions of New England than those employed by Europeans abroad and for this reason Englishmen in the New World adopted them.

The intent of this chapter is not to restrict the role of Indians in the colonial past strictly to areas of trade and agriculture because their impact was more far reaching. Indian culture served as a “crucial point of reference” from which colonial societies came to understand themselves first as British citizens living in a foreign land and eventually as a distinctly American population in a distinctly- different land. Michael Zuckerman writes that settlers were “especially inclined to discover attributes in savages”...that

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 994

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Cronon, p. 47

made them different from themselves.”¹⁶² Communal identities are often formed by cultural comparison but, as James Axtell says, “the English colonists forged their particular American identity on an Indian anvil” more than on any other; the presence of Indians in America challenged the transplanted British culture and led to the formation of the American identity.

This point in some ways falls into the same trap that earlier scholarship did in that it explains the significance of Indian culture in what it meant to colonial activity and how Indian behaviors contributed to the establishment of a unique colonial identity in America. However, were it not for the advanced, dynamic, and organized nature of much of Indian life in New England, Indians would likely not be increasingly regarded as agents of change and progress but rather in the older and unfavorable position as victims of and obstacles to colonial expansion. The presence of diverse and vibrant communities in the New World challenged British understandings of cultural superiority and progress. John Locke, in the *Two Treatises of Government*, wrote that “In the beginning...all the world was America” only to progress by the civilizing capacities of commerce and the accumulation of wealth.¹⁶³ While Locke’s opinions were mirrored by others in the seventeenth century, the dynamics at play in the early colonial setting of New England challenged such views. However primitive and uncivilized stereotypes in the seventeenth century presented Indians to be, colonists needed Indians in the earliest days of settlement to survive in New England. As this chapter has shown, trade, agriculture, and economic stability in the colonies required contributions by Indians and this fact alone, raises Indians to a level of importance former scholarship had not established.

The purpose of this chapter was not to assert with authority that colonial America could not have succeeded without Native Americans but rather to suggest that colonial settlement would have been more of a challenge without the advancements enabled by Indian practices in trade and agriculture. To extend

¹⁶² Zuckerman, Michael, “The Fabrication of Identity in Early America,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 34 (April, 1977), 183-214, esp. 204

¹⁶³ Cronon, p. 78

the argument much beyond this would be to tiptoe along the fine line between historically-based conjectures and the “free flight of fancy” that James Axtell warned against. What emerges definitively from this discussion, however, is that the colonial story cannot be told without Native Americans. However consumed pro-colonial rhetoric might have been by the myth of the empty continent, in reality the New World proved to be far from unpopulated, and it was in the engagement with Indian communities in the first years of settlement that the colonies in New England were able to succeed.

Despite information in colonial-era rhetoric that suggested the New World was open and ready for colonization, there were Indian communities who had been engaging with the natural environment long before the arrival of Europeans. While the devastating effects of Anglo-Indian relations, primarily concerning disease, must not be overlooked or diminished it is true that Indian contributions to colonial practices in trade and agriculture allowed for the colonies in New England to survive the earliest years of settlement. Through discussing historical facts of this period, and the challenges that colonists would have been presented in the absence of Indians, it is increasingly clear that Native Americans played central roles in the stability of New England’s colonies. Whether in the introduction of corn to agricultural practice, or in the clearing of agricultural lands and farming plots, Indian involvement with the environment made British settlement in America sustainable.

Concluding Thoughts on the Nature of Anglo-Indian Relations in the America Colonies

The intent of this thesis is to suggest a heightened degree of importance of Native Americans in the scheme of early colonial history. Through a discussion of the pro-colonial propaganda and writings by Richard Hakluyt and others, it became apparent that the New World was a land unto which the personal aspirations and commercial goals of Britons were projected. It is also clear that the New World that the first colonists experienced was vastly different from that promised in the texts. Arguably the most important difference between the two versions of the New World, the idealized and the realized, was the presence of Native Americans. While Britons in the sixteenth century had heard of indigenous peoples living across the sea, their existence was underplayed in pro-colonial rhetoric with the intent of preserving the image of the empty continent to encourage settlement. Through interacting with Native American communities, settlers in the New England region were able to close the gap between the New World they anticipated and that which they found in reality.

This thesis has continued in the traditions set forth by scholars Neal Salisbury, James Axtell, Virginia DeJohn Anderson, and their contemporaries, who have dispelled any former notions that America's social, political, economic, and environmental history began with the arrival of Europeans to the New World. Instead, it is now clear that Europeans arrived to a dynamic and vibrant system of Native American communities in which trade and agricultural exchange flourished. Europeans participated in long-standing traditions of reciprocity, as established by Indian customs, as a means of achieving economic and social stability amid the uncertainty of early life in New England.

In exploring not only the historical record of New England in the seventeenth century but also creatively imagining elements of its past without contributions from Indians, one can come to appreciate just how central they were in the formation of not only the economic stability of New England, but in the formation of a distinctive colonial American identity. James Axtell writes that not only would have trade and farming struggled in New England without Indians, but, he says, “More generally, the Anglo-Americans’ definition of themselves would have lacked a crucial point of reference.”¹⁶⁴ To represent British colonial history as a history removed from the experiences of Native Americans would be to discredit and discount the influence of Indians on many dimensions of life in New England.

As had been discussed, scholarship is moving away from paradigms that diminished Native Americans as obstacles to settlement or threats to colonial security, and they are now becoming increasingly appreciated beyond this scope. It was not the intent of this thesis to present an image of the New World in the first moments of colonization in which Indians and colonists lived in a utopian society of peace, cooperation, and reciprocity, but rather to assert that, contrary to images of colonial warfare, violence, and anxiety expressed by settlers, trade and agricultural exchange brought colonists and Indians to a level of equal importance and interdependence in the earliest days of settlement in New England. The legacy of violence and oppression that came to dominate much of Anglo-Indian relations in the latter portion of the seventeenth century and beyond resulted from British expansion deeper into the American interior. Economic growth and accumulation of wealth and resources meant that colonists no longer need to include Indians in their socio-economic system as a means of survival as the seventeenth century came to a close.

¹⁶⁴ Axtell, p. 994

As the populations and sizes of colonies in the Northeast grew, greater pressures were put on the land and this led many to look west for further expansion. Indian communities became increasingly displaced as they came into contact with colonial groups across the frontier. The reciprocal nature of relations between Indians and colonists was warped by time, expansion and economic growth within the colonies and it is from this perspective that Indian histories during the colonial period are often remembered.

Unfortunately, as colonial expansion progressed through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, British desires to acquire and enclose land, to domesticate animals, and to raise livestock increased tensions between Indians and colonists. Indians did not assign ownership to land beyond those small plots in which they farmed, and even then, ownership was under more communal notions than individual.¹⁶⁵ The rest of the land including “clam banks, fishing ponds, berry-picking areas, hunting lands, and the great bulk of a village’s territory” were not owned; Indians in the Northeast survived mainly upon the resources of these types of land but, “English theories assigned them no property rights at all.”¹⁶⁶ Conflicts arose as British colonists, applying their understandings of land ownership, usurped the rights of Indians to land.

Additionally, as colonial development expanded, so too did the practice of raising livestock. Indians did not have the same understanding of ownership over animals that Britons did, and this led to both confusion and conflict as Indians increasingly encountered domesticated livestock on British colonial property.¹⁶⁷ Virginia Anderson writes, “Indians had little experience with domesticated animals, and it was not clear whether they would immediately recognize

¹⁶⁵ Cronon, p. 62

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 63

¹⁶⁷ Anderson, p. 17

livestock as having a different status from the wild beasts with which they were far more familiar.”¹⁶⁸

While Britons associated animals as property, Indians held animals within their cosmological understanding. For Indians, animals were not strictly physical but “also accorded them spiritual significance.”¹⁶⁹ British colonists misunderstood this and often thought Indians worshipped animals; Roger Williams observed in 1638 that the Narragansetts “have plenty of Gods or divine powers: the Sunn, Moone, Fire, Snow, Earth, the Deere, the Beare etc” and he was not alone in his assessment.¹⁷⁰ British colonists throughout the seventeenth century failed to appreciate the cosmological connection between animals and livestock. This understanding among Indians contributed to their understanding of land enclosure.

English colonists assigned rights to Indians based on how they cared for the land. As John Locke’s opinions suggest, some Britons saw in Indian agriculture a disregard for order. In fact, John Winthrop, governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, argued that Indians had no real legal rights to land because “they inclose noe land”; the domestication of livestock, the installation of fences, and the demarcation of farming areas were part of uniquely-European agriculture and were not mirrored in Indian practice.¹⁷¹ Fences visibly demarcated British colonial life as separate from Indian influence and further distanced colonists, both physically and ideologically, from Indian communities. The major conflicts that erupted between Indian and colonial communities were over land and its appropriation and use as the seventeenth century progressed.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 18

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Cronon, p. 130

As Indians became increasingly displaced outbreaks of violent attacks on cattle and other livestock, as well as the sabotaging of colonial agriculture, became more common.¹⁷² In the mid 1650s the British government enforced a tax on all horse exports, which meant many in New England “rushed to produce a homegrown supply to sell in the West Indies”; this meant that as the decade progressed, a large amount of Narragansett territory was being converted into grazing land and pasture for horses.¹⁷³ Disgruntled Indians sometimes “harassed colonists at work, throwing stones at them, and seizing cattle and horses to hold for ransom.”¹⁷⁴ As the size and wealth of the colonies in New England grew, Indians increasingly felt the restriction of their access to land and often retaliated violently.

The Pequot War (1633) serves as one example of many in which “the reach of law and diplomacy stretched thin,” and the Pequot Indians acted out against increasing colonial oppression.¹⁷⁵ The Pequot Indians’ tactics during this conflict reflected an awareness of how central agriculture and livestock were to colonial stability. One witness, Captain Lion Gardiner remembered hearing an Indian boast about killing “Englishmen....as mosquitoes...and we will take away the horses, cows, and hogs”; Indian acts of violent resistance to colonial efforts to tax land were the result, in part, of differing understandings of land ownership and the individuals’ role in nature.¹⁷⁶

It is important to address the issue of violence and conflict between colonists over land use within the context of this thesis because the main argument, to this point, has been to highlight the exchange and somewhat peaceful relations between Indians and colonists in the

¹⁷² Anderson, p. 226

¹⁷³ Ibid., 223

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 182

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

earliest moments of settlement. As earlier chapters have discussed, Indian participation in commerce and trade, through the contribution of goods for trade, allowed for the wealth of colonies throughout the Northeast to grow greatly in a short period of time. As James Axtell asserts, without the Indians' contributions in the early settlements of New England colonists "would not have begun to accumulate wealth *so* soon...nor would the mature economies of...major colonies have rested on fur trade well into the eighteenth century."¹⁷⁷ The wealth and prosperity that members of colonial New England enjoyed from participation in trade and export, particularly in fur, gradually made Indians less important contributors to the settlements in New England. Traders adopted Indian practice and, once proficient enough, no longer needed Indians' help. In their declining role during the late seventeenth century and beyond, Indians were perceived by colonists less as partners in trade and more as obstacles to expansion and threats to colonial development.

Throughout the Northeast it became increasingly common for Indians to sabotage colonial settlements as a means of resistance to colonial expansion.¹⁷⁸ In attacking colonial agriculture and livestock Indians assumed, once again, a degree of control amid the tides of increasing colonial power. The goal of this thesis is to insert Indians back into their own histories and to bring them out from under the dominant shadow of British colonialism. In a discussion of Indian and colonial relations in the first years of settlement, it is clear that Indian practices of farming and hunting impacted settlement and made them important players in the British experience in America. The latter portion of the seventeenth century pushed Indians to the margins of colonial development and it was during this period that their agency and autonomy

¹⁷⁷ Axtell, p. 989

¹⁷⁸ Anderson, p. 180

was most threatened. Acts of violence toward British settlements were in direct response to such trends.

Without Indian communities, America's history would have been vastly different. To attempt to articulate just how different, in the broader scheme of the country's past, would be to exercise more artistic and creative capacity than perhaps historical study can allow. However, if the colonies were uninhabited, the experiences of the first colonists would perhaps have been marked by more hardship in the initial stages. The colonial economy would have developed in different directions, the location of settlements would perhaps have looked different, and the way in which colonists engaged with the natural setting would likely have mirrored practices in Europe.

In reality, however, the New World was not an empty land. It was inhabited by vibrant and diverse cultures with dynamic systems of trade, religious customs, and socio-political organization. The colonists arriving to New England in the early 1600s entered into this scheme. It has been the intent of this thesis to depart from the age-old understanding of colonialism in which European culture came, saw, and conquered; instead, the earliest moments of America's colonial past can be seen as formative in the establishment of stable agriculture, society, and economic practice born out of reciprocal relationships with Native American communities.

The trajectory of the place of Indians within the colonial process can be followed through their contributions to agriculture and trade, and in following this path, it is apparent that once colonial settlements in New England grew, in both population and wealth, beyond their meager foundations, colonists had little use for Indian alliances as they set their sights on expanding west. While the history of colonialism is most often remembered within the context of violence

toward and oppression of Indians this thesis has sought to capture a different, more cooperative record of the earliest moments of settlement. It was in these formative moments that Indians and colonists participated with each other and the natural environment more as equals than former accounts of history will suggest. This thesis continues in the footsteps of scholarship promoting a sensitive reexamination of the American past in which Indians are shown to be key players in the earliest moments of settlement in New England.

From its humble colonial beginnings America grew into a nation of impressive capacity. Of America, J. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur wrote,

I think, considering our age, the great toils we have undergone, the roughness of some parts of this country, and our original poverty, that we have done the most in the least time of any people on earth

It is important, however, to be mindful that the success of colonial development in New England, and throughout the colonies, was not achieved by European efforts alone. Indian contributions during the formative stages of settlement in the New World put into place the foundations for the country of which Crevecoeur spoke.

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