The Empire’s New Clothes: Constructing the “American” in the Colonial Northeast

by

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Map of Colonial North America

**Introduction**

The iconic scene of the Sons of Liberty dumping tea into the Boston Harbor represents, for many, resistance to British authority and the beginning of an American identity. It also reveals an important trend in Colonial America: the appropriation of Native dress and imagery by Anglo-American settlers in the creation of a new identity. This thesis will argue that from the early years of colonization, the clothing and appearance of Native people and the contact and exchange between Native Americans and Europeans in the Northeast played an essential role in the formation of a colonial identity. While Euro-Americans initially attempted to bolster their identities by defining themselves in opposition to Native peoples, they subsequently adopted and appropriated the image of a Native American – created by Europeans and Euro-Americans over the colonial period – in their efforts to establish a new American identity.

This project will begin by examining early explorers’ and settlers’ impressions and accounts of Native dress and appearance, and what kinds of dress Natives and Europeans wore in the early contact period, and the reasons and implications of cultural exchange between the two populations. Next, I will explore how Europeans represented Natives during the contact and settlement period in North America and how these depictions relate to the construction of a Native image. Finally, the project will investigate how Euro-Americans appropriated this Native imagery in the formation of a new American identity leading up to the American Revolution.
In this project, I will examine cultural traditions of the Indigenous inhabitants of Northeast North America and their relations with European settlers. Before European colonization, there were a multitude of distinct Native nations in the Northeast who shared many cultural similarities. Some Natives that appear in this project include the Mohawk, Huron, and Pequot nations, and more generally, nations belonging Algonquian and Iroquois language groups.¹

This project focuses on the Northeast coast of North America. Though other colonial areas provide useful insights and supplemental material, I will focus on the territories that became known as New Netherlands, New France, and New England – ranging from present-day Pennsylvania to Quebec. In the early exploration and colonial period, a variety of sources are useful in examining European impressions of Native Americans. Explorers and settlers of a variety of nationalities, including employees of the Dutch West India Company and Jesuit missionaries from France and Italy, provide important insight into early European perceptions of Native cultures.²

However, after this initial period, my primary focus is on the British Empire in North America. Though the French and Spanish empires in the Americas may provide helpful comparisons, the dominance of the English in the Northeast of North America makes the relationship between English settlers and

¹ While scholars have used a variety of terms to describe the Indigenous peoples of North America for various social and political reasons, I find that “Native” is an appropriately encompassing and largely generally accepted term. In many cases, the European sources I draw from do not refer to specific nations or tribes, so I use the term Native if the nation or language group is unknown.
² Given the lack of written materials from Native sources, this project relies primarily on European and Euro-American sources. This reliance on European materials is a limitation for many colonial historians choosing to examine Native-colonial relations.
Natives the most relevant for this project, particularly in examining the formation of an American identity leading up to the colonial revolution against the British Empire.

In addition to written source materials, I will employ sketches, engravings, paintings, and other physical representations of Native Americans to examine the Native American image as it was created and perpetuated by European settlers. Many of these visual materials were available at the Smithsonian National Anthropological Archives, the Smithsonian Museums of American History and the American Indian, and the Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center. In using visual sources, Gillian Rose proposes several strategies for image analysis. She suggests that there are three sites for analysis of visual sources – the production, the image itself, and the intended audience.\(^3\) For this project, I will focus on content analysis, particularly the dress and appearance of Native figures. Though the context in which the images were created and their intended audiences are also essential to understanding their significance, the content of the images – particularly how Native figures are presented – greatly informs this project’s discussion of how Europeans and Euro-Americans created an image of what it meant to be Native American.

**Historiography**

There is extensive historical scholarship on early contact and exchange between Native American and European settlers. Most scholars of material

exchange between Native and settler communities generally focus on its economic consequences. While some analyze the exchange of clothing goods, this discussion is primarily mentioned in relation to the fur trade and its economic and political importance for European colonists. A few some scholars, including Colin G. Calloway and James Axtell, discuss the adoption of material culture practices by both Native and settler communities, yet most historians of early colonial North America do not explore the cultural exchange between Natives and colonists.

Arnold Bauer’s examination of material and cultural exchanges in South America provides a useful framework for exploring of the influence of these exchanges between Indigenous and colonizing populations. Bauer lays out how different kinds of goods played distinct roles in the stages of colonization – including survival and civilizing efforts. Though the cultural makeup and progress of colonization in South America was widely different from that of North America, Bauer’s theory suggests an important connection between material trade and the intersection of Native and European cultures.

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The image of a “noble savage” has been discussed extensively regarding Native peoples in North America. For some historians, physical representations of Native figures provide important evidence of how Europeans and Euro-Americans perceived Native society. Some historians’ uses of these images greatly inform this project, particularly in understanding the European imagination of Native society. Though some scholars of Native imagery, including art historians, attempt to link these images to American identity formation, these discussions tend to focus on interactions between Natives and settlers in the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Additionally, several scholars have examined the appropriation or rejection of Native society by colonial society in North America, most notably Michael Zuckerman and Philip Deloria. Zuckerman argues that the colonists of Northeast North America strove to remain British and that the revolution was essentially political. He suggests that the colonies achieved independence without declaring a shared or distinct identity. While he acknowledges that the Euro-Americans had distinct experiences from people living in Britain, which may have created the terms for a national identity to arise eventually, he argues that this development of a national character did not occur until after the

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American Revolution. Zuckerman suggests that colonists primarily identified with their particular city or colony, rather than seeing themselves as Americans. However, the experiences of American colonists that he discusses support an alternate conclusion – that their developing attitudes towards British and Native society prompted the creation of a shared, distinct American identity leading up to the Revolution.

In “The Subject of the ‘Great Constitutional Discussion,’” Carroll Smith-Rosenburg discusses the development of the concept of an “American national subject.”10 She explores how Euro-American colonists attempted to create a new American identity through counter-identities, focusing on the “otherness” of British officials and Native Americans. D.H. Lawrence also identified a trend among Americans to identify themselves in contrast to “others”. This method of identity formation yields a self-identification with no positive basis of its own. In the lead up to the American Revolution, Lawrence suggests colonists struggled with simultaneously admiring and disparaging Native peoples.11

Early settlers in North America faced a struggle based on their values of both authority and liberty. Most early colonists who left England desired freedom from its strict political control. Upon reaching North America, they initially enjoyed the freedom of colonial society, but they disdained what they perceived as the “savage” nature of Native societies. Throughout the colonial

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period, colonists clung to European ideals of civility and came to value and accept the necessity of control and authority.\(^\text{12}\)

Throughout the eighteenth century, Native society defined the boundaries and character of colonial society by providing an “otherness” for colonial identification. Colonists also used their perception of the uncomplicated and uncorrupted natural state of Native society to critique European decadence. While colonists wanted to embrace the noble aspect of the “noble savage” image, they continued to despise the perceived “savagery” of Native society.\(^\text{13}\) Deloria argues that rebellious colonists in the Northeast shifted their self-definition. By inverting their existing interior-exterior boundaries, colonists began to see themselves in opposition to Britain, rather than Native peoples.\(^\text{14}\)

Deloria argues that colonists in North America engaged racial and gendered images of Natives in order to create “an ultimately unassemblable American identity.”\(^\text{15}\) Though using the Native image allowed white Americans to create a shared identity leading up to the revolution, Deloria argues that colonists' reliance on British and Native concept to define themselves meant that their identity was incomplete. The conflicting role of Natives (who were both included and excluded from colonial society) presented a challenge for newly independent Americans. White Americans could not eliminate one perception of Natives without dismantling the other, which would in turn jeopardize their

\(^{12}\) Zuckerman, “Identity in British America,” 155.

\(^{13}\) Lawrence, Studies in Classic American Literature, 160.


\(^{15}\) Deloria, Playing Indian, 5.
constructed American identity that relied on both understandings.\textsuperscript{16} Though these scholars have discussed how relations between Native and settler communities influenced the creation of an American identity, the role of dress and appearance in the Native image and its subsequent appropriation of identity formation in colonial America have been insufficiently explored. My project seeks to fill this gap.

**Chapter Outlines**

Beginning with European preconceptions of the Indigenous people of the Northeast coast of North America, Chapter One will explore how dress and appearance shaped Europeans’ early views of Native Americans and defined for Europeans an image of what it meant to be Native American. Early explorers and settlers, largely traders and missionaries, reported their various experiences with Native people in the northeast to a captive European audience, intrigued by the exotic nature of Indigenous societies. For European settlers, establishing alliance and trade relationships with Native populations was essential to their survival in the Northeast. Through these relationships, European and Native communities exchanged material goods and cultural knowledge. Both populations adopted and adapted one another’s material culture practices, without sacrificing their own traditions. However, the extent of cultural exchange in some circumstances presented a challenge to maintaining each group’s identity.

\textsuperscript{16} Deloria, *Playing Indian*, 37.
In Chapter Two, I will explore how the relationships between Natives and Europeans in the Northeast of North America oscillated between cooperative and violent, and how the images of Native people in the seventeenth and early eighteenth century reflected these shifts. In times of peace and mutual cooperation, Native people were described and presented as similar to Europeans, emphasizing their natural strength and nobility. However, in times of conflict between settler and Native communities, Natives were presented as uncivilized, violent, and “savage”. Over time, as Zuckerman suggests, colonists struggled with their presentation of Native peoples. While settlers attempted to differentiate themselves from Natives by emphasizing the “barbaric” nature of Native society, they also presented Natives as friendly and peaceful in order to encourage more British settlement in North America.\footnote{Zuckerman, “Identity in British America,” 153.} Thus, the alternating presentations of Natives as “noble” or “savage” frequently served a political purpose, yet both types of Native depictions persisted and alternated throughout the colonial period.

In addition to reports and depictions of Natives from North America, several Indigenous Americans, including Pocahontas and, later, the Four Mohawk “Kings”, travelled to Europe. The presentations of these individuals reflected the trends to represent Natives as both “noble” and “savage”. The Four Mohawk Kings in particular, immortalized in commissioned portraits, represent the English presentation of Native allies as civilized nobility. Though they were portrayed in European dress, the inclusion of Native imagery in the portraits
reflects the persistence of English people’s fascination with Native Americans as foreign curiosities. Representations of Native peoples in Europe changed throughout the colonial period, often reflecting contemporary Euro-Native relations in the Northeast.

Chapter Three examines how later colonists appropriated the European image of Native Americans, and specific elements of this image, to create and demonstrate a uniquely American identity. The legacy of settler-Native conflicts ensured that historical prejudices remained. In the mid-to-late-eighteenth century, British artists began using the image of a Native figure to represent the North American colonies, rather than Natives or the continent itself. In political prints, English artists used a Native figure to represent the colonies to demonstrate the foreign and inferior nature of colonial society. Illustrators in North America also adopted the Native image to represent the colonies, yet they adapted the image to diminish the perceived differences between colonial and English society. These adjusted images served colonists’ claims to equality and liberty, which were central to their resistance to the British Empire. In addition to using visual representations of Native peoples, rebellious colonists engaged the European tradition of performative misrule and stereotypical Native imagery in order to express their discontent with British policies. The most famous example of this misrule tradition using Native imagery is the case of the Boston Tea Party.

Leading up to the revolution, rebellious colonists appropriated Native imagery, created over time by European and Euro-Americans, to develop a new,
national American identity. By claiming admirable traits and rejecting negative attributes of both Native and European society, Anglo-American colonists attempted to establish a new identity, but ultimately gave up any claim to belonging to either culture. These colonists saw themselves as simultaneously “civilized” and “free,” which in the colonial mind reflected the best traits of both European and Native society. This project argues that the cultural exchange, particularly in regards to clothing and appearance, between Natives and settlers throughout the colonial period played a key role in the formation of a new American identity in the late eighteenth century.
Chapter I:

Material and Cultural Exchange in Northeast North America

In the northeastern North America, both Native inhabitants and European settlers adapted one another’s technologies in order to survive while continuing to employ their traditional practices to maintain their own worldviews. However, the immediate environment, in some instances, forced these groups to alter their traditional practices and challenged each group’s sense of self.

In many ways, the exchange of clothing and goods between Native populations and European settlers in the northeast, parallels Arnold Bauer’s discussion of “contact” and “civilizing” goods in Latin America. However, a single central authority did not lead the process of colonization in the North American Northeast, so the progression of material culture there does not universally mirror the Spanish-led conquest of Latin America. In *Goods, Power, History*, Arnold Bauer outlines his understanding of the development of material culture in Latin America. Bauer begins his argument with an examination of Pre-Columbian material culture. He then examines the “contact goods” that were selectively appropriated by Indigenous populations in the early period of colonization. The next period of colonization was characterized by the impact of “civilizing goods,” which played a significant role in the identity formation of Native and mixed-race populations in the evolving political and social hierarchy or the Spanish empire.¹⁸ For the purposes of this project, the first three stages of

development will be useful in comparing material culture of Latin America and
the Northeast of North America in the colonial period.

The Pre-Columbian material landscape of the Northeast was
characterized by similar subsistence living and small scale bartering of goods
and services among Native populations as those in rural Latin America. Though
Bauer focuses on Indigenous populations’ appropriation and modification of
European goods, in the Northeast both populations selectively adopted
behaviors out of necessity or convenience. The third stage of Bauer’s analysis of
Latin America, from the late sixteenth century through 1800 BCE, diverges from
the case of Northeast North America in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.
While the centralized Spanish authority encouraged consumption of goods to
promote the “civilization” of their colonies in Latin America, the disparate
colonizing efforts in the Northeast lacked a concerted push to “civilize” Native
populations. Additionally, by the late sixteenth century in Latin America, mixed
races emerged, and consumer goods played a key role in allowing these groups
to establish their identities and status in the new socio-political hierarchy of the
colonies. However, in northeastern North America, Native and European
populations remained largely distinct, and Native people thus did not experience
the same pressure to consume goods in order to become “civilized” to achieve
status in a Euro-centric hierarchy.

Though cultural and material exchange did not serve a unifying purpose
among the populations of the colonies in the North American northeast, it was
key to the survival of European settlers in the region. Despite efforts by
European settlers to maintain their ties to European civilization and remain distinct from Native populations, they became increasingly dependent on Native people and their goods for trade and alliances to ensure their survival in the Northeast. Natives too adopted European goods for their technological or aesthetic appeal. As James Axtell suggests, Natives and Europeans exchanged and adopted one another’s goods but they did not attempt to become one another. In Colin Calloway’s examination of cultural exchange between Natives and Europeans, he similarly argues that the exchange of goods and traditions deeply impacted both communities, yet both Natives and Europeans continued to rely on their own practices to maintain their identities. This chapter will argue that both Natives and Europeans in the Northeast of North America adopted one another’s material practices to sustain their own worldviews; however, the extent of this adaptation in some cases challenged their cultural identities.

**Native Dress before European Arrival**

Before contact with Europeans, Native people constructed all of their clothing from natural resources, which protected their bodies from the environment. Native peoples of the Northeast, most nations in the Algonquian and Iroquois language groups, shared traditional dress styles. Garments were primarily made from animal skins and furs. Naturally dyed thread, feathers, and

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beads made from shells and clay embellished these garments. Traditional garments for men included breechclouts – a draped material around the hips covering the genitals and buttocks; and mitasses, or leggings, made of material wrapped around the leg, covering from the ankle to the thigh where it was tied with a strap, much like a garter. Women in woodlands Native cultures typically wore a cylinder of material around their waists – tied or suspended with straps, leaving much of the chest exposed. Men and women wore moccasins – flexible shoes made of animal leather. In cold weather, both men and women would wear animal furs wrapped around their shoulders for warmth; they would also wear snowshoes – constructed from bark to allow the wearers to walk easily in the snow.\textsuperscript{21}

Samuel de Champlain, a notable French navigator and explorer, first reached North America in 1603 where he participated in trade, conversion of Native peoples, and mapping the region. After helping to build Port Royal,
Champlain established Quebec in 1608. Images from Samuel de Champlain's exploration of New France in 1615, illustrate the traditional dress of the Huron people he encountered (Figure 1.1). These figures present clear examples of women's wrapped garments (figure G), men's breechclouts (figure H), and traditional garment and personal ornamentation (figures G and F).

Natives in the Northeast typically used their resources in as many ways as possible. They often used the material that they wore as garments during the day as blankets at night, a practiced that persisted into the seventeenth century. In 1624, Nicholas Van Wassenaer, a Dutch scholar and physician who compiled a history of New Netherland from 1621-1631, noted that the local Natives slept on the ground covered by leaves and skins. Another Dutch settler, Isaack de Rasieres, travelled to North America with the Dutch West India Company in 1621 as a trading agent and secretary. Rasieres coordinated trade with Native peoples and the Puritan colony established at Plymouth. He reported that Natives traded for duffel cloth, which they used for dress during the day and blankets at night. Van Wassenaer also commented that they used their materials for its best purpose. Given the negligible value they placed on their garments, they would rip up the skins comprising them for trade if the Europeans desired them. He also remarked favorably on the appearance of

Native garments – with fur on the inside for warmth, the smooth sides of the skin were decorated “so beautifully that, at a distance, [they resembled] lace.”

As Europeans arriving in the Northeast observed, the Native populations there had what they considered to be relatively simplistic ways of dress, though Natives also had elaborate traditions of garment and personal ornamentation. These seemingly simple, subsistence-oriented ways fulfill Bauer’s expectations of Pre-Columbian material culture, as the clothing goods of Native populations in the Northeast primarily served the basic human need of clothing for survival.

European Views on Native Appearance

In Europe, personal appearance, particularly dress, was an important indicator of an individual’s status and place in the social order. Given the importance of dress and appearance in demonstrating identity in European society, European settlers’ understanding of Native societies was deeply impacted by their observations of Natives’ appearance. These early impressions and assumptions based on Natives’ physical appearance shaped European and Native cultural exchange throughout the colonial period. European views of Native culture had a significant impact on which Native goods they adopted and which they rejected.

Karen Kupperman suggests that early English observers of Native Americans typically followed a set pattern of description given the importance of

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26 Van Wassenaer, 77.

these physical attributes in understanding identity in European society. These
depictions, especially from early explorers, began with stature, followed by other
physical attributes including hair, skin, and eye color; next they included
clothing, ornamentation, and other forms of personal decoration.28 Records from
Henry Hudson’s voyages to the Northeast of North America reflect European
perspectives on Native appearance and behaviors in the early seventeenth
century. Henry Hudson, an English explorer sailing for the Dutch East Indian
Company, reached the Northeast coast of North America in 1609.29 Robert Juet,
the first mate on Hudson’s ship during his North American voyages, wrote a
detailed account of their experiences, including their interactions with Native
populations of what would be called New Netherland.30 He described one
exchange with Indigenous inhabitants of New Netherland who came aboard
their ship to trade in 1610. These Natives were dressed in deerskins, and Juet
commented that they were very civil but they desired clothes.31

Hudson also commented on the appearance of the “swarthy natives” of
New Netherland, whose clothing consisted of the skins of various animals,
including foxes. Though Hudson found these particular Natives along the Hudson
River to be friendly, he warned that they were inclined to steal and skilled at

28 Ibid., 197.
30 “Robert Juet,” in ANB. Juet is also alleged to have led a mutiny against Hudson in 1611. The
mutiny resulted in the marooning of Hudson and several crewmembers in the Arctic; they were
never seen again.
31 Robert Juet, “From The Third Voyage of Master Henry Hudson, 1610” in Narratives of New
Netherland 1609-1664, 18.
doing so.\textsuperscript{32} Though Van Wassenaer’s observations of Native dress and other customs reflect a generally favorable impression – he was largely impressed by the Natives’ skills and intelligence – he also commented that the Natives were prone to thievery, and that Native society did not seem to have any system of justice or punishment that he recognized.\textsuperscript{33}

Other explorers and settlers with the Dutch East India Company throughout the seventeenth century reported on the customs and behaviors of the local inhabitants of New Netherland, a territory including parts of present day New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, and Massachusetts. Johannes Megapolensis, a minister of the Dutch Reformed Church, moved to Fort Orange – a Dutch settlement established on the site of present-day Albany, New York – in 1642.\textsuperscript{34} Megapolensis served as a missionary to the local Mohawk communities; he preached in the Mohawk language and became very familiar with Mohawk culture and behaviors, about which he wrote a detailed account. In describing Mohawks’ appearance he found some similarities to Europeans. He wrote that they were similar to “Dutchmen in body and stature.” Unlike Europeans, though, the Mohawks had black hair and eyes and yellow skin. He reported that young children go about completely nude, except in winter when they wear furs for warmth. Adults wore animal skins – from deer, bears, panthers, beavers, otters, mink, raccoons, and wild cats – which they hung on their bodies as garments.

\textsuperscript{33} Van Wassenaer, 77.
\textsuperscript{34} “Johannes Megapolensis,” \textit{ANB}. 
Even when they would buy European clothing, they simply tore it and tied it around their bodies without sewing it. Europeans considered these kinds of draped garments simplistic.

One unnamed Dutch explorer described the Sankiks – a tribe living near modern-day Trenton – as “barbarians”. The Sankiks were one of many nations in the area that shared similar behaviors, but did not have a shared language. He commented that they wore clothing comprised of animal skins – including beavers and foxes – that had been “sewed together in the manner of savages.” This description does not provide clear insight on the manner in which Sankiks manufactured their garments. However, it reveals that their garment creation was considered rudimentary or less developed than European ways of sewing and garment construction, which at this time had advanced far beyond simple, draped garments.

Reverend Megapolensis further commented on what he perceived as the Mohawks’ vanity; he reported that they looked at themselves frequently and were pleased with their appearance. This may reflect Megapolensis’ judgmental, negative perceptions of Native behaviors. In addition to their ways of dress and wearing their hair, Megapolensis remarked on the Mohawks’ tradition of skin decoration. The Mohawks painted their faces and bodies with primarily red and blue natural dyes. He found this practice frightening and declared that they

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36 De Laet, 57.
appeared “like the Devil himself.”37 David de Vries, a Dutch merchant and
explorer, travelled extensively around the world; he visited Newfoundland
briefly in 1620 and returned to North America in 1632.38 On his second visit to
North America, he kept a detailed account of Lenape tribes he encountered near
Fort Amsterdam, the southern tip of modern-day Manhattan. He noted that like
the Natives near Fort Orange, they wore animal skins for warmth, and they also
wore coats of plaited turkey feathers. De Vries noted that these Lenape tribes
wanted to trade for Dutch cloth to use for garments as it was considered better
for rain than traditional animal skins. This account reflects the trend of Natives’
adaptation of some European goods for their technological advantages, but
continuing to use these goods in traditional ways. These tribes, like the
Mohawks, also painted their faces with natural red and black dyes. He described
this appearance as making the Natives “look like fiends.” He considered the
Natives to be generally foul and unclean, but he thought that once they bathed
the women became significantly more attractive.39

One striking difference in the appearance of North American Natives and
European settlers was the presence or absence of facial hair. Several European
settlers commented on how the Native men did not have beards. At this time in
Europe, facial hair – like dress – represented one’s social status and was highly

37 Megapolensis, 173.
38 “David de Vries,” ANB.
39 David De Vries, “Short Historical and Journal-Notes of various Voyages performed in the Four
Quarters of the Globe” in Narratives of New Netherland 1609-1664, 216.
associated with men’s virility.\textsuperscript{40} The absence of facial hair on most Native men surprised the Europeans, who placed social significance on facial hair and expected Native men to be naturally virile. The Native populations were equally surprised by Europeans’ facial hair, which they were not accustomed to seeing. According to Father Pierre Biard, a French Jesuit missionary, in 1611, the Natives reported that they at first found the Europeans to be “very ugly,” having hair on their mouths and heads.\textsuperscript{41} They gradually became accustomed to seeing Europeans facial hair and began to see them as “less deformed.”\textsuperscript{42}

Though relatively little is known about Native populations’ impressions of Europeans due to the lack of their own written records, some Europeans reported on their understanding of Natives’ views of the Europeans. In addition to Natives’ views on facial hair, Biard also commented on Natives’ reactions to the physical appearance of some of his fellow Frenchmen. Biard described the Natives as physically well built and without deformities. He reported that upon seeing any Europeans with physical deformities, the Natives ridiculed them. Biard understood this reaction to reflect Natives’ “habit of self-aggrandizement” and that the Natives saw themselves as superior to the Europeans. However, Biard’s understanding of Native views and culture was tainted by his expectations of their society and his own ingrained Euro-centric worldview.\textsuperscript{43}

\textsuperscript{41} “Pierre Biard,” in \textit{American National Biography}. Biard’s account helped raise French interest in North America and support for the Jesuit’s missionary efforts.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 75.
In the North America, many European settlers insisted on continuing to wear European-style clothing, however impractical, as a mark of “civilization” in this new land, which was widely considered wild and “savage”. For many Europeans, Native ways of dress and other behaviors perpetuated the idea that Native society was “uncivilized”, as it did not follow the same standards as European society.44 They avoided adopting Native goods, as they feared that any influence from Native society threatened their identities as Europeans.

A Dutch settler described a Native form of entertainment – a game called Senneca, in which the players won from one another any and all possessions. This could include the garments the players wore – in some cases causing the players to end up completely naked. He immediately then described what he observed as the Natives’ sexual promiscuity. For many Europeans, nudity was highly associated with sexual promiscuity and such “uncivilized” behaviors. He remarked that the garments the Natives wore regularly left the body “almost” naked.45 This relatively limited covering of the body compared to European dress was associated with other “primitive” behaviors and suggested to many Europeans the inferiority and “uncivilized” nature of Native society.

While being primitive was clearly perceived as negative by many, in other ways Native Americans’ natural existence, without the social ills that plagued European society, made them admirable in the eyes of European observers. An unnamed Dutch explorer commented that the Sankikans “neither know nor

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45 De Rasières, 106.
desire riches.”\textsuperscript{46} This declaration reflects the duality of being “uncivilized”. While not having riches would be a considered a negative characteristic by many Europeans, the absence of a desire for riches represented an ideal, uncorrupted natural state.

In some ways, Native behaviors and appearance challenged European assumptions; other aspects of Native culture, however, seemed to fulfill European expectations. In his depiction of Native dress, Biard noted that the men and women did not distinguish themselves greatly in terms of dress. Young children especially dressed in the same fashion, regardless of gender. He described adult women as covering themselves “both above and below the stomach,” and being generally “less nude” than men.\textsuperscript{47} This manner of dress seemed to conform to European ideals of modesty among women. He goes on to state explicitly that the Native women and girls were “very modest,” and the men were “not immodest.”\textsuperscript{48} Biard also observed that women tended to have more ornamentation on their garments. He argues that this reflects the nature of women everywhere, that they are “fond of adornment.”\textsuperscript{49} Biard’s stereotypical views of women may be based on prevailing views in French society as well as his religious education. Biard, and many other Europeans in the Northeast, applied their assumptions about human behavior based on European society onto traditional Native practices.

\textsuperscript{46} De Laet, 57.
\textsuperscript{47} Biard, “Relation of New France,” 73.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 103.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 74-75.
Whereas European clothes tended to be form fitting and emphasizing slenderness, especially among women, Native garments made the wearer appear large, by girding and folding fabric around the waist. European women’s dresses typically reached the floor, and the longer the gown, the more beautiful and valuable it was considered. In contrast, Native women’s garments barely reached below the knees, as was necessary for their daily activities. Long gowns would greatly have restricted their movement and thus their abilities to fulfill their traditional duties.⁵⁰ European settlers in the northeast of North America commented upon the practices of Native peoples that differed from European norms, but recognized how Native technologies were more efficient for the demands of their lifestyle and the environment of the region.

In a relation of the differences between European and Native customs, another Jesuit reported on the issues of gender differentiation, or lack thereof, in Native dress. In Europe, men dressing as women would be considered appropriate only in the theatre or at masquerades. However, in North America, it was not uncommon or inappropriate for Native men to wear women’s dress. In the adoption of European headwear, Native men typically adopted hats or riding-caps, while women adopted nightcaps, yet both sexes would wear either type of hat regardless of the time of day. The Natives’ “improper” use of European garments prompted European ridicule. In addition to not wearing hats and caps according to European expectations, Native men also wore European

shirts loose and flapping without wearing breeches. The French settlers mocked this combination of dress styles.\textsuperscript{51}

For many Christian missionaries, getting Natives to adopt European behaviors as well as the Christian faith represented a major success in bringing the Natives into “civilization”. Upon converting two “Savages,” one Jesuit priest expressed great joy that they not only saw themselves as Christians in faith, but also wanted to adopt French ways of dress and living to become completely Christian.\textsuperscript{52} In addition to adopting European behaviors, the missionaries attempted to instill Christian ideals in their Native converts. One unidentified priest shared a significant case in which a Native Christian convert named Jenne came to him and desired to exchange a decorative gown for a plain one, as emphasis on “such trifles” was unchristian. The priest was impressed with this young women and her sister not only for their ability to adopt European behaviors but also for their devotion to understanding and practicing Christianity. He declared that they strove “unceasingly to conquer themselves,” in becoming “civilized” and departing from their Native roots and behaviors.\textsuperscript{53}


\textsuperscript{52} “Relation of 1642-1643” in Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents, vol. 24, 235.

\textsuperscript{53} “Letter of Father Jacques Bigot, respecting the mission of the Abnaquis at St. Missel de Sillery,” in Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents, vol. 62, 49.
Natives’ Appearance: Hair Styling

Europeans’ observations of Natives’ appearance played an important role in their understanding of Native communities. Dress was not the only aspect of Native Americans’ appearance that drew the fascination of Europeans – another major signifier of cultural identity was hair. Many European settlers and explorers reported in great detail the dress of Native populations, but even more extensive descriptions of Natives’ hair reached Europe. The significance of hairstyles representing identity of individuals in Native society paralleled the importance of personal appearance in demonstrating identity in European society. Additionally, Natives’ distinctive hairstyles contributed to Europeans’ ability to distinguish and define them as separate nations.

Kupperman suggests hair and its appearance was a point of interest among English settlers given the significance of hair styling in the English Civil War of the 1640s, in which Roundheads were distinguished from Cavaliers by their short-cropped hair. Early settlers’ reports of Natives’ hair practices additionally reflect the importance of hair styling in Native culture and how it provided class and status demarcation, along with dress. Long hair was an important symbol of Native identity. Within Native societies, hair was an important symbol of status and skill. For European missionaries, long hair symbolized pride and a connection to the sins of Adam and Eve. Missionaries

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54 Kupperman, "Presentment of Civility," 205
thus focused on cutting the hair of Natives as part of their efforts to bring Natives into Christian civilization.\textsuperscript{55}

Nicholas Van Wassenaer observed in 1626 that the married women among the Native population near Fort Orange let their hair grow long, even to their waists. Men let hair grow on one side of their head, which they braided, and cut the rest off. De Vries suggested that the loose hanging hair for the Natives made them “foul and dirty.”\textsuperscript{56} In Megapolensis’s description of the appearance of Mohawks, he included particular information on the way they wore their hair. Women generally let their hair grow long and hang down their backs, loosely tied together. Men typically had one lock of hair on one side of their head, sometimes one on each side. They had a streak of hair from the top of their heads to the neck, which “stands right on end like a cock’s comb.” The Mohawks typically had short cut hair except the central streak and occasional locks.\textsuperscript{57}

Though little information on the meaning of these specific styles was recorded, Ann Little details the significance of general hairstyle trends among Native in the Northeast. She reports that hairlessness signified powerlessness and was primarily associated with newborns and elderly males. Boys and young men did not wear their hair long or elaborately decorated, as those practices were reserved for warriors and tribal leaders. Additionally, among women, hairstyles reflected age and position. Long hair on women signified marital status and sexual maturity. Girls of marriageable age wore long bangs. Upon

\textsuperscript{56} De Vries, 216.
\textsuperscript{57} Megapolensis, 173.
marriage, women cut their hair and wore a head cover until it grew out again. Adult women with long hair also ornamented it elaborately, similar to the warriors’ decorative hairstyles. The importance of hair, along with dress and personal ornamentation, in Native society demonstrates a significant similarity between Native peoples and European society in how personal appearance demonstrated identity and status.  

The French settlers used the name Huron to refer to these people due to their hair styling. In Quebec (or modern-day upstate New York and parts of Ontario) Francesco Bressani, a Roman-born Jesuit priest who reached the region in 1642, encountered a Native population that the French had named Huron (Wyandot), an Iroquois-speaking people. The straight locks worn on the middle of the head resembled the “bristles of a wild bore,” or hure in French. The Huron generally had black, straight hair, and they disliked curls, which were uncommon among them. The Huron women wore their hair in a long single braid. The men wore their hair in a variety of styles including shaving half of the head, or shaving the whole head with the exception of some patches, but the most common style was wearing straight bristles down the middle of the head.  

Both the Natives themselves and European observers considered the hairstyles of Natives a significant aspect of Natives’ appearance. This case illustrates how hair provided a point of reference and became the name by which Europeans could identify a given Native nation.

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58 Little, “‘Shoot That Rogue, for He Hath an Englishman’s Coat On,’” 246.
59 “Francesco Giuseppe Bressani,” ANB.
Natives’ Appearance: Personal Adornment

Native traditions of personal adornment and skin decoration represented yet another aspect of Natives’ appearance that garnered the attention of European observers. Europeans arriving in northeastern North America in the seventeenth century, continued to report on the appearance and customs of Native communities. Adriaen van der Donck, a Dutch colonial officer and attorney, moved to Fort Orange in 1641 to manage law enforcement, trade, and debt collection for the Dutch West India Company.61 Donck reported that the Natives were increasingly using European cloth, but continued to use animal skins primarily for their garments and shoes. He also commented on the ways that Natives in New Netherland ornamented their appearance. They would cut and paint their skin in various patterns. They also hung zeewant, or wampum, strings of shell beads, around their necks and bodies, and in their ears. Natives additionally used dyed deer hair to wear on their heads or around their necks, and treated their skin and hair with natural greases to enhance its appearance.62 These aspects of Native appearance that Europeans perceived as different than their own contributed to concerns about the uncivilized nature of North America. These practices were thus frequently emphasized in written descriptions and visual representation of Native peoples.

Francesco Bressani gave a detailed account of local Natives’, traditional practices of self-ornamentation. The Natives of New France painted their faces

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61 “Adriaen van der Donck,” ANB. He returned to the Netherlands in 1649 to petition for local governance in New Netherland.
and bodies in various styles, both temporarily and permanently. For temporary paint, the Iroquois used dyes from various natural resources, including earth and certain roots. Some painted their bodies so completely that they appeared at a distance to be clothed. Upon closer inspection, it was revealed that they were stark naked and that their “clothes” consisted only of paint. Permanently painting one’s skin – or tattooing – was performed by piercing the skin with needles or thorns in a particular design, and tracing the design with charcoal or other black material. This material would become absorbed in the wounds and the pattern would remain on the skin. The Iroquois traditionally tattooed themselves with animal figures. The tattooing process was extremely painful, and in some cases could be fatal, Bressani reported. Bressani suggested that the reasons the Natives painted themselves in these ways were “not barbarous.” Painting served as protection from the cold in winter. In battle, paint helped conceal fear and made them appear “more terrible to the enemy.” Painting the face could also conceal age, which could be perceived as a weakness by their enemy. Painting the body and face was also an important part of personal adornment festivals and ceremonies.

Tattooing and personal adornment was a not only a significant practice within Native societies, but also became an important way in which Natives were distinguished from Europeans. Upon their adoption of European clothing, tattooing and piercings continued to mark Natives’ distinct identity. These different, and frequently perceived as uncivilized practices featured prominently

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63 Bressani, 249-253.  
64 Ibid., 253.
in European descriptions and presentations of Native peoples, furthering the creation of a cultural boundary between Native and European society.

**Trade Goods and their Uses**

For Europeans, trade with Native populations was essential for their survival in North America. Trade was key to establishing alliance relationships, without which Europeans would not have had the goods, knowledge, or safety to survive and establish colonies in the Northeast. When Europeans arrived and began trading with Native peoples in the Northeast, they brought a variety of goods that Native Americans incorporated into their traditional ways of life. Not all trade goods were utilitarian; some, such as glass beads, were used in decoration. Natives used glass beads, which contained colors that could not be produced with natural materials, to signify concepts in nature that were important to Native cultures. These new products were employed in traditional ways – supplementing natural materials in traditional designs and applied with traditional techniques. For example, glass beads were incorporated into garment decoration using a traditional embroidering technique using porcupine quills as needles to attach the beads to animal skins.65

Wampum beads were an essential trade item throughout European relations with Native peoples in the Northeast. These beads – made from small shells – were used in the decoration of garments and other goods and worn on strings. Both white and purple wampum were traded, though purple wampum

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was more valued. As Arnold Bauer argues, goods can also play a significant role in creating and maintaining social relationships.\textsuperscript{66} Wampum is one such product that was essential to European and Native trade relationships and could symbolize a wearer’s social status.

Wampum strings were essential in Northeastern Native societies to preserve historical accounts, negotiate treaties, and conduct trade. Before the arrival of Europeans, oral historians used them as mnemonic devices. Wampum was also exchanged to resolve disputes within and among Native tribes. Acceptance of wampum belts symbolized agreement on a given issue while throwing a belt aside demonstrated rejection of a proposition. Symbolic exchange of wampum was incorporated into many Native ceremonies. Wampum was additionally used for personal adornment and trade.\textsuperscript{67}

When Europeans arrived in Northeast North America, they began using wampum to trade and secure alliances with local Native nations. Isaack de Rasieres, a Dutch settler in New Netherland, described the Natives making \textit{sewan} or wampum – beads from shells found on the shore. He remarked that these beads were considered as valuable as Europeans considered money. Wampum could be used to purchase any other possessions. Both men and women wore these bands around their wrists, necks, and bodies; women also wore them in their hair.\textsuperscript{68} Rasieres’ account illustrates an early exchange between Europeans

\textsuperscript{66} Bauer, S.
\textsuperscript{68} De Rasieres, 106.
and Natives where wampum were used to establish an economic and political relationship.

Adornment of personal items and garments with European goods reflected the status and prestige of the wearer. Before 1620, Iroquois used trade goods primarily as materials in traditional crafts. Additionally, trade goods allowed for new forms of expression. For example, metal needles helped with traditional embroideries – though the practice of using porcupine quills was not abandoned. Trade items like metal brooches, garters, and belts were adapted into traditional decoration. This trade generally did not lead to loss of traditional cultural means of clothing and personal adornment, rather, these trade items augmented conventional materials.

Some trade goods, with more extensive and detailed ornamentation, indicated the wearer’s status as allies of Europeans; as the Native had to engage with the Europeans in order to get these valued items. One such item of value in Native communities was duffel cloth – a heavy wool cloth primarily used to make bags and overcoats. In the mid-seventeenth century, high status Algonquian and Iroquois men began wearing European-manufactured red and blue cloth coats, though they generally considered most European dress, particularly breeches, to be an encumbrance.\textsuperscript{69} Cornelis van Tienhoven, the colonial secretary for the Dutch West India Company, was born in Holland and

\textsuperscript{69} Nash and Strobel, \textit{Daily Life of Native Americans from Post-Columbian through Nineteenth-Century America}, 51.
reached North America in 1633. In the 1640s, Tienhoven reported that the Natives there were strong and had olive colored skin. He described their dress as, “almost naked,” with a minimal covering of their genitalia and animal skins draped on their shoulders for warmth, yet he also noted that the Natives were increasingly using blue and red duffel cloths.

In the seventeenth century, cloth was the best-selling item in Native markets. Most Native words for Europeans meant “cloth-makers” or “coat men”. For example, the Mohawks around Fort Orange called the Dutch “Assirioni” or “cloth-makers”. Woolen blanketing was lighter and as warm as fur. Match coats dried faster and were softer than animal skin. They would remain warm even if wet, and came in bright colors that could not be created with the natural dyes traditionally made by Native people. With the introduction of metal tools, cloth could be easily made into clothes with less work than animal skins. Life in the woods was rough on European cloth, which was less durable than animal hide. Though cloth could be easily washed, Natives typically did not was their garments and would wear them until they disintegrated. Given their practical benefits, Natives would employ European goods according to their traditional ways, yet they were adapting them all the same.

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70 “Adriean van der Donck,” *ANB*. Donck returned to the Netherlands in 1649 to petition for local governance in New Netherland. Tienhoven attempted to discredit him and spoke against the petition.
72 Megapolensis, 178.
73 Axtell, *Natives and Newcomers*, 156.
In 1621 the Dutch West India Company obtained a charter for colonies along the Northeast American coast. In the list of rules and guidelines for individuals in these colonies, the company explicitly prohibited the production of cloth. The colonists were not permitted “to make any [woolen], linen, or cotton cloth, nor weave any other stuffs there, on pain of being banished” or otherwise punished”. English and French authorities established this restriction on cloth manufacture in North America as well. European powers did not want the colonies to compete with the mother country in manufacturing and selling such an important and demanded product. In 1644, Johannes Megapolensis noted the land of the Northeast was rich in a variety of resources. He declared that the land was “fruitful in everything which supplies human needs, except clothes, linen, woollen, stockings, shoes, etc., which are all dear here.” As European cloth was not manufactured in New Netherland, it was a highly desired imported product among both Native and Euro-American communities.

Trade was an essential piece of European colonization in forging alliances with and garnering the assistance of local Native communities. Trade allowed Europeans to establish reciprocally beneficial relationships with Natives. For example, Europeans exchanged material goods for assistance from locals. One instance of this exchange is some local individuals’ agreement to serve as guides.

74 “Privileges and Exemptions For Patroons, Masters and Private Individuals, Who Will Settle Any Colonies and Cattle in New Netherland, Resolved Upon For the Service of the General West India Company In New Netherland, and For the Benefit of the Patroons, Masters and Individuals” in Narratives of New Netherland 1609-1664, 96.
75 Megapolensis, 168.
and translators in exchange for material goods. Marten Gerritsen, an employee of the Dutch West India Company in New Netherland, reported securing a Native guide to take him to another Native community for the price of a half yard of cloth, and two each of axes, knives, and awls.\textsuperscript{76}

**Impact of the Fur Trade**

In the early period of European settlement in North America, Europeans reached out to Native communities in order to gain their allegiance and for assistance surviving in the North America. Settlers relied on Native goods – including furs, snowshoes, and food – for their survival. As Calloway discusses, European settlers relied on Natives as both hunters and as customers, in order to survive.\textsuperscript{77} Additionally, Natives began to incorporate European manufactured goods into their daily lives. As the fur trade expanded, it became a central feature of Native and settler interactions as the communities became mutually dependent on the trade. The fur trade led to the depletion of local game and thus the loss of traditional clothing sources, so Natives’ adoption of European goods and dress increased.\textsuperscript{78}

Trade with Europeans had deep impacts on Native society. In addition to the adoption of European goods for dress, the introduction of metal tools dramatically effected Native ways of hunting, building, and food preparation. Metal tools and weapons allowed Natives to hunt more extensively and further

\textsuperscript{76} Marten Gerritsen, “Narrative of a Journey Into the Mohawk and Oneida Country, 1634-1635” in *Narratives of New Netherland 1609-1664*, 143.


\textsuperscript{78} Thomas, “Cultural Change on the Southern New England Frontier,” 156.
from their traditional lands. The abilities and opportunities brought by European trade encouraged Natives to hunt and gather materials for trade rather than subsistence, which altered the fabric of traditional Native society. The economic and political pressures created by European trade networks led to a resurgence of inter-tribal warfare.79 Though European trade had deep impacts on Native society, Natives continued to be active participants in economic and cultural exchange with Europeans.

The introduction of European style trade and economics disrupted the traditional functioning of Native society in the Northeast, which had been primarily based on subsistence. David de Vries commented on one exchange when he attempted to trade with a group of Natives who did not have any corn to trade, as a local tribal leader had demanded their corn for nothing in return. These Natives had only raised enough corn for their personal needs and some extra for trading with Europeans, but the local Sachem had exacted their surplus coin for his personal gain. The Natives with whom de Vries spoke were extremely dissatisfied with this behavior – not only did it leave them disadvantaged, but also it represented a clear shift away from traditional power structures and behavior.80

In addition to its role in economic and political relations, the exchange of cloth had significant unintended consequences. Cloth materials carrying infectious elements were traded among these communities, which facilitated the

80 De Vries, 209.
spread of diseases and devastated Native populations. While early European settlers did not understand the cause of these epidemics, later actors such as William Johnson attempted to stymie the spread of disease. However, other Anglo-Americans in the eighteenth century intentionally promoted the spread of illness by giving Natives blankets and other materials from small pox hospitals.\textsuperscript{81} Beyond its importance in the creation and maintenance of trade and alliance relationships between Natives and Europeans, the exchange of material goods had a variety of long-lasting, unintended consequences including the disruption of the Native economic system and the spread of infectious diseases.

**Europeans’ Adoption of Native Dress**

The exchange of trade goods between Native and European communities had deep impacts on both cultures as the populations adopted and adapted one another’s behaviors. While Bauer’s analysis focuses on Indigenous peoples’ appropriation of European goods, Europeans arriving in the Northeast of North America made use of Native goods out of necessity and convenience. Europeans in the Northeast often adapted Native goods in order to endure the cold winters and to more successfully gather resources for their survival.

Europeans adopted traditional Native dress for a variety of reasons: comfort, practicality, and cultural mobility. In terms of cultural mobility, the Europeans who adopted Native dress were more easily able to engage with Native communities – in trade, alliance, or missionary work. Some Europeans in

\textsuperscript{81} Calloway, *American Revolution*, 5.
the Northeast of North America chose completely to adopt Native dress temporarily in an effort to live in Native communities. For example, one young man fled the French settlement at Port Royal over a conflict with its governor and lived among the Natives nearby for a year. He adopted Native dress and ways of living, but gave them up upon returning to the French settlement.\textsuperscript{82} In addition, some interpreters and guides hired by Dutch and French trading companies adopted Native behaviors including their dress, in order to live among them and facilitate trade relationships. These men, known as truchements, lived among Native populations and adopted certain cultural behaviors to learn their languages and establish trade and alliance relationships on behalf of their European employers more efficiently.\textsuperscript{83} However, Jesuit missionaries found these men’s behavior to be immoral and potentially detrimental to their conversion efforts. Some of these truchements later redeemed themselves in the eyes of the missionaries by assisting them in teaching Christianity to the local Native populations. This is evident in the account of Charles L’Allemant – a companion of Champlain – who was a dedicated French Jesuit.\textsuperscript{84}

\textsuperscript{82} Details on the life of this young man were not recorded; the primary account of this incident is Pierre Biard, “Letter from Father Pierre Biard to the Reverend Father Provincial, at Paris” in Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents, vol. 2, 101.


Europeans frequently adopted Native footwear, most significantly moccasins. Moccasins – soft shoes made from animal skins – were widely utilized by Europeans because they were relatively inexpensive to make and easy to repair. Their flexibility and durability made them much better for use in the Northeast woodlands than the stiff, heeled shoes typically worn by European men at this time. Moccasins could also be easily altered as needed for the seasons - fur could be added or removed as the weather required. They also dried quickly when wet. Moccasins helped Europeans hunt successfully because they made less noise than European shoes – the ability to move quietly through the wilderness aided in Europeans’ survival. Some Natives considered European shoes so cumbersome and inferior that Native war parties would bring additional moccasins for potential European captives.85

Another important adaptation of Native dress by Europeans can be seen in a change of the colors of their garments. In order to blend in to the landscape – an invaluable skill for hunting and thus, survival – Europeans abandoned their brightly colored garments. They adopted the practice of dressing in natural colors, primarily variants of brown and green. Not blending into the wooded landscape made the Europeans easier targets in skirmishes with Natives, so adopting natural colors was also a defensive strategy.86

In the frontier of the Northeast – the outskirts of colonial settlement, far from the European-populated areas on the coast – some European settlers adopted traditional Native garments, such as mitasses and breechclouts.

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85 Axtell, *Natives and Newcomers*, 324.
86 Ibid.
European men who adopted these Native garments greatly challenged the norms of Euro-American colonial society. These garments exposed parts of the body – the upper thighs and parts of the hips – covered by traditional European dress. This exposure of flesh seemed uncivilized to some observers who feared that Native influences would corrupt colonial society. This concern continued to plague European settlers well into the eighteenth century. One minister expressed concern that this manner of dress among colonial men would distract or in other ways negatively impact the religious devotion of Euro-American ladies. This adoption of Native dress demonstrates not only Europeans’ flexibility in adapting Native practices, but also the superiority of Native garments for wear in the woodlands.

Karen Kupperman suggests that by the early sixteenth century, many English writers were concerned with the breakdown of English society due to the decreasing indications of rank and gender distinctions. One publication from 1631 suggests that men were dressing effeminately, while women’s fashion was too masculine. This period in England was marked by the decline of traditional social categories in that economic expansion allowed common people to amass wealth and power, which had previously only been available to the nobility. Additionally, during this period in Europe, people experimented in new

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87 Joseph Doddridge, “Notes, on the settlement and Indian wars, of the western parts of Virginia & Pennsylvania, from the year 1763 until the year 1783 inclusive,” (Printed at the office of the Gazette, for the author, 1824).
ways of dress, including wearing items associated with the opposite sex. Greater expansion into foreign lands exacerbated this degeneration of traditional social structures in bringing wealth and power and “unique experiences” to certain individuals. The minister in this case represents a valuable example of the anxieties of English colonists’ that adopting Native ways would challenge their traditional social order and thus an element of their identity as English citizens.

In Renaissance England, cloth was key to the economy and society. In addition to its importance as currency, clothing marked gender, age, and status. Ann Little suggests that clothing was also potentially transformative, that clothing symbolized servitude or freedom and changes in dress could reflect alternations to the privileges or status of the wearer. On the colonial frontier of northeast North America, cloth also held great economic and cultural significance. In addition to marking status and wealth, dress also reflected ethnicity, as Natives did not produce woven cloth.

In Michael Zuckerman’s examination of identity in New England, he claims that English settlers – uncertain of their own identities – attempted to maintain their sense of civility by establishing physical and cultural boundaries between settlements and the wilderness. Zuckerman suggests that this fear of “going Native” led colonists in the Northeast to refuse to adopt Native technologies and materials, even if they proved superior to European ways, in

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92 Little, “Shoot That Rogue, for He Hath an Englishman’s Coat On,” 240.
fear that doing so would diminish their identity as English citizens. Zuckerman supports this argument by examining settlers’ building construction practices in the Northeast, and he claims that this rejection of Native goods extended to clothing practices as well. Zuckerman’s suggestion that material and technological exchange with Native peoples threatened English settlers’ identity proved to be true in some ways, reflected in colonists’ anxieties about cultural cross-dressing. However, he fails to acknowledge the various instances in which English colonists adopted Native technologies and goods in order to survive in the Northeast.93

Little argues that English writers attempted to separate themselves from Native society and to maintain a boundary between “civilization and savagery.” However, their writings reveal significant similarities in the importance and function of clothing and adornment in both English and Native societies. Given its transformative properties in European society, colonists’ feared natives’ adoption of European dress would blur the constructed boundary between the populations.94 Little’s work supports the idea that both Native and European people adopted one another’s dress practices for their own purposes, but this adoption had the potential to threaten their identities.

94 Little, “‘Shoot That Rogue, for He Hath an Englishman’s Coat On,’” 248.
Natives’ Adoption of European Dress

Though Native people were interested in trading for European cloth, they primarily used this material to manufacture traditional garments, rather than adopting European styles of dress. If Natives adopted European clothing, they did so in unusual ways – they wore shirts and jackets loose and unbuttoned, cut off trousers, and wore hats backwards. Natives would decorate these goods according to existing cultural traditions.95

The adoption of European clothing goods by Natives was limited and secondary to their adoption of tools and food. It was inconvenient and virtually impossible to live and work in the forest of the Northeast in European dress, which tended to be more fragile, formal, and physically restrictive that traditional Native dress. This was particularly true for women – the corsets and large skirts of European dresses were completely impractical for the active lifestyle of most Native women, who were responsible for a variety of physically demanding tasks. In addition to its impracticality, European women's dress was not typically adopted by Native populations as it was generally unavailable for purchase, except to those who converted to Christianity.96

Some Europeans thought that the adoption of European clothing and other “‘trappings of civilization’ would ease [Natives] spiritual transformation into Christians.”97 The dress that appealed to Natives tended to be fancy and

97 Bailey, 61.
decorative. Though missionaries tended to push for Natives to adopt European
dress, they saw this reasoning as unchristian. Missionaries encouraged Natives
to adopt European dress as a piece of conversion to Christianity. They spread the
ideals of Christianity among Native communities including the concepts of
modesty and the sinfulness of the flesh, which further encouraged Natives who
converted to Christianity to adopt European clothing. European dress, along
with faith, served as a mark of “civility”, and physically reflected the “civilizing”
power of clothing.

Despite the efforts of many missionaries, Natives continuously wore their
traditional garments. Even in the mid-eighteenth century, Native populations
continued to resist adopting European dress. Pierre Pouchot, a French military
officer sent to war in North America in 1754, revealedly stated, “Even those
who are Christians have always refused to wear breeches.” While some Natives
adopted European clothing so completely that they could be mistaken for
Englishmen, most only adopted European clothing goods for comfort and
maintained their traditional ways of dress.99

Native men did not wear trousers. As Biard describes, the Native men
found them encumbering, like wearing chains. He recounted that they would use
European cloth and blankets, but they would improve upon them by trimming
them with traditional decorations and wearing them doubled over for more
warmth. Native garments were adorned with “leather lace;” the animal skins

98 Peter N. Moogk, “POUCHOT, PIERRE,” in Dictionary of Canadian Biography, vol. 3, (University of
Toronto/Université Laval, 2003).
99 Calloway, New Worlds for All, 66.
were painted with natural dyes with intricate “lace-like” patterns. They also used
animal leather to make shoes and strings to hold together their garments. 100

Due to its economic value, it became common for Native warriors to strip
fallen Europeans of their clothing. Lieutenant Lion Gardiner, and English officer
in the Pequot War, recounted an incident of negotiating with Pequot warriors
who threatened to kill more English men, women and children. He later revealed
that some of the men wore English dress. This combination of threats and
wearing English clothing upset Gardiner’s translator, who encouraged him to
shoot the warriors.101 As Little suggests, this event demonstrates how cultural
cross-dressing exacerbated English anxieties about living on the colonial
frontier.102 For European settlers, the ability of Native peoples to dress like and
appear as Europeans but remain “savage” presented a significant threat to their
ability to maintain their fragile identities in North America.

Conclusion

In the early period of colonization in northeastern North America,
European settlers and Native populations exchanged “contact goods,” including a
variety of clothing goods: moccasins, wampum, animal furs, and duffel cloths.
Introduced foreign goods were adopted and adapted by Native populations, and
Europeans adopted Native clothing goods out of convenience or necessity. The
introduction of European goods and conceptions of private property deeply

100 Biard, “Relation of New France,” 75.
101 Lion Gardiner, “Leift. Lion Gardener His Relation of the Pequot Warres,” Collections of the
Massachusetts Historical Society, 3rd ser. 3 (1833): 144-146.
102 Little, “Shoot That Rogue, for He Hath an Englishman’s Coat On,” 238-239.
impacted Native society, yet their clothing and appearance traditions did not change dramatically in the first 150 years of contact with Europeans. Unlike their counterparts in Latin America, Native populations were not systematically encouraged by European colonists on a large scale to adopt European behaviors as part of a “civilizing” process. In fact, the unorganized and disparate nature of colonization in the Northeast allowed for Native populations to remain largely separate from European colonial society and to maintain their traditional ways. Preserving some level of separation between the two communities was also key as European settlers attempted to preserve their cultural ties to Europe and resist the influence of Native culture on their brittle identities. In addition to the exchange of clothing goods’ impacts on both societies, the Europeans’ views on Native society and Natives’ appearance in the period of early colonization played a key role in Europe’s imaginings and understanding of what it meant to be a Native of North America.
Chapter II:

Creation and Presentation of a Native American Image

As Ann Little explains in her examination of cultural cross-dressing in colonial North America, before Europeans understood race and sex in terms of biology, these concepts of personal identity were constructed in large part by clothing and adornment. Thus, the description and depictions of Native peoples’ appearance on the frontier of the Northeast colonies provides important insight into how Europeans conceptualized Native society. Additionally, the significance of appearance in representing an individual’s identity explains the importance of discussions of clothing and personal appearance in the discourse of power and identity in the colonies. This chapter will argue that given the importance of dress as a reflection of identity, the images – both visual and descriptive – of Native Americans that reached Europe played a key role in Europeans’ imaginings of what it meant to be “Native American”.

As English colonists faced changing relationships with Native populations over the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, their depictions of Native peoples reflected these shifts. Depending on their status in war and peace times, Natives would be portrayed in positive and appealing ways in order to encourage settlement and support for England’s colonial efforts or in negative images that emphasized their danger and “barbarity”. Throughout all of these

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representations, one element remained consistent. Europeans, particularly the
English, continued to be intrigued by Natives’ exoticism, which was central to
Europeans’ imaginings of Indigenous societies.

In addition to the reports of settlers in the colonies, North American
Natives who travelled to England in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries
significantly influenced English perceptions of Native society. Most of the early
Native visitors to England served a political and cultural purpose as translators
and were presented to the English public as exotic figures. Later visitors, most
prominently the “Mohawk Kings,” were seen and treated as nobility. Though
received by the English court as respected royal diplomats, they continued to
provide fodder for the English public’s fascination with foreign places and
peoples. Though the shifting presentations of Native people reflected the state of
Native-colonial relations, the duality of the “noble savage” Native figure
persisted in English imaginings of Native American society.

**Early Depictions and Imaginings of Native Society**

Europeans’ worldview at the beginning of the colonial period greatly
impacted their early impressions and presentations of Indigenous people around
the world. In the noble courts of Europe, social structure was based on
hereditary hierarchy. Additionally, gender distinctions were central, and, though
natural, were also constructed through visible presentations.\(^{104}\) Thus, for early
travelers to North America, civility was determined by gender distinctions and

inherited social structures – reflected in recognizable forms. Karen Kupperman argues that given the ongoing degeneration of social order in England in the early colonial period, early conceptions of Native Americans reflect this discord. Many English observers of Native Americans both criticized them as “savages” and praised their simplicity and virtue.\(^{105}\)

Early descriptions of Native peoples by European travelers in North America indicate that many of those who spent time on the continent accepted that Native people were similar to themselves and the differences between them were not innate. Early in the colonial period, race was not seen as a defining and predetermined characteristic; rather, differences between races were acquired.\(^{106}\) As Kupperman explains, many Englishmen expected Natives to be uncivilized and their society devoid of order; however, reports from North America described the opposite. Many travelers observed that Native populations lived in “highly organized societies” with significant distinct categories.\(^{107}\)

\(^{105}\) Kupperman, “Presentment of Civility,” 195.
\(^{106}\) Ibid., 193.
\(^{107}\) Ibid, 196.
Despite reports of Natives’ dress practices and appearance, the European assumption of Natives’ nakedness persisted throughout the colonial period. In early European settlers’ reports of Native North Americans, the term “naked” carried a variety of meanings. The phrase “stark naked” meant completely without clothes, while “naked” often referred to the simplicity and limited nature of Native clothing. Kupperman argues that the description “naked” went along with the word “savage” which perpetuated the concept of Natives as primitive, deficient, and defenseless against European influence and conquest.108 Promoters of settlement in North America used the concept of “naked” Native Americans to encourage immigration by making North America seem more appealing and its settlement unchallenging. This type of presentation of Natives is evident in the Massachusetts Bay Colony seal (Figure 2.1). The Native man in

![Massachusetts Bay Colony Seal](image)

Figure: 2.1 Massachusetts Bay Colony Seal, 1629. The History Project, University of California, Davis.

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the seal is nude except for leaves covering his genitals, and he holds an arrow pointing down. This physical representation of the Native suggests the peaceful and uncivilized nature of Native society. The Native figure also appears to be saying, “Come Over and Help Us.” This image appeals to potential colonists by emphasizing the justified nature of colonization and implied the ease of settlement in northeastern North America. Some settlers in New England who portrayed Natives’ nudity emphasized their modesty and “original purity.” However, most Europeans saw this nakedness as a mark of Natives’ inferiority to European society. These conflicting expectations and observations of Native society persisted throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

**Early Images from the Colonies**

Europeans’ early depictions of Native people in North America reveal settlers’ fascination with Natives’ exoticism, Europeans’ idealized image of a “noble savage” and colonists’ appreciation for any cooperative relations with Native nations. In addition to dress and personal appearance, posture also represented one’s position in society. In the early seventeenth century, a trend in portraiture of European elites depicted men in bold body positions. The pose of “an armed figure, with one arm akimbo and one leg extended” was reserved in Europe for individuals who commanded respect and authority. There are several examples of this positioning in John White’s paintings of Native

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Americans (Figure 2.2). John White was an English artist and mapmaker who arrived in Roanoke in 1585. White became the governor of the colony on Roanoke Island in 1587; while the initial relations between the settlers and local Native nations were largely cooperative, they deteriorated over time – much like the relations between Natives and colonists in the Northeast.\footnote{William Patterson Cumming, “The Identity of John White Governor of Roanoke and John White the Artist,” \textit{The North Carolina Historical Review}, 15:3 (July 1938), 197-203.} White created many watercolors depicting the Natives he encountered. Though his works depict Native nations from the mid-Atlantic rather than the Northeast, they are an important source for understanding early settlers views on and presentations of Native Americans.

The “Anglicanization” of Native people in artistic representation was not limited to commanding male figures, it can also be seen in a variety of presentations of Native American women. Renaissance painters depicted elite females with their arms in a “self-enclosing gesture.” Kupperman suggests that using this pose in depictions of Algonquian women demonstrates a connection between them and European elites (Figure 2.3). This pose also emphasized modesty and civility, which further connected the pictured individuals to European cultural ideals.\footnote{Kupperman, “Presentment of Civility,” 217.} The practice of “Anglcanianizing” Native women can be seen in paintings by John White, and in the portrait of Pocahontas, who visited England in 1616 (Figures 2.3 and 2.4). The practice of portraying Native peoples in ways that suggested their similarity to Europeans diminished the perceived differences between the two populations; however, the European
view of Natives from North America as inferiors and objects of curiosity continued throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Figure 2.2: John White, "Indian in Body Paint," National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institute.
Figure 2.3: John White, “Indian Woman,” National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institute.
Even before Europeans set foot on mainland North America, the appearance and behavior of Indigenous peoples captured the imagination of the European public. Many Europeans saw Native Americans as creatures of Satan or as brutes and animals.113 These views persisted among many colonists as they settled in North America. As Michael Zuckerman argues, the challenges of immigration and struggles with social order in North America were exacerbated by frontier life. He suggests that colonists were thus concerned about their own

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civility. Colonists in North America characterized their world in dichotomies—“saved and damned, Christian and heathen, civilized and savage, white and black.”\textsuperscript{114} Zuckerman argues that their existing negative perception of Natives fed into this worldview, which led settlers in North America to create an identity based on their differences from perceived “others”. The existing derivative view of Native peoples as simple and savage primarily came from early narratives of discovery and exploration of North America and from accounts of war with Natives, which stressed their savagery.\textsuperscript{115}

English colonists tended to keep Natives at a distance and typically did not include them in colonial culture. Though some English colonists attempted to bring Natives into colonial society, primarily through religious conversion, these incidents were limited in scope compared to the larger approach of the English settlers to exclude Native peoples from the center of colonial society. Zuckerman also suggests that though many English settlers claimed that proselytizing was a primary goal of their settlement in the North America, they generally failed in their missionary efforts. Puritans in Massachusetts in particular claimed missionary work as a major priority; however they engaged in violent conflict with the Pequot nation rather than establishing an inclusive relationship through conversion.\textsuperscript{116}


\textsuperscript{116} Zuckerman, “Identity in British America,” 145-147.
Additionally, Zuckerman suggests that compared to other European powers, English views of Native populations were particularly stern, even from their first settlement in North America. These opinions were made worse by the outbreak of violence between Native and English populations in Virginia in 1610, and between the Puritans and Pequot in 1634. The English settlers in Virginia and the Powhatan Confederacy engaged in a series of conflicts for resources and territory in the seventeenth century known as the Anglo-Powhatan Wars; the first of which began in 1610. The Pequot War broke out between the Pequot nation and several New England colonies and their Native allies as a result of competition for economic and territorial control in the Connecticut River Valley. Zuckerman suggests that the separation of the Native and settler communities and violence between them perpetuated English settlers’ negative views on Native populations.\textsuperscript{117} While Zuckerman ignores important positive exchanges that did occur between English colonists and Native populations, the general separation of Native and colonial populations, may explain how the English continued to see Native populations as distinctly different “others.” This perception and emphasis on the “other-ness” and exoticism of Native peoples is evident in many English colonists’ accounts of Native peoples.

In the early period of English exploration and settlement in North America, the descriptions of Native populations reflect the concept of ethnicity as a manipulable attribute. Early accounts describe Natives with “tanned” or

\textsuperscript{117} Ibid., 148.
“bronze” skin. Early writers emphasized that this difference in skin tone was not innate, but acquired through their culture and environment. In his description of the Native people he encountered in Virginia, John Smith reported, “they are borne white.” Many descriptions also supported the idea that Natives darkened their skin with dyes. Kupperman suggests that this limited differentiation between Europeans and Natives in regards to race allowed individuals of either race to easily adopt the appearance of the other. In fact, some observers of Native Americans suggested that language was a more suitable characteristic for determining identity than appearance, as appearance was much easier to manipulate and adapt. Language became the main categorization for Native peoples used by anthropologists, who recognized Algonquian and Iroquois peoples as part of distinct language groups.

Many Natives who converted to Christianity could manipulate their appearance to pass as either Native or European. William Hubbard recounts a case of a Native ally of the English in King Philip’s War who was wounded and disguised his appearance by darkening his skin in the manner of the enemy tribe in order to avoid capture. Additionally, this manipulation or disguise of identity is evident in reports of early Native Americans to visit England, who after adopting the clothing and hair practices of the English nobility were unrecognizable as Natives at court. Though the adoption of clothing could

120 Ibid., 222.
121 Williams, Key into the Language of America, 165, 192.
allow Natives to transform into allies, or seeming Englishmen, many Englishmen and colonists feared that the adoption of European clothing by Natives could be employed to mock or endanger English settlers or threaten the order of colonial society. Various accounts of Natives’ behavior from New England regarding the adoption and misuse of English dress reflect this continuous anxiety.

In times of conflict between settlers and Native populations, colonists’ reports on Native practices reflected their anxieties about the threats posed by non-ally Native nations. English colonists’ writings on cultural cross-dressing reflected their concern about the potential influence of this practice on the existing social order. In Benjamin Thompson’s *New England’s Crisis*, he dramatizes the consequences of King Philip’s War. Thompson suggests that in adopting English clothes, Native people would be able to infiltrate and ultimately take over Anglo-American society. While the idea that Natives could overrun colonial settlements was not a realistic possibility, Thompson’s suggestion reveals his anxiety about the potential consequences of accepting Native people in colonial society. Given how some English captives adopted Native practices and joined their communities, some Anglo-Americans feared that Natives who adopted English dress would be able to permeate colonial society and demand the same rights and benefits as Anglo-Americans, including property rights, territorial control, and advantageous trade agreements.123 This anxiety was one of many among Anglo-Americans in the Northeast, many of whom continuously

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feared the blending of European and Native practices and felt threatened by the presence of Native influences.

European construction of a Native American image continued to be influenced by reports from Euro-Americans in the northeast. The most detailed descriptions of Natives’ appearance from the eighteenth century come from explorers and various captives. Captivity narratives provide useful insight into the appearance and dress of Native populations, as captives often had more time and ability to observe tribes’ cultural practices and traditions. Euro-American captives also gained intimate knowledge of Indigenous manners of dress and appearance as they were frequently forced by their captors to adopt traditional ways. As dress was an important marker of identity for both Native and Euro-American communities, forcing captives to adopt traditional ways of dress stripped them of their original identities and incorporated them into the imprisoning society.

Captivity narratives tend to provide negative images of Natives as the Native captors in most cases were engaged in conflict with the colonial population. One example of this trend is the captivity narrative of Mary Rowlandson, an English woman who arrived in America as a child in 1639 and was captured by Nipmuck and Wampanoag warriors in 1676 during King Phillip’s War. In her narrative, Rowlandson recounts an incident in which she

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125 Nipmuc and Wampanoag are nations in the Algonkian language group.
was hopeful of rescue when she saw a group of men approaching who appeared to be Englishmen, as they were wearing English clothing. However, when the men reached her and her Native companions, Rowlandson realized they were in fact, Natives.\textsuperscript{126} Rowlandson’s account demonstrates the ability of clothing to conceal or reveal one’s identity.

Colonel James Smith’s narrative of his own captivity in 1755 serves as a prime example of re-forming captives’ identities through manipulating their appearances. Smith, an officer of the British Empire describes his captors as members of Kahnawake nation.\textsuperscript{127} Smith was captured in a battle, during which he observed the Natives to be wearing only breechclouts and body paint. After the battle, he reported that several of the warriors had taken clothing from the British officers, including sashes and hats, as symbols of victory and status. After his capture, Smith was forced to strip and wear only a breechclout – the traditional dress worn by young Mohawk men. Additionally, his Mohawk captors pulled out Smith’s hair except on small spot which was cut short with only three short locks remaining, as was a traditional hairstyle of the local Native population. They also adorned Smith in beads and brooches. The Mohawk captors also pierced Smith’s nose and ears and adorned them with traditional jewelry and decorated his body, face, and head with traditional painted designs. Smith reported that his captors offered to split his ears, as was fashionable

\textsuperscript{126} Mary Rowlandson, \textit{A narrative of the captivity, sufferings, and removes, of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson: who was taken prisoner by the Indians; with several others... Written by her own hand}, (Boston: re-printed and sold by Thomas and John Fleet, at the Bible and Heart, Cornhill, 1791), 76.

among them, but he refused. The manipulation of Smith’s dress and personal appearance reflects his removal from Euro-American society, and his inclusion in the Kahnawake community. In this way, clothing and appearance could be used to alter the identities of individuals from either community to become incorporated into another society.

Given the successful use of clothing to manipulate individuals’ identities, colonists in New England feared this practice. Both Native and French captors employed changes in clothing and appearance to evoke submission from or create a sense of belonging among their captives. From 1675 to 1763, less than half of individuals captured in New England returned home. Of those who did not return, almost a third of women and twelve percent of men chose to remain with their capturers. Many of these individuals intentionally rejected English government and culture by voluntarily continuing to live with their French or Native captors. These individuals represented the danger and instability of life on the colonial frontier in the Northeast for many Europeans.

Native Travelers to Europe

In addition to reports and images of Native people created by Europeans in North America, Natives who travelled to Europe played a crucial role in the formation of Europeans’ imaginings of Native Americans. The earliest Natives from the Americas to reach Europe were captives on Christopher Columbus’s

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128 Ibid., 9-10.
129 Emma Lewis Coleman, New England Captives Carried to Canada, between 1677 and 1760 during the French and Indian Wars, (Portland: Southworth Press, 1925).
first voyage who reached the Iberian Peninsula in 1493. In Portugal, the nobility
were shocked by the nakedness of captives, but were also impressed by their
intelligence. Columbus’s captives arrived at the Spanish court where they were
put on display for the entertainment of the Spanish nobility and to demonstrate
Spain’s great achievement. The tradition of viewing Natives from North
American as entertainment continued for the next century. Hernando Cortez
sent numerous Natives back to Europe, especially those with unusual features, to
entertain the nobility. In the early years of colonization, many Natives were sent
back to Europe as slaves.\textsuperscript{130} Additionally, many Natives from South America and
the Caribbean were captured and brought to Europe to serve as interpreters for
Europeans. Throughout Europe, Americans were primarily considered points of
interest – exotic curiosities to observe, portray, and discuss.

Compared to Spain, Portugal, and even France, relatively few Natives
from the Americas reached England until the late sixteenth century. Some
evidence suggests that four Native Americans from North America reached
England as early as 1498. These men were kept at the court of Henry VII. They
were reported to eat raw flesh and to dress in animal skins. In 1503, two of the
Natives were observed again, but at this time they were dressed in conventional
European clothing. The observer remarked that he only recognized them as
Native Americans after hearing them speak, not based on their appearance.\textsuperscript{131}
The earliest well-documented visit of a North American Native in England was
an Inuit captive who arrived in London in 1576. Along with this visit, many

\textsuperscript{131} Ibid., 11.
images of Inuits were made and distributed around Europe. In 1584, around 20 Natives from different parts of the Americas came to England. They attracted large crowds and continued the established tradition of entertaining the public. When put on display, Natives dressed in their traditional ways, with garments made of animal skin and ornamental face and body paint. However, in other contexts they were increasingly seen in English attire and beginning to speak English. The experiences of these early visitors reflect Europeans’ fascination with Natives as exotic peoples and entertainment.

Europeans did not engage the image of North American Natives solely through observation; many European elites began adopting and adapting elements of Native identity. A Masque performed in 1613 featured prominent noblemen and women dressed as Natives of Virginia. Additionally, Francis Higginson wrote in 1630 that the popular style among English men to wear one lock of hair long was an intentional imitation of the images of Natives from North America. Some Englishmen rejected this practice of adopting Native traditions as it threatened the existing order of English society, a commonly feared consequence of colonial expansion.

As colonization in New England progressed, Native visitors from the Northeast who travelled to England continued to be viewed as exotic curiosities by the English public. By the mid-seventeenth century, Norumbega, or northern

132 Ibid., 5, 19.
133 Kupperman, “Presentment of Civility,” 225.
135 Francis Higginson, New-Englands Plantation (1630), 12.
New England, was becoming a popular option for colonial settlement. In an effort to increase English settlement there, Captain Waymouth took five Abenaki people to England to train as interpreters. A chronicler of their visit remarked that the Abenaki were civil and intelligent, yet he continued to imagine that they, like other savages, were treacherous. He also commented that the captives were “so naked” that they could only be restrained by holding their hair. Upon their arrival in England, Sir Fernando Gorges, one observer of the Abenaki captives, was impressed by them and remarked that they were better behaved than the English common people.\textsuperscript{137} In addition to training as translators, the Abenaki captives were likely displayed to the public and the nobility in their traditional dress and ornamentation styles demonstrating their skills, like hunting with bows and arrows, as earlier Native captives had been.\textsuperscript{138} These generally positive depictions of the Abenaki visitors to England reveal the early largely cooperative relationship between Natives in Northeast North America and English settlers there. However, these generally peaceful relationships eventually deteriorated, which – along with the natural difficulties of supporting colonies in the Northeast – led the British Empire to largely withdraw from the area. As such, English interest in Northeast Natives decreased and four of the five Abenaki returned to their homeland.\textsuperscript{139}

\textsuperscript{137} Vaughan, \textit{Transatlantic Encounters}, 58-61.
\textsuperscript{138} Ibid., 63.
\textsuperscript{139} Ibid., 65.
The “Four Mohawk Kings”

Approximately a dozen Native Americans traveled to England between 1620 and 1710. Given the perceived failure of Pocahontas’s mission in 1620 and the outbreak of violence between Natives and English colonists in the Northeast, the demand for Native Americans to be brought to England diminished. However, as war between the English and French reached North America, the English recruited Native populations as allies. At the turn of the eighteenth century, English depictions of some Native nations reflected their position as necessary and desired allies. In 1710, four Native men travelled to England in order to secure their alliance with England. These men became widely known as the “Four Mohawk Kings”. As Eric Hinderaker suggests, the changing presentation of Native peoples fit into the emergence of British colonial identity. The depictions of the “Mohawk Kings” reflect this trend, as John Verelst’s portraits demonstrate the ambiguous English perception of Natives as both noble allies and as foreign curiosities, representing the reach and power of the British Empire.

Early European observers in North America suggested the similarity of Native society to their own in using aristocratic language. In ascribing noble titles such as “king” to Native leaders, these settlers imposed their own understanding of social order onto Native society. The title of “king” in this case was imposed by Europeans and does not accurately reflect the station of these men in their home cultures. Though earlier Natives who travelled to Europe

140 Ibid., 97.
141 Hinderaker, “Four Indian Kings,” 487
were frequently captured or served as guides, these men willingly travelled to England in order to gain economic and military assistance from the government, which was expected to benefit the colonies and the empire, as well as the Native populations the men represented. The “kings” also hoped to encourage missionary efforts in the Northeast and gain military support for an invasion into Canada.\textsuperscript{142}

The delegation of Native men was led by Hendrick Tejonihokarawa, referred to in England as the “Emperor of the Six Nations”. Hendrick was accompanied by: his brother, John Onigohenago (known as “King of Granajahore”); another Mohawk, Brant Saquainquaragton (called the “King of the Maquas”); and a Mohican warrior Nicholas Etowaucum (called “King of the River Nation”).\textsuperscript{143} The names of these men reflect their treatment by Europeans. In using the titles of “King” and “Emperor”, these Native men were granted noble status and treated as such. This ennoblement of the Native men reflected how Europeans projected their understanding of political and social structure onto Native society. While these men may have been respected warriors and leaders in their communities, the European concepts of monarchy and nobility were not mirrored in Native society. John Verelst’s portraits of the kings, commissioned by Queen Anne, presented he men as similar to European royals, unlike most

\textsuperscript{142} Ibid., 489.
\textsuperscript{143} There were various titles attributed to these Native men and several variations on the spellings of their names; I will use the titles on Verelst’s portraits (Figures 4-7) and the spellings of the names used by Vaughan, in \textit{Transatlantic Encounters}, 117.
previous ethnographic illustrations of Natives, which tended to emphasize traditional aspects of Native society.\textsuperscript{144}

Unlike earlier Natives to reach Europe who were primarily seen as curiosities or were used for their knowledge of Native languages, the European nobility treated the “Mohawk Kings” with respect and generally interacted with them as established foreign dignitaries. The men represented the interests of their tribes in North America: maintaining what had been prosperous trade relationships with the English colonies of the Northeast. By 1709, the British officials in North America convinced many Mohawks to break neutrality and join them in battle against French America in Queen Anne’s War.\textsuperscript{145} British officials promised a fleet and more troops in support of this military effort, but the assistance was late in coming. Many allied Iroquois nations questioned British and Anglo-American sincerity and competence. One official in the colonies, Samuel Vetch, was concerned that losing the alliance with five Native nations would result in the British colonies being overrun by French forces. Thus, Anglo-American officials assembled a delegation, including the “Mohawk Kings” to meet with Queen Anne directly and request more support for the ongoing war.\textsuperscript{146}

On April 19, 1710, the four “kings” met with Queen Anne. They presented her with gifts and a prepared address in which they asked for her to support the ongoing war in North America. They threatened to switch their allegiance to the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{144} Hinderaker, “Four Indian Kings,” 494.
\item \textsuperscript{145} Queen Anne’s War refers to the North American Theater of the War of Spanish Succession, as it was known in Europe.
\item \textsuperscript{146} Hinderaker, “Four Indian Kings,” 489-490.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
French if they did not receive support from the British. The Queen accepted their gifts, including wampum belts, and suggested that military support would come. After their visit, Queen Anne commissioned John Verelst, a Dutch portraitist, to paint full-length portraits of each man to be displayed at court. In addition to display at court, these portraits were copied by engravers, notably John Simon, and widely disseminated amongst the European public.\footnote{Vaughan, \textit{Transatlantic Encounters}, 120-123.} The portraits of each of the Native “kings” reveals important trends in not only how the clothes and general appearance of Native peoples continued to fascinate the European public, but also how the appearance of these men reflect a shift in Europeans’ imagination of Native peoples. Given these men’s status as allies of the empire, their depictions present a “civilized” image of strong leaders comparable to those of European nobility.
Figure 2.5: John Vereist, Tee Yee Neen Ho Ga Row (Hendrick Tejonihokarawa), 1710, Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center, Special Archives and Collections.
Figure 2.6: John Verelst, Ho Nee Yeath Ta No Row (John Onigohenago), 1710, Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center, Special Archives and Collections.
Figure 2.7: John Verelst, Etow Oh Koam (Nicholas Etowaucum), 1710, Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center, Special Archives and Collections.
Figure 2.8: John Verelst, Sa Ga Yeath Qua Pirth Tow (Brant Saquainquaragon), 1710, Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center, Special Archives and Collections.
Verelst’s Portraits

The starkest example of the “royal” treatment the “kings” received can be seen in Verelst’s portrait of Tejonihokarawa (Figure 2.5). In this painting, Tejonihokarawa is depicted in an imposing stance typically reserved for portraits of European elites. He is pictured wearing an English style outfit – a linen shirt, breeches, a waistcoat, cloak, stockings, and buckled shoes. In addition to these English clothing items, he is wearing a wampum belt, reflective of his diplomatic status, and a scarlet cloak, like the other sachems. As Tejonihokarawa was considered the “Emperor” and the most important and respected member of this group of “nobility”, he is presented as the most “Anglicanized” figure. In addition to wearing English clothing, Verelst’s portrait minimizes Tejonihokarawa’s face and body paint and depicts his hair tied back in the prevailing English style at the time. Additionally, holding the wampum belt suggests Tajonihokarawa’s diplomatic influence and skill as a leader, while the other sachems are depicted holding weapons, implying their comparatively inferior status as warriors (Figures 2.5 – 2.8).

In the portraits of the other three sachems, their Indigenous characteristics are clearly on display. Though they all maintain the posture of European leaders, other features of their appearance appeal to existing European assumptions about Native ways. The three remaining sachems are depicted wearing a simple, knee-length shirt, a cloak, a colorful patterned belt, and moccasins. In these paintings, the face and body paint or tattooing on each individual is clear and prominent. Their hair is also tied and adorned in
traditional Native fashions. In the paintings, John Onigohenago holds a bow and Brant Saquainquaragton poses with a rifle, indicative of their position as hunters, while Nicholas Etowauccm carries a war club and sword, reflecting his warrior status. All four paintings depict the men with tomahawks and their clan animals. The tomahawks lying on the ground remind the viewer of the figures’ Native nature, but symbolize their peaceful relationship with Britain (Figures 2.5 – 2.8).

Of the clothing elements in these portraits, some would have been worn in traditional Native society, while others are a creation of the European imagination. Each man is depicted wearing a colorful belt on his waist – these woven belts reflect actual Native traditions of personal adornment. The moccasins in the paintings display traditional designs and materials used in northeastern Native communities. The face, body, and hair adornments also reflect traditional Native behaviors. However, some pictured items were not the sachems’ traditional clothes, but rather given to them by their English hosts and are representative of the European imagination of Native culture rather than Native culture itself. The cloaks pictured, known as matchcoats, were often described in European accounts of northeast America. Their draped appearance also suggests Native foundations, but the cloaks depicted in these paintings were in fact made in England for the visiting sachems.148 The shirts worn by Onigohenago, Saquanquaragton, and Etowauccm are depicted open and draped, suggestive of togas, and the noble simplicity Europeans’ expected of Native

populations. These loose, simple shirts were not worn in traditional Native cultures; rather they reflect a blend between reports of Natives’ distortion of European clothing in North America and the European imagination of an ideal Native American. These simple, long and loose linen shirts became known in North America as “hunting shirts”, which were associated with Native culture, despite their European origins (Figures 2.6 – 2.8). While hunting shirts had become widely adopted by Natives in America and symbolized status by their wearers in Native society, the shirts demonstrate a Native adoption of European goods rather than a purely Native tradition.

To differing extents, these portraits present a blend of respectful portrayal of nobility and continued fascination with the exotic. Each figure is partially “Anglicanized” in their posture and dress, and presented with objects that reflect their status, as was typical of European portraiture. This feature reveals the status of these sachems as comparable to European nobility. However, the presence of the tomahawks and clan animals as well as the dress of Onigohenago, Saquanquaragton, and Etowaucum implies their differences from European society and its standards. Additionally, the background of each painting – imagined and painted at a later time by Verelst – also emphasizes their status as Natives. The background depicts the wild forest of the Northeast, a point of fascination and anxiety for English immigrants. In the background of Onigohenago, Saquanquaragton, and Etowaucum’s portraits, the viewer can see a small figure wearing a traditional Native breechclout and employing the

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149 For more on Verelst’s portraits see Bruce Robertson “The Portraits, an iconographic study,” in John Garratt, *The Four Indian Kings* (Ottawa: Public Archives Canada, 1985),139-152.
pictured figure’s weapon (Figures 2.6 – 2.8). These small figures suggest that despite their “Westernized” presentation, their European observers were consistently intrigued by their Native nature. While the “Anglicanized” presentation of the sachems reflects the peaceful alliance between their tribes and the English empire, the relatively subtle references to their traditional practices reflect Europeans’ continuous fascination with Native culture for its exotic nature.

This trend is particularly evident in other depictions of the four sachems produced during their visit to England. Like prints of Verelst’s paintings, these engravings (Figure 2.9) were widely distributed among English masses following the sachem’s visit. Though based on Verelst’s portraits, the engravings greatly accentuate the men’s facial tattoos. This derivative presentation of the men asserts the differences between them and typical Englishmen. In emphasizing the aspects of the sachems that seemed foreign, these engravings reflected the European public’s continuous fascination with the exoticism of Native populations, particularly the Natives of the North American Northeast. They also suggest that derivative attitudes towards Native peoples remained common among English people after the sachems’ visit.
Though the “kings” were generally accepted at court as foreign nobility, they remained a piece of curiosity and fascination for much of the English public. When they attended a performance of *Macbeth*, the “kings” drew a large crowd. Due to demands from the masses, the “kings” were put on stage so the audience could watch them watch the play.\(^{150}\) Their address to Queen Anne was published and widely disseminated, and a variety of poems and stories romanticized the personal tales of the Natives in England. Some authors also used the Natives’ visit to express Enlightenment criticisms of English society.\(^{151}\) The popularity of theses narratives reflects the public’s fascination with the Natives. While the general opinion on the Natives ranged from admiration to condemnation, this

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\(^{150}\) Arthur Murphy, in *The Gray’s-Inn Journal*, No. 95, August 10, 1754. As this account was published 40 years after the King’s visit, some scholars have questioned its accuracy, but many accept it as a plausible telling of the event. See Hinderaker, “Four Indian Kings,” 499.

\(^{151}\) Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, *The Spectator*, No. 50, April 27, 1711.
delegation of Native “kings” likely improved the general public’s views on Native Americans as allies of the British Empire, though strong prejudices remained.

**Conclusion**

The presentations of Native people in Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries demonstrate the European public’s shifting view on Native Americans, reflecting the nature of the relationship between Natives and colonists over time. In addition to revealing European attitudes towards Natives, depictions of Native Americans also reflected Europeans’ imagining of the nature of Native people and society. Despite increasingly detailed reports from North America, European depictions of Native people continued to reflect their own assumptions of Native behavior and appearance and their fascination with Natives’ exoticism. Reports from North America, particularly captivity narratives, exacerbated and perpetuated the idea of Native savagery. However, some Native travelers to Europe, especially the “Mohawk Kings”, facilitated the perception of Native nations as noble and as beneficial allies to the British Empire. The persisting duality of English perception of Natives as “noble savages” became a key symbol in the emergence of British imperial identity. The prevalent dichotomous image of a Native American, created by Europeans, became an important symbol in representing the opportunities and challenges of North America leading into the American Revolution.
Chapter III:

Appropriation of the Native Image in Constructing an American Identity

After the “Mohawk Kings” several other Native Americans from the Northeast travelled to England and were generally referred to as “Indian kings” and continued to be exploited as commercial entertainment. In late 1775, Thayendanegea, better known as Joseph Brant, traveled to England to strengthen the alliance between Mohawks and the British Empire. Brant, the Mohawks, and many other Natives in the Northeast saw the success of the colonists’ resistance as a threat to their lives, land, and freedom. While the cooperative relations between some Natives and colonists persisted, leading up to the American Revolution, many tribes allied themselves with the British Empire. These alliances led to a deterioration of relations between Natives and Euro-American colonists, yet even while colonists fought against many Native populations, they appropriated Native imagery in order to strengthen their demands for independence.

Throughout the colonial period, British settlers in the North American northeast attempted to maintain their brittle identities by establishing their differences from other peoples, including the local Native populations. Colonists thus created a sense of self from counter-identities, and accordingly portrayed themselves as distinct from Native society. However, as colonists became increasingly resistant of British imperial control, they utilized their assumptions about Native society to supplement their identity. Colonists in the Northeast

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adopted what they perceived as Natives’ positive traits to bolster their own identities in contrast to British imperial forces. This chapter will argue that white colonists used the image of a Native American, created by Europeans and Anglo-Americans over time, to symbolize their own struggle against colonial power.

Though both D.H Lawrence and Michael Zuckerman argue that leading up to the American Revolution colonists did not create their own distinct identity,\(^{153}\) evidence suggests that in appropriating the Native image and their perceived desirable traits, along with maintaining European political and social values, colonists were able to establish a new shared identity distinct from both British and Native societies. Colonists created this identity through appropriating the imagery of Native society. This use of the Native American image is evident in various forms of colonial resistance including protests and political cartoons.

In political prints, both British and American illustrators used the image of a Native figure to represent colonial society. Though Europeans had used a Native figure to represent North America since colonization began, in the mid-to-late-eighteenth century, the Native figure came to represent the British colonies in North America. Over the eighteenth century, British-Native relations continued to be both cooperative and destructive and the European concept of a “noble savage” persisted. However, leading up to the American Revolution,

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Native nations continued to ally with Britain, while the colonies increasingly resisted imperial rule. This resistance was portrayed in British political prints, in which the Native image emphasized the foreignness of the colonies from the center of the British Empire. Given the influence of British society, Anglo-Americans, too, used a Native figure to represent colonial society. However, rebellious colonists utilized and appropriated this image in their efforts to create a new American identity and to justify their struggle for independence.

The Native Image in British Political Prints

In *Emblems of American Community in the Revolutionary Era*, Lester Olson examines the various ways the colonies were represented in European and Euro-American publications, particularly the colonies symbolized by a snake, a child, or an “Indian.” For his discussion, Olson uses the term “Indian” to describe these depictions, as they did not represent actual Native Americans, but rather stereotypes of Native culture ascribed to the American colonies.\(^{154}\) Using this European or Euro-American generated image allowed the illustrators to engage existing attitudes in white society about Natives, through which they could demonstrate similarities or differences between the colonies and Britain. These political prints in the eighteenth century demonstrate ideological and perceived differences between English, Anglo-American, and Native societies.

Since the fifteenth century, the figure of a Native, usually a woman, symbolized the Western Hemisphere. This association between the Native figure

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and land of North America had deep roots in British society. Starting in the late seventeenth century, English people began referring to white Americans as “tame Indians,” as they were thought to be taking on negative traits associated with Native people such as laziness and dishonesty. This perception was felt in the colonies and expressed by Parliament and in British writers’ discussions of the colonists of New England, whom they saw as inferior.\textsuperscript{155} This association between Euro-Americans and Native people manifested itself in British portrayals of colonial society. As both Deloria and Olson suggest, the particular presentation of the Native figure – its clothing, gender, coloring, and arms – signified a specific meaning.\textsuperscript{156} Given the alliance relationships between English and Native forces in the early eighteenth century, English depictions of a Native figure in political cartoons typically reflected an innocent, peaceful image.

Over the latter half of the eighteenth century, however, British depictions of the Native figure representing America changed to reflect the shifting relationship between Britain and the North American colonies. By the eighteenth century, a Native figure was used not only to represent America, but also the British colonies there. When symbolizing the colonies, the Native figure image was modified to include items such as a liberty pole, a colonial military flag, or text indicating the figure was the “child of Britannia.”\textsuperscript{157} Most political prints

\textsuperscript{155} Benjamin Carp, \textit{Defiance of the Patriots}, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 154.
\textsuperscript{157} “America” in George Richardson, \textit{Iconology: or, a Collection of Emblematic Figures Containing Four Hundred and Twenty-Four Remarkable Subjects, Moral and Instructive; in Which Are Displayed the Beauty of Virtue and the Deformity of Vice}, 2 vols. (London, 1777-79), 1:30-33.
featuring a Native figure in the decades before the Stamp Act primarily served to critique the British government’s leaders. Using a sympathetic, innocent Native allowed the illustrators to criticize British public officials, and existing tax and commerce policies.

During the Stamp Act controversy, the primary purpose of Native figures in political prints was to emphasize America as foreign and inferior to British society. The Native figure as a woman represented the patriarchal structure of society and thus Britain’s control over the colonies. Depictions of Natives as inferior due to their race and gender were used to justify British attempts to

Figure 3.1: “BRITAIN’s RIGHTS maintained; or FRENCH AMBITION dismantled,” Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Online Catalog. In this print, Mars stabs a map of North America while Britannia protects America, depicted as a Native child.
bring civilization to America for its benefit. In several prints, figures representing Britain were depicted as protecting the Native figure, emphasizing the idea of British expansion as necessary and justifiable for the protection and maintenance of the colonies in North America (Figure 3.1).

Following the Stamp Act, critical depictions of the Native became more common. While some prints distributed blame for the conflict between several parties, some specifically criticized the British government’s actions. Other prints depicted the conflict as futile as an appeal for reconciliation. With the outbreak of violence in 1775, the depictions of a Native evolved in British prints to be more critical of the colonies. Some of these images condemned the Native figure and many depicted outright violence. Even images that condemned the Native for acting against Britain typically remained critical of British officials. They also frequently criticized other nations for getting involved or taking advantage of the conflict (Figure 3.2). These types of images demonstrate how the growth of national identity in Britain in the eighteenth century was accompanied by derivative presentations of “others” including Native, French, and Dutch people.

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159 See “The COURT COTILLION, Or the Premiers new Parl +++++t Jig” and “[When fell Debate & civil Wars shall cease]” in Olson, *Emblems*.
160 See also “Bunkers Hill, or the blessed effects of Family quarrels,” in Olson, *Emblems*.
The outbreak of war led to a dramatic change in the Native’s depiction in British illustrations. The Native began to be pictured carrying multiple weapons, typically with more variety. In addition to the traditional bow and arrow, the Native figure was also depicted carrying a scalping knife, tomahawk spear, or whip. The inclusion a greater number and variety of weapons emphasized the Native’s perceived primitiveness and savagery – mirroring the perceived savagery of the violent conflict. After 1777, the addition of military flags to the Native image reflected a change from depicting the colonists’ demands for liberty under the British Empire to their demand for independence as a new

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162 Olson, Emblems of American Community, 88.
nation.\textsuperscript{163} Another change in depictions of Natives was the inclusion of a liberty pole, as opposed to chains in earlier images, demonstrating that they had broken free of English restraints and correspondingly suggesting the empire’s loss of control over the colonies. From 1765-1775, liberty poles had been depicted but were typically held by British figures whereas later prints showed Natives possessing the liberty poles.\textsuperscript{164} Given that most Natives aligned themselves with Britain during the revolution, these Native figures clearly symbolized rebellious Anglo-Americans, rather than actual Native people.\textsuperscript{165}

During the American Revolution, the Native image representing the colonies in British prints drew on Native stereotypes to criticize colonial society. In addition to the savage image, these prints emphasized Natives’ perceived licentiousness, immorality and limited intelligence. British illustrators depicted Natives as war hungry and prone to violence, suggesting the colonies as hostile and savage. A significant change in Native depictions was the gender of the figure. From 1765 to 1777, a small proportion of political prints depicted the Native figure as a man, where as from 1777 to 1783, about half featured a Native man. If Congress was represented as a Native, the figure was almost always masculine (See Figure 3.8). This shift to a masculine Native figure drew from the savage image of Natives and reflected the emphasis on military aggression in wartime prints.\textsuperscript{166}

\textsuperscript{163} “[America to her Mistaken Mother]” in Olson, \textit{Emblems of American Community}, 88.
\textsuperscript{164} Olson, \textit{Emblems of American Community}, 88.
\textsuperscript{166} Olson, \textit{Emblems of American Community}, 99-100.
Though the “noble savage” image of Native Americans had become common in Europe, particularly in France, during the Revolution, only elements of this concept are present in English depictions. English conceptions of Native imagery relied primarily on the “ruthless savage” image common in captivity narratives. Though some English magazines contain references to the “noble savage’s” oratory ability, strength, courage, and liberty, the Native figure representing the colonies did not orate and frequently appeared fearful. Depictions of the Native’s desire for liberty were limited as the British wanted to maintain control and the American colonies’ demand for liberty was not perceived as righteous by the British government or most English people. British authors also suggested that American ideas of liberty were different than the British conception of liberty, and also distinct from the “noble savage’s” liberty as many patriots supported the Enlightenment idea of republican government.167

British depictions of Native figures emphasized this expected savagery, including two in which the Native figure was depicted dismembering a living entity representing Britain. These cartoons associated the colonies’ struggle for independence with assault and thievery. In addition to these “savage” images, the Native figure was presented in other demeaning ways such as a courtesan or a misbehaved child, figures with “low moral character.”168 Some cartoons suggested the Native as a naïve, gullible figure, led astray by European states, which implied that reconciliation was possible. However this conception of the

167 Ibid., 101-102.
168 Ibid., 93.
conflict and the Native as naïve ignored the patriots’ informed and intentional rejection of English authority. Another variant of the Native image depicted the figure as morally debased, which emphasized the righteousness of Britain’s military action in the colonies. Others suggested the moral superiority of Britain, that the empire was honorable whereas the colonies’ actions were unjust. By 1782, extremely derogatory images of the Native figure were common in British prints, some of which included demonic attributes on the Native figure.¹⁶⁹

In pre-Revolutionary prints, Natives were frequently depicted in an unequal struggle against a group of British officials. After 1777, prints portrayed alliances between the Native and figures representing France and Spain, even though Spain had no formal alliance with the colonies. This shift displayed Britain in an unequal struggle against the American and European powers. In many prints, this depiction suggested that the colonies and European nations were cowards and unable to successfully fight Britain on equal terms.¹⁷⁰ Some of these prints featured a strong, militaristic British figure defeating the Native and European allies, while in others Native figures were depicted as defeated, being punished by British figures.

After 1782, British prints reflected British anxiety about the circumstances of a transition from war to peace. Many of these images implied and suggested reconciliation. One such print included a Native and British figure embracing but other European powers trying to pull them apart. Some suggested that the colonies’ independence threatened British power and pictured the

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¹⁶⁹ Ibid.
¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 90.
Native as an ungracious winner. Other, more negative images expressed British anxiety over the welfare of loyalists remaining in the colonies. One of these prints featured a fully savage Native figure torturing a loyalist figure.¹⁷¹

From 1778 to 1783, few British prints used the Native image to represent Native Americans rather than the American colonies. These generally depicted a savage Native and simultaneously criticized Native society and the British government for having Native allies. For example, “The Allies – Par Nobile Fratrum,” depicts King George sharing a cannibalistic meal with his Native allies (Figure 3.3). Images like this print criticized the British government for its alliance relationships with Native nations. Though before the outbreak of

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 98.
violence, these connections had been beneficial to the British Empire, they later served as a criticism of the British government’s actions. However, the use of the Native figure to represent Native Americans was far less common than its use to signify the North American colonies.

**Cultural Cross-Dressing**

In the early and mid-eighteenth century, the duality of presentations of Native figures in Europe persisted. While the concept of Native savagery continued to be pervasive in European and Euro-American society, the close relationships among some Native nations and the British Empire were mirrored in depictions of certain individuals, presenting positive images of Natives, suggesting their sophistication and civility. This trend is evident in depictions of Joseph Brant – as discussed previously. Additionally, the relationship between William Johnson and Hendrick Tejonihokarawa, evident in depictions of them, reveals the persistence of cultural cross-dressing and its positive influence on Native-European relationships.

William Johnson, a fur trader who settled in the Northeast in 1738, became New York’s first Indian agent in 1746. In 1755, Johnson became the British Empire’s first Superintendent of Indian Affairs. Hendrick was born around 1680 to a Mohican family. He was adopted by Mohawks and converted to Christianity at a young age. By 1710, he was a respected leader in his community and was chosen to travel to England along with three other Native men where they were known as the “Four Mohawk Kings”. Between 1744 and 1755, Johnson
and Hendrick were extremely influential in the Covenant Chain – an array of alliances and agreements between English colonies and Native groups, primarily the Iroquois Confederacy, in the Northeast – and their relationship was key to maintaining peace between the colony of New York and its Native inhabitants. As Timothy Shannon argues, one reason for the success of Johnson and Hendrick’s relationship was their ability to negotiate cultural boundaries.172

Both Hendrick and Johnson manipulated their appearance and dress in order to interact with one another’s communities more effectively. Johnson, in addition to providing cloth as gifts to Native communities, became well versed in their cultural norms and in some circumstances adopted their dress. A portrait of Johnson from 1750 depicts him in proper British dress, reflecting his status as merchant and military officer. However, he is described in many colonial sources as being dressed and painted like a Native sachem or warrior.173 Johnson effectively used clothing to increase his cultural mobility. In dressing and appearing according to Native custom, Johnson gained greater access to Native populations and markets. His engagement with Native customs of self-presentation afforded him success in forming positive relationships with Native communities.174 Hendrick also manipulated his appearance and dress in order to increase his political and social position. When negotiating with European powers, Hendrick would appear in English dress in order to gain more European

173 [New York], A Treaty between his Excellency...George Clinton...And the Six...Nations (New York, 1746), 8.
gifts which he would redistribute in his community to increase his standing there.\textsuperscript{175} Additionally, Hendrick’s European goods and dress demonstrated his status as a negotiator and leader, both to settlers and to his own community.\textsuperscript{176} Though Hendrick obtained British goods and had the capability to dress in European fashions, he remained independent of British control.

Hendrick and Johnson’s relationship represented peaceful relations in the Mohawk valley in the mid-eighteenth century in which goods were exchanged between Natives and Europeans, but colonists and soldiers had not yet taken over the region. As Shannon discusses, the devolution of relations between Natives and settlers in the Mohawk Valley was mirrored by negative trends in the representation of Native people, which is evident in portraits of Hendrick. While early images depict his cultural mobility by including both European and Native imagery, images of Hendrick made after his death present him as a stereotypical “noble savage” figure.\textsuperscript{177} These presentations of Hendrick further support the argument of representations of Natives by Europeans reflecting the shifting relationships between Natives and Euro-Americans. Through cultural cross-dressing, Johnson and Hendrick facilitated negotiations among their peoples for beneficial trade and alliance relationships. Exchange of dress practices in this manner served a particular political and commercial purpose but did not alter the identities of the individuals or significantly challenge the

\textsuperscript{175} Shannon, “Dressing for Success,” 31.
\textsuperscript{176} Hinderaker, “Four Indian Kings,” 523.
\textsuperscript{177} “The brave old Hendrick,” 1755; “Hendrick the Sachem, or Chief of the Mohawks,” 1756; “Soi-En-Ga-Rah-Ta, or King Hendrick,” colored lithograph, 1847; in Shannon, “Dressing for Success,” 16, 33-34.
order of colonial society. While these relationships were beneficial to both communities in the eighteenth century, the ties between Natives and the British Empire became a point of contention with the outbreak of violence between Euro-Americans in the colonies and British imperial forces.

**The Term “American”**

By the decades preceding the revolution, white colonists began to use the term “Americans” to describe themselves, excluding Native populations. Several authors arguing for colonial independence stressed the legitimacy of their claims by demonstrating white colonists’ similarity and ties to European culture – that Americans were a new group of people, of European origins, that did not include blacks or Natives. In 1764, James Otis declared that Americans were “freeborn *British white* subjects,” not a “mongrel mixture of *English, Indian, and Negro,*” people. In *The Federalist* number two, written after the Revolution, John Jay describes the inhabitants of America as a “united people” with the same ancestors, language, religion, and, “very similar...manners and customs.” Even after Independence, using the term “American” bolstered the assertion of legitimacy of the desires and rights of Anglo-Americans. These colonial and early national writers attempted to establish the validity of independence by demonstrating the nature of colonial society as similar to that of civilized Europe. In order to create a sense of a unified, civilized society, these authors rejected Natives – and other racial and religious groups – from this new identity.

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Carroll Smith-Rosenburg suggests that the exclusion of Native people from the new American identity justified white colonists’ seizure of Native lands, exercise of political control, and appropriation of the term “American.” Using racial and cultural arguments, colonists appropriated the term “American”, originally used to refer to Native people, to describe their own identity and defend their demands for independence.

**The Native Image in Colonial Political Prints**

Colonists in North America also engaged the Native image to represent themselves in political prints. Due to the influence of British culture and publications on colonial society, it is not surprising that Anglo-American illustrators used a Native figure to symbolize colonial society. Though this may suggest that white Americans adopted Native imagery because British artists had ascribed it to them, Euro-Americans embraced this image as it exemplified many of their claims for independence, primarily equating them with the freedom and nobility of idealized Native societies.

In his commentary on the Native image as the masthead of a popular publication during the Revolution, Olson struggles with the challenge that by this time, Native Americans were generally seen as enemies to the patriots’ cause. Olson references the inclusion of the British-Native relationships in the Declaration of Independence as further evidence that due to the Natives’ alliances with British forces, colonists’ hatred of Natives was fairly

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widespread. However, at this point in his discussion, Olson conflagrates the Native image symbol with Native people themselves, though he explicitly delineates these understandings of Natives earlier in this work. For the purposes of understanding the use of the Native figure as a symbol by American colonists, it is useful to engage Philip Deloria and Robert Berkhofer’s understanding that for white America, there are two Natives: real Native American people and the Native image as created by the European and Euro-American imaginations. While colonists’ hostility towards Native Americans was prevalent, the power of the Native as a symbol of America and its struggle for independence from Britain remained valuable to colonial forces.

During the early period of colonial resistance, colonists generally accepted the colonies inferior status in the imperial mercantile system. However, they were concerned over the portrayal of the colonies as “alien” in British illustrations as such images could be used to deny their rights as British citizens, and most colonists continued to identify themselves as members of the British empire. For rebellious colonists, the Native image could be manipulated in its inferior or foreign appearance to dramatize the colonists’ struggles against Britain. The Native image came to serve as a symbol of colonists’ formation of a new nation in America.

182 Olson, *Emblems of American Community*, 118.
From 1765 to 1775, colonists began questioning the colonies’ inferior position; accordingly, colonial illustrators altered the Native image to reflect this change. Both loyal and resistant colonists, who generally considered themselves natural British citizens, recognized the subordinate economic position of the colonies, but felt threatened by being seen as foreign by British society.185 During the Stamp Act controversy, from 1765-1766, two prints published in the colonies attempted to diminish the perceived differences between the colonies and Britain. Two of these images were derived from a British image entitled “THE DEPLORABLE STATE OF AMERICA or SC – H GOVERNMENT” printed in London in March 1765 (Figure 3.4). John Singleton Copley’s adaptation of this print was printed in Boston in November 1765. Copley’s illustration maintained some similarities with the British original (Figure 3.5). Both prints suggested a similar relationship between the Native and Britannia engaged in a confrontation over the Stamp Act. In both illustrations the colonies appeared to be engaged in defense, not defiance. They both included criticisms of Lord Bute and the British government’s motives. They also alluded to the dramatic consequences of the Stamp Act including the loss of liberty and commerce for the North American colonies.186

Copley’s alterations to the original print serve a variety of rhetorical purposes. Copley added specific details to the image to more specifically represent the colonies, particularly the city of Boston. Additionally, Copley added

185 [Daniel Leonard], Massachusettensis [(Boston, 1775)], Letter VI, January 16, 1775, pp. 51-52 [Evans 14157].
186 Olson, Emblems of American Community, 106.
the words “Take it Daughter” implying a familial relationship between Britannia and the Native, which emphasized Britain’s guilt for abusing the colonies. While in the original print, the Native figure is pictured standing and carrying bow and arrows on her back, the Native figure in Copley’s image sits on the ground with the bow and arrow on the ground beside her. This alteration emphasized America’s position as a victim of Britain’s policies unlike the original in which the Native stood and actively refused the Stamp Act.

In addition to the positioning and accompaniments to the Native figure, her physical appearance also reflects Copley’s attempt to diminish the foreignness of the figure. In the original print, the Native is pictured bare breasted and having dark skin. In Copley’s version, the figure has the same skin tone as Britannia and is draped in fabric reminiscent of Greek and Roman figures. These attributes suggest that the Native is similar, rather than alien, to European culture. While Copley’s illustration maintains elements of colonial inferiority present in the original, his modifications diminish the differences between the Native and European figures. Copley’s print was published and popularly reproduced in the colonies. Another illustrator, Wilkinson, further modified the print to make references to Philadelphia rather than Boston, but his Native figure remained similar to Copley’s.\(^{187}\)

\(^{187}\) Wilkinson’s first name is unknown. Ibid., 108.
Figure 3.4: “THE DEPLORABLE STATE OF AMERICA or SC – H GOVERNMENT,” Boston Public Library. Britannia, seated, offers the Stamp Act to a Native woman. Liberty, lying on the ground, is dismayed while Mercury, representing trade, departs. This print criticizes the Stamp Act and its consequences for British citizens in England and in the colonies.

Figure 3.5: John Singleton Copley, “The Deplorable State of America,” The Library Company of Philadelphia. Britannia, flying over the ocean, gives the Stamp Act to America, a Native woman. Loyalty leans sadly against a “Tree of Liberty” inscribed with the date of the first Boston riot.
The alteration of the physical appearance of the Native figure was common in colonial prints in an effort to make the Native seem less alien to British society. Olson reports that in colonial prints containing a Native representing the colonies, less than a quarter featured a figure with darkened skin, as opposed to almost two thirds of Native figures in the prints published in Britain. Olson also writes that only about a quarter of colonial prints pictured a Native in “stereotypical dress” while this presentation was present in around two thirds of British prints. These proportions reflect how British illustrators commonly employed a stereotypical image of an uncivilized Native in their representations of the colonies while illustrators in the colonies attempted to minimize the stereotypical presentation of Natives to limit the implications that colonists were likewise foreign and inferior.

After the dramatic events of the Boston Tea Party and other incidents of Euro-American colonists adopting Native imagery in political protests, colonists also represented themselves in cartoons as white men in Native disguise. For many Englishmen, the Boston Tea Party confirmed their negative opinions about colonial society – that colonists were alien to Britain – by the participants identifying themselves with “savage” Native imagery and destroying tea, a symbol of British civilization. Later prints featured the colonies, and Congress, as a Euro-American man in Native disguise. In “A Picturesque View of the State of

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189 Olson, Emblems of American Community, 109.
190 Ibid., 112.
the Nation for February 1778,” Congress is depicted in colonial dress and a Native headdress, suggesting a colonist in Native disguise (Figure 3.6).

In June 1774, the institution of the Intolerable Acts furthered colonial resentment of British control. Paul Revere’s famous engraving “The able Doctor or America Swallowing the Bitter Draught,” reflects this dissatisfaction. Revere’s engraving is derived from a print published in London. Revere modified the print to contain specific references to Boston and to emphasize the guilt of the British government (Figure 3.7). By adding the word “tea” to the pot, Revere eliminates the possibility that Britain’s actions could be understood as positive. Two additional modified versions of this image were printed in the colonies, in
Philadelphia and Connecticut. These images also attempted to make the Native figure less foreign by portraying her strength and her familial relationship with Britannia.\footnote{Ibid.} Various other prints responding to the Intolerable Acts were published in the colonies. One such print, “Liberty Triumphant, or the Downfall of Oppression” featured a Native woman representing America being defended by the Sons of Liberty – in disguise as Native men – against British figures who were accompanied the Devil (Figure 3.8).\footnote{E.P. Richardson, “Four American Political Prints,” \textit{American Art Journal} 6 (1974): 36-38.}
In later prints by Paul Revere, his Native figure is represented in less stereotypical Native ways. In “America in Distress” the figure representing America looks similar to Britannia, with the addition of a feather headdress. In other prints Revere also employed the figure of Britannia to represent the colonies. Olson suggests this change in Revere’s engravings suggest his dissatisfaction with a Native as a symbol of America.\(^\text{193}\) However, these changes, like others made in colonial prints, primarily serve to diminish the perceived differences associated with the American colonies.

\(^{193}\) Olson, *Emblems of American Community*, 114.
During the war, colonists’ treatment of the Native as a symbol altered to emphasize their feelings of alienation from Britain and to justify their struggle for independence. In addition to political prints, the Native symbol appeared on four colonial military flags. These figures were depicted in defensive stances, attempting to preserve liberty, creating a new empire, and striving for fame. These flags were used by: the Gostelow Standard Number Four, Gostelow Standard Number Eleven, Webb’s Additional Continental Regiment of 1777, and the Philadelphia Light Horse (Figure 3.9). Furthermore, the *Massachusetts Spy*, a colonial news publication, featured a Native figure on its masthead for over

![Image](image-url)

Figure 3.9: Standard of the Philadelphia Light Horse, Annin Flagmakers; present-day reconstruction, originally designed in 1775. The words “For these we Strive” accompany the image of a Native man – representing liberty – and a trumpeting angel – symbolizing fame. The 13 stripes in the corner stand for the 13 colonies.

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three years. Isaiah Thomas, the publication's editor, described the image as a Native trying to defend itself against a British lion.\(^{195}\)

**Tradition of Performative Misrule**

Euro-Americans' use of costumes in rebellious actions fits into an established tradition among Europeans and Euro-Americans. For centuries in Europe, certain festivals and activities turned the rules of society upside down. These often included masques and carnivals at which people could dress in ways that rejected their own identities and appropriated those of others. In England, nobles expressed their abstracted interest with Native peoples by dressing as Native Americans for masquerades (Figure 3.10). England's fascination with Native Americans increased after the visit of the Mohawk kings at the beginning of the eighteenth century. In addition to the appropriation of a Native American image by members of British high society, common people also dressed in Native-inspired costumes during riots. “Mohocks” became a description for “genteel ruffians” and the use of Native American dress became a symbol for daring or mischievous behavior.\(^{196}\)

Though the leadership in Massachusetts outlawed most festivals that the Puritans considered socially disruptive, the tradition of misrule persisted in northeastern North America. At the Stamp Act Riot, participants disguised their identities. In this and other mob events, the use of disguise, which typically

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Figure 3.10: "Habit of a Mohawk one of the Six Nations," New York Public Library Digital Gallery. From a European guide to dressing for masquerades, published in 1772. A crouching Native man is depicted wearing mitasses, moccasins and a draped garment over his torso; his head is mostly shaved except a small patch, which is adorned with feathers. He smokes out of a tomahawk pipe.

included some blackening of the face, played on existing community concerns about non-white and low class people.\footnote{Carp, \textit{Defiance of the Patriots}, 145.}

As Deloria suggests, colonists in the Northeast engaged in Old World misrule traditions, including disguised riots, effigy burning, and tar and feathering. The colonists may have drawn particular inspiration from deer poachers in England who in the beginning of the eighteenth century blackened their faces for disguise as they continued to hunt in Windsor despite restrictive
laws. In the Northeast of North America, misrule took on a "Native" character. By engaging Native imagery and customs, the colonists situated themselves in the historic tradition of Native society and accordingly appropriated a natural connection to the land of North America. With these invented customs – drawn from stereotypes and perceptions of Native culture – colonists claimed that their traditions and interests superseded imperial control. Colonists engaged Native disguises to perform and experience different identities, both rebel and citizen.

Several incidents in the colonial Northeast throughout the eighteenth century exemplify this tradition of misrule. In 1734, white settlers disguised as Natives attacked the British forces sent to enforce a law restricting the mast tree trade in New Hampshire. Additional reports of white colonists using Native costumes in Maine were published in the 1760s. In 1761, Dr. Silvester Gardiner, a Kenneback Proprietor, reported being attacked in his home by settlers in Native disguises. He reported hearing men howling, which he associated with Native war parties. Another incident culminated in 1768 when a group of twenty to thirty men in "Indian dress" pulled down the house of another proprietor. Ann Hulton, the wife of a Customs Commissioner in Maine, wrote in 1768 that the Sons of Liberty surrounded her home and their yelling sounded

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198 Deloria, Playing Indian, 14, 23.
199 Ibid., 25.
201 James Flagg, A Strange Account of the Rising and Breaking of a Great Bubble, (Boston, 1767), 11.
like, “the Indians, when they attack and Enemy.” 203 Hulton’s reaction reveals that some people associated wild yells with Natives, though the protestors may have not intended to engage Native imagery. These incidents suggest settlers’ dissatisfaction with British policies, yet the Boston Tea Party is the most recognizable example of white Americans appropriating a Native image for political purposes.

The Boston Tea Party

The Boston Tea Party exemplifies a significant trend among rebellious colonists in the lead up to the American Revolution to appropriate the Native American image in the effort to create and display their own identity. Many scholars have commented on the appearance of the tea destroyers at the Boston Tea Party. 204 These scholars have largely recognized that the wearing of “Mohawk” disguises by the participants did not serve to conceal their identities but rather that it served a greater purpose. In Defiance of the Patriots, Benjamin Carp provides a variety of possible explanations for this behavior, but argues that for the participants and its observers, this performance made a significant statement about the developing identity of rebellious colonists. 205 Both Deloria and Carp’s discussions of The Boston Tea Party support the conclusion that tea destroyers appropriated a Native American image – created by Europeans and

205 Carp, Defiance of the Patriots, 141-160.
white Americans – in order to establish and demonstrate their new identity as Americans, neither Native nor British.

As Carp discusses, observers and scholars over time have suggested various explanations for the tea destroyers’ appearance. Given the varying effectiveness of the disguises and the recognizability of the organizers, it is unlikely that the costumes would have actually hidden their identities. Another explanation of the use of Native imagery in their costumes is that allowed the observers to scapegoat actual Native peoples. Given that earlier riots in Boston had been multiethnic, it would not have been unbelievable that Natives participated in this action. However, contemporary observers would not have believed that Mohawks had travelled through hundreds of miles of white settlements in order to dump tea in the Boston Harbor. The intentions of the tea destroyers is suggested by the organizers’ advance decision to dress as Natives. The organizers wore the most elaborate costumes, while others simply smudged soot on their faces or wrapped themselves in blankets.

Colonial news publications following the event published a variety of accounts on the appearance and actions of the tea destroyers. One “impartial observer” described the incident in the *Boston Evening Post* and the *Boston Gazette*: “a number of Persons, supposed to be the Aboriginal Natives from the complexion, approaching...gave the War-Whoop,” proceeded to the wharf to

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206 Ibid., 143-144.
destroy the tea.208 A more explicitly critical account came from Peter Oliver, a Loyalist judge, who declared that the participants were made to “look like the Devil, in Order to Make them Act like the Devil,” in his denunciation of the protest.209

Another reason for using the name “Mohawks” may have been to show solidarity with the rebellious colonists in New York. Carp suggests that a sign protesting tea imports, signed by “Mohawks,” displayed in New York shortly before the Boston Tea Party may have inspired the organizers to use the “Mohawk” name to demonstrate commonalities among the colonies in their resistance. This sign is an example of the variety of ways colonists associated themselves with the Native image. In addition to performative and visual representations, colonists established this strategy in language use and publications in newspapers, attributing their protest statements to Native authors.210

The Boston Tea Party was a significant piece of “political theater” that inspired similar protests and the use of Native disguises throughout the colonies. Deloria suggests that through the performance of the Boston Tea Party, colonists “solidified” a common understanding of American identity, based on Native imagery.211 Carp argues that the tea destroyers, in employing Native dress and imagery, attempted to create an identity as “new and improved” Natives, who

210 Drake, Tea Leaves, cxxxvii, xix.
211 Deloria, Playing Indian, 32.
deserved America for themselves. As Deloria suggests, the use of costumes and disguises can have transformative qualities. While costumes can question fixed identities, they also emphasize them. Masks, for example, conceal one’s identity while calling attention to the real face underneath. At the Boston Tea Party, the Native disguises represented the freedom and purity of North America, while the white men wearing them embodied European social and political ideals.

For participants in the Boston Tea Party, the Native costumes allowed them to imagine themselves simultaneously as both civilized and free. They could present themselves as taking the most attractive qualities of British and Native societies while rejecting the aspects of each that they deemed negative. By establishing an American identity through embracing and rejecting aspects of British and Native society, the colonists could no longer claim to belong to either community. They now considered themselves Americans.

**Conclusion**

During the eighteenth century, relations between Native nations and British colonies continued to include both cooperative and violent interactions. Though a Native figure had been used to represent North America in British portrayals for centuries, these images took on new significance in response to the changing relationship between the colonies and the British Empire. As colonists began resisting British control, a Native figure was increasingly used to

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212 Carp, *Defiance of the Patriots*, 157.
represent the British colonies, rather than Natives themselves. The use of this image allowed British illustrators to establish the differences between English and colonial society, which they perceived as foreign and inferior.

Given the history of conflict between Native and settler communities and existing European assumptions about Native society, the image of Natives as "savage" persisted throughout the eighteenth century. However, leading up to and during the revolution, patriots used and altered this image to demonstrate their shifting relationship with Britain. Colonists’ use of Native imagery emphasized the noble aspects of Europeans’ “noble savage” expectation, such as pride and freedom to bolster their claims for independence. The rebellious colonists’ use of the term American and their visual and performative appropriations of a Native American image allowed them to create a new, unique American identity, tied to yet explicitly distinct from both Native and English culture.
Conclusion

This thesis has demonstrated how material and cultural exchanges between Natives and Europeans in northeastern North America shaped the emergence of an American identity. While early contact between Natives and Europeans proved essential for the successful settlement of the Northeast, the material and cultural exchanges between these groups challenged their identities. Native Americans played an essential role in European colonization of North America. When Europeans arrived in the Northeast of North America, they lacked the skills and knowledge to survive on their own. European settlers adapted Native techniques and formed alliance and trade relationships with Native peoples in order successfully to establish settlements. Though most scholars of the early colonial period focus on the political and economic components of European-Native relations, this project examines the impact of cultural exchanges on both of these communities. Both Natives and Europeans adopted one another’s products and practices in accordance with their needs. This cultural exchange drastically affected the lives of people in each community. While these groups attempted to maintain their own identities, the material and cultural exchange between them in some cases threatened these efforts.

Native peoples in northeastern North America adopted European goods for practical and aesthetic purposes. While they utilized many European materials, they primarily adapted them according to their cultural traditions. Though some missionary efforts attempted to encourage Natives to adopt European dress as a part of their civilization and conversion efforts, these
endeavors were not systematically undertaken by the major colonizing powers so most Native peoples in the Northeast maintained their traditional practices and remained distinct from colonial society. The unintended consequences of trade, including the spread of disease and restructuring Native economies, had lasting effects on Native society.

For European and Euro-American colonists, the influence of material and cultural exchange with Natives threatened their brittle identities. Europeans also adopted Native clothing goods in order to survive in North America, utilizing goods that helped them to hunt more efficiently and protect their bodies from the harsh environment of the Northeast. However, many Europeans felt threatened by their proximity and connection to Native communities and feared their influence would lead European settlers to “go Native”. When Europeans arrived in North America their observations of Native people both confirmed and challenged their expectations of Indigenous societies. Contemporary scholarship and religious thought perpetuated the idea that Indigenous people would lack the civility and modesty of Christian society. Some explorers in North America were struck by the apparent structure of Native society, yet many early observers reported on the appearance and dress of Native peoples as confirming European expectations of their exotic and “uncivilized” nature. These reports on Native dress, hair, and personal adornment traditions come from a variety of Europeans in North America including Dutch traders and French missionaries. These early reports and images from North America fed the European imagination of Native peoples as foreign and uncultured, which continued
throughout the colonial period. By the seventeenth century, European and Euro-American colonists attempted to strengthen their identity as part of European society by defining themselves in opposition to their Native neighbors.

The descriptions and depictions of Natives from northeastern North America that reached Europe in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries demonstrate the shifting relationships between Natives and settlers in the region. While cooperative exchanges between Native and settler communities continued in some areas, in others this relationship devolved into violent conflict over land and resources. Captivity narratives and accounts from times of conflict perpetuated the image of Native society as savage. Euro-American settlers used this derivative image of Natives to justify their claims over territory and to bolster their own identities as part of European civilization. However, in order to encourage more support for settlement and colonization, Euro-Americans tried to portray the region as hospitable, so they diminished the image of Native as violent and threatening, and emphasized the noble nature of Native society. This also reflected the importance of alliance relationships between Natives and the British Empire.

In addition to the depictions of Native society reaching Europe, the English imagination of a Native American was greatly influenced by Native people who visited England in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The first Natives from North America to reach Europe were primarily captives who were later trained as translators and put on display for the entertainment of
curious Europeans. As Euro-Americans developed key alliance relationships with Native populations, they brought Native leaders to Europe, who they presented as noble and civilized, to gain support for their colonial efforts. Even these figures, particularly the Four Mohawk Kings, who were viewed and treated as foreign nobility by the court, continued to capture the attention of the British people due to their exotic nature. The depictions of Natives from the North American Northeast over this period as both uncivilized and dignified fed the European imagination of the nature of Native society. As other historians have noted, this image of Natives as “noble savages” pervaded English society. I suggest that a disconnect emerged between the European imagination and the reality of Native society and that this constructed image was appropriated in the creation of an American identity.

Throughout the eighteenth century, conflicting and cooperative relationships between Natives and Euro-Americans persisted in the Northeast of North America. Trade and cultural exchange continued and many Native nations maintained alliance relationships with the British Empire. Regardless of their shifting relationships with actual Native communities, both English and Euro-American artists appropriated an image of a Native figure to represent the North American colonies. Using this image, reflecting Europeans' imagination of Native society, allowed illustrators to engage existing popular ideas about Native peoples to make political statements about the colonies. While English artists had used a Native figure to represent North America for centuries, in the late
eighteenth century they utilized this figure to demonstrate their concerns over the increasingly contentious relationship between the colonies and the British Empire. When representing the colonies, the Native figures in English prints generally reflected their perceived negative traits in order to portray the colonies as foreign and inferior to English society.

Despite having attempted to bolster their own identities by defining themselves as superior and more civilized than Native Americans, Euro-Americans also engaged the Native image to represent the colonies, as it had been ascribed to them by British artists. Euro-American artists widely adopted this image to engage what they perceived as positive traits of Native society. Political prints in the colonies minimized the foreign nature of Natives, as colonists were concerned about being perceived as inferior to English society, and emphasized the connection between the colonies and Britain. Rebellious colonists accordingly adopted this image as a symbol on publications and militia flags to demonstrate their demands for independence. In addition to utilizing the image of Natives in print, Euro-Americans engaged in performative misrule activities in which they wore Native costumes and protested British authority. The most notable of these events was the Boston Tea Party, in which tea destroyers dressed as Mohawks. These adoptions of a Native image – primarily created by European imaginings of Native society – represent colonists’ attempts to justify their demands for independence by claiming the positive traits of Native peoples. In shaping this new identity, Americans drew on the image of a
Native American that had been created by Euro-American and European sources over centuries of colonization.

In establishing a new “American” identity, colonists claimed positive traits from both Native and British society. They portrayed themselves as having the noble and unbound nature of Native society, but rejected the inferior and “savage” aspects of the Native image. They also maintained claims of their similarities to Europeans due to their shared heritage and civility, but distanced themselves from the excess and corruption of English society. Through the engagement of Native imagery, Euro-American colonists established a new, unique identity for themselves leading up to the American Revolution by both adopting and rejecting aspects of Native and British society simultaneously.

Though several scholars have discussed the role of Natives in the formation of an American identity, they do not sufficiently address colonists’ appropriation of a Native image. I have examined how material and cultural exchanges between Natives and Europeans, beginning with early contact and throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, informed European and Euro-American perceptions of Native society. I argue that early Euro-Americans defined their fragile identities in opposition to this Native image while later colonists appropriated it to create a new American identity leading up to the American Revolution.
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