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978-1-107-50215-4 - White Settlers and Native Peoples: An Historical Study of Racial Contacts between English-Speaking Whites and Aboriginal Peoples in the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand

A. Grenfell Price

Excerpt

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## Introduction

The following book compares the impact of English-speaking whites on the American Indians, the New Zealand Maoris, and the Australian aborigines, primarily from the historical aspect. The author has been encouraged in his task by the reception given to "White Settlers in the Tropics". That book, which applied similar methods to a study of the North European invasions of the tropics, was published in 1939 by the American Geographical Society as a result of the author's work as a Travelling Fellow of the Rockefeller Foundation.

Leading anthropologists in several countries have rendered great help, but some have pointed out the danger of comparing the contacts between English-speaking invaders and aboriginal peoples when such contacts frequently occurred at different historical periods, in different geographical environments, and amongst peoples in different stages of development, and with different cultural potentialities. Such scientists would postpone generalisation until anthropologists have made many more local and tribal studies of culture contacts. Warning against dangerous and ill-founded generalisations is wise, but the author believes that the material already available reveals many remarkable similarities in the various invasions and in their results, and may assist those who are conducting native policy and administration. Use of the comparative method seems particularly important, for, although students have conducted considerable research on white-native impacts in the United States, and some research on white-native impacts in Canada, Australia and New Zealand, they have done very little comparative work—for example in comparing white-native contacts in Canada and the United States.

The thesis which follows indicates that in the majority of regions considered white-native relations fell broadly into three stages. During an opening period of pioneer invasion on moving frontiers the whites decimated the natives with their diseases;

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occupied their lands by seizure or by pseudo-purchase; slaughtered those who resisted; intensified tribal warfare by supplying white weapons; ridiculed and disrupted native religions, society and culture, and generally reduced the unhappy peoples to a state of despondency under which they neither desired to live, nor to have children to undergo similar conditions. In a second stage, which largely resulted from the great British philanthropic movements about the beginning of the nineteenth century, the whites attempted to remedy their mistakes by gathering some of the survivors on small and often unsuitable reservations, where Government agents and missionaries laboured worthily but ineffectively to impart Christianity, an academic education, and a training in industries such as agriculture which were distasteful to nations of hunters. As a result almost all the aboriginal peoples became the decadent and disappearing recipients of their conquerors' bounty.

In a third stage, which opened slightly before the nineteen thirties, certain white governments began to realise the importance of scientific policy and administration; of adequate reservations; of practical education; and of industries suited to the native temperament and traditions. On their part many native peoples adjusted themselves to the impact of white civilisation and entered on a period of recovery and numerical increase, although this growth was, in many cases, primarily due to an increase of aboriginal-white mixed bloods. It now appears that, although in most cases the white majority peoples will absorb the native minorities, this absorption may never occur in regions such as New Zealand and the South-West of the United States, while in other areas it lies many generations ahead.

In the meantime grave problems exist. Aboriginal peoples, deprived of their lands and traditional modes of life, are rapidly increasing and form islands of malnutrition, disease, and social, educational and cultural weakness amongst the surrounding whites. On the environmental side white greed and native ignorance have often destroyed the historic and delicate balance between the aboriginal peoples and their land, its flora and fauna, with results, such as the creation of soil erosion or the destruction of indigenous game that have proved very serious to both the natives and the whites.

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In all the countries considered, with the possible exception of the United States, the problems arising from white-native contacts require more scientific examination, more competent administration and more generous government finance. The achievement of the Roosevelt-Collier "New Day for American Indians", which is examined below, is a glowing example to other English-speaking peoples of what an enlightened and generous policy can accomplish.

Much of the material presented was collected in the English-speaking countries visited in the years immediately before the Second World War, which long retarded the completion of the work. Hence, in general, the comparative study concludes in 1939, although some later material has been secured by correspondence.

It is impossible to thank all those who assisted the author in various countries and on many native reservations. Particular gratitude is, however, due to Mr. John Collier, United States Commissioner of Indian Affairs; to Mr. Harold W. McGill, Canadian Deputy Superintendent-General of Indian Affairs; and to Dr. Diamond Jenness, of the National Museum of Canada. Professor I. L. G. Sutherland, whose writings on Maori affairs are outstanding, provided most valuable comments upon the New Zealand section, and the Australian Ethnologists, Mr C. P. Mountford and Mr. N. B. Tindale, read the whole work in manuscript. The author also acknowledges with gratitude the photographs supplied by the United States Department of the Interior, the Governments of New Zealand, New South Wales, and South Australia, and by Mr. C. P. Mountford.

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## CHAPTER I

# The Moving Frontier in the United States

The Indians of the territory, which is now the United States, had developed varied, and, in certain cases, fairly advanced cultures prior to the European conquests. The white invasions, therefore, frequently produced on tribes, and even on individuals, a variety of results. The picture had, however, another and more important aspect.

The dominating factors were not the differing cultures of the Indian peoples but the greater material development of the whites. These latter possessed ships, horses, wheeled vehicles firearms and manufactured goods. Their languages were comparatively few in number. They could communicate by writing, while their advanced political institutions enabled scattered European colonies to unite.

As the invaders could add to these advantages a certain tolerance to their own diseases, and to alcohol, they devastated the Indians in a process, which, despite the minor differences stressed by some ethnologists, was remarkably similar, notwithstanding variations in Indian tribes and culture, or in time and place.

In an opening period the whites of several nations destroyed the Indians by such factors as disease, slaughter, and land robbery, along a vast and moving frontier. In a middle period they applied to their victims such palliatives as small reservations, removals and missionary efforts. In very recent times, they attempted to salvage some of the human wreckage by philanthropic endeavour directed along scientific lines.

## INDIAN ORIGIN AND NUMBERS

The American Indians were apparently of Mongoloid origin, their ancestors having crossed the waters or ice of the narrow Bering Strait at various times and in different stages of cultural

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development. The Viking settlements in Greenland (990-1409 A.D.), and the Viking explorations in continental America, south of the St. Lawrence (1000 A.D.) had no effect on the Indians, and, if the Polynesians made comparatively recent contacts with South America, as seems possible, such contacts had little influence.

The duration of Indian occupation is unknown. It may perhaps date from Pleistocene times, some 15,000 to 20,000 years ago. Then, with the retreat of the ice sheets, groups of Asiatics possibly followed to North America mammals, now in many cases extinct. The diversity of Indian physical types, languages and cultures at least suggests that the penetration began in times long distant.

Numerically the Indian peoples to the North of the Rio Grande were, and still remain, insignificant. Estimates vary considerably but leading authorities believe that, when the white invasions opened, there were rather less than 850,000 Indians in the present United States. But although their numbers were small, the Indians occupied a vast region of some 3,000,000 square miles. blessed in many areas with a temperate climate and resources of immense richness<sup>1</sup>.

## INDIAN CIVILISATION

Enthusiastic writers have paid glowing tributes to Indian civilisation, and have claimed that the natives surpassed their conquerors in aesthetic, ethnic, and social culture, and were inferior to them only in material development and powers of destruction. Certainly, before they degenerated at the hands of selfish white peoples, who usually failed to understand their mentality, religions or social systems, many tribes had reached a fairly advanced state. Jenness, for example, classes the more progressive groups with the Egyptian, Hittite, Assyrian and Babylonian civilisations of about 1500 B.C. and so places these Indian tribes some 3000 years behind the whites.

Physically many Indians were fine people, free from scourges of the Old World such as smallpox, measles, tuberculosis, syphilis, leprosy, scrofula and nervous prostration. The race held well toward the end of the human life cycle and there were many centenarians.

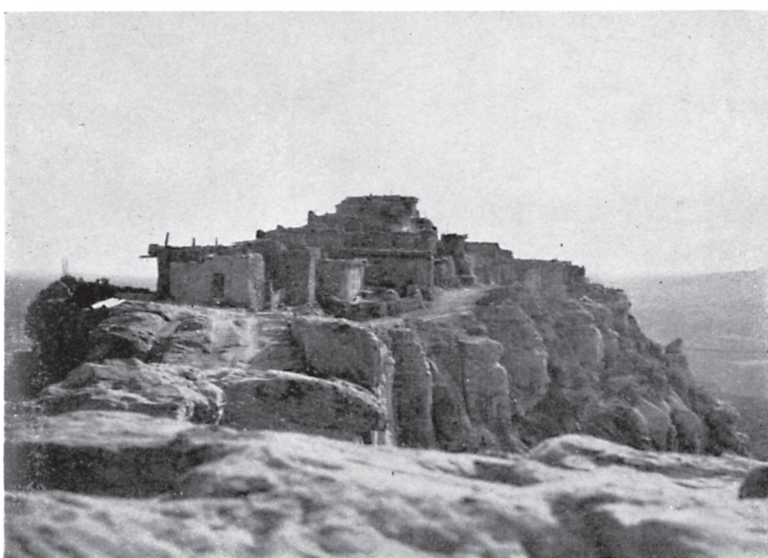
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*Walpi Pueblo, Arizona*

Photo: Author



*Walpi Pueblo, Interior.*

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*Indian Housing, Mescalero Apache Agency, New Mexico*

Photo: Author



*Paiute Indian Housing of poor type, Nevada*

Photo: Author



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## THE MOVING FRONTIER IN THE UNITED STATES

Contemporary white accounts, like those of the Jesuit Fathers, paint, however, a somewhat different picture. Descriptions of comparatively advanced peoples, such as the Hurons, portray a society whose culture was marred by constant warfare, cannibalism, slavery, torture and other revolting practices. Broiling the tongues of living victims, including Jesuit Fathers, was by no means the most disgusting of these barbarities. Nor did customs, such as the digging up of corpses for the "Feast of the Dead", afford a pleasant savour to white nostrils<sup>1</sup>.

That the Indians were less advanced than their white conquerors can be attributed to several factors. First, the Indian brain was possibly of slightly smaller average size than the European, although authorities such as Huntington admit that the data for this assumption is inadequate. Secondly, the Indians were isolated from Old World progress, and in many cases from progress in their own continents. A difficult terrain made the Isthmus of Panama a barrier rather than a connection, whilst throughout the length of both the Americas huge mountain ranges impeded communications East and West. Furthermore, the Indians possessed no cereal excepting maize; no milk producing animal like the cow, and no effective transport animal such as the horse. The buffalo was too fierce and stupid to tame, and, although dogs were used to pull sledges, and the llama to carry light loads in its limited habitat, these means of transport were of comparatively slight importance.

Some features of Indian life—the agriculture of the East and South—the architecture of the Pueblos—the political systems of tribes such as the Iroquois and Natchez and the woodwork of the North-West coastal groups had reached fairly advanced standards. In general, however, the Indians of the United States had failed to develop the great civilisations evolved by their fellows in Mexico, Peru and Guatemala, and in certain cultural aspects were far behind the whites.

They remained for the most part nomadic food gatherers or semi-nomadic agriculturists, grouped in some thousands of small tribes or communities which spoke some 600 different dialects. Such a people, primitive, sparse, and disunited, were utterly unable to resist the weight of European attack.

Examining Indian civilisation in detail we find local differences

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which produced minor variations of response under white impacts, although, as noted above, the general pattern was remarkable for its similarities rather than its contrasts. The detailed story is extremely complicated. To take only one aspect the percentage of Indian survival depended upon many factors—some of which were not recorded in the early stages of the conquest. We can see, however, that amongst these factors were the protection afforded by isolation, and the numbers and cultural status of the Indian groups, together with the attitudes of these groups to white attack.

Thus in the Eastern areas the English-speaking whites largely decimated the native tribes, although some of these were numerous, warlike and culturally advanced. In the South-West, however, isolation, the arid territory and Spanish policy in its later and more tolerant phases fostered a survival which was later followed by an increase. The recent researches by Kroeber and other authorities have explained the importance of isolation in protecting certain groups of Californian Indians, and have also shown that survival was regulated by the numerical strength of both Indians and whites.

South of the English conquest zone, where the Indians were numerous and advanced, and the later policies of the Spanish conquerors moderate, the native peoples not only survived but greatly increased. Leading authorities consider that pre-Columbian numbers for the Hemisphere South of the Rio Grande were from six to nine millions. By 1930, some four and a half centuries later, these numbers had increased to over 20 million Indian full bloods and 30 million mestizos.

Recent times have witnessed one of the most interesting counter invasions in history—a Spanish-Indian (Mexican) penetration of the English-speaking United States<sup>1</sup>.

## CULTURE REGIONS

Clark Wissler and others have divided the Pre-Columbian culture of the United States Indians into six main regions. These are the Eastern Woodlands, the Central Plains, the South-West, the Central Plateau, California and the North-West Pacific Coast. The last of these lies mainly in Canada, and will be discussed in the Canadian section of this book<sup>1</sup>.