The Way We Lived

VOLUME I: 1607–1877 SECOND EDITION

Essays and Documents in American Social History

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CREDITS

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VOLUME I
1607–1877

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Essays and Documents in American Social History

SECOND EDITION

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PREFACE

History courses have traditionally emphasized the momentous events of our past. Wars and laws, technological advances and economic crises, ideas and ideologies, and the roles of famous heroes and infamous villains have been central to these studies. Yet, what made events momentous is the impact they had on society at large, on people from all walks of life. Modern scholars' growing attention to social history is in part a recognition that knowledge of the experiences, values, and attitudes of these people is crucial to gaining an understanding of our past.

Thus America's history as reflected in the everyday lives of its people provides the focus of these volumes. In preparing a work of selected readings, we have had to make choices as to which episodes from our past to highlight. Each of those included, we believe, was significant in the shaping of our society. Each of the essays is followed by original documents that serve several purposes. They provide examples of the kinds of source materials used by social historians in their research; they help to illuminate and expand upon the subject dealt with in the essays; and they bring the reader into direct contact with the people of the past—people who helped shape, and people who were affected by, the "momentous events."

Our introduction to each essay and its accompanying documents is designed to set the historical scene and to call attention to particular points in the selections, raising questions for students to ponder as they read. A list of suggested readings follows after each of the major divisions of the text. We trust that these volumes will prove to be what written history at its best can be—interesting and enlightening.

We are pleased to note that favorable comments by faculty and students as well as the large number of course adoptions attest to the success of our first edition. Quite naturally, we thus have no desire in our second edition to alter the basic focus, style, and organization of *The Way We Lived*. Those essays and documents that we and our readers consider to have been the first edition's very best remain intact. But in the second edition, we have added and replaced certain materials. We believe that these new selections will, even more effectively than those they replaced, identify and clarify significant issues in America's social history.

F. M. B.
D. M. R.

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PART I

Colonial Society

1607–1783

COLONIAL AMERICA WAS THE PRODUCT OF THE MIXING OF three distinct cultural groups: the Indians, who came thousands of years before the others; the Europeans; and finally the Africans. Not only did these groups differ widely in background and culture, but also within each there was significant variation in language, religion, and social customs. By the time of the European settlement of the New World, the Native American population consisted of hundreds of different and distinct tribes. Although the English played the major role in shaping colonial society, the British colonies included people from all parts of western and northern Europe. Cultural diversity also characterized the west Africans taken in bondage to the shores of America. The first four chapters introduce these groups and describe aspects of their culture, experiences, and interaction.

The Europeans, by sheer weight of numbers and superior technology, emerged as the dominant group in the seventeenth century. To a considerable extent, they tried to re-create their European life-style in the New World, but traditional institutions and attitudes often had to be modified in the face of new conditions. No element of their heritage was of greater significance to the European colonists than religion, which was characterized by a rich diversity of belief and practice during this period.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the vast majority of colonists were farmers. Nevertheless, cities, as centers of commercial, political, social, and cultural life, were of vital importance in the making of American society. Like her peoples, America's cities had distinct personalities of their own and presented their inhabitants with a variety of life-styles, opportunities, and challenges.

The culminating episode of the colonial period, the American Revolution, brought disruptions, turmoil, and new opportunities. As with other aspects of colonial life, there were intense differences of opinion regarding the war, which often resulted in violence quite apart from the military conflict.

The chapters in Part I discuss Native American culture, the contrasting values of the Massachusetts and Virginia colonies, family life in Puritan New England, religion and urban life in the early eighteenth century, and the impact of the American Revolution on the lives of the colonists.

CHAPTER 1

Indians and Europeans

Thousands of years before the establishment of England's New World colony of Jamestown in 1607, America's initial settlers had begun their migration, lasting centuries, across the land bridge that periodically emerged in the Bering Sea. Drawn from a variety of Asiatic peoples, the hundreds of native tribes that had settled across America by the advent of European colonization differed profoundly in language, religion, economy, and social and political organization. These differences frequently were far greater than those that separated settlers from the various European nations.

When they arrived, the European newcomers expected the Native Americans to give up their cultures and accept the "superior" ways of Western civilization. During the colonial era, both Indians and colonists adopted the goods and technology of the other culture that they found useful. However, this acceptance did not signal

cultural surrender by either group. In the face of European encroachment, Native Americans held on to their life-styles as tenaciously as they defended their lands and, in the long run, with greater success.

The essay that follows, from Anthony Wallace's The Death and Rebirth of the Seneca, *describes how one tribe, the Seneca, lived. The Seneca, along with the Mohawk, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Oneida, belonged to the League of the Iroquois—a confederation founded by Hiawatha around 1570 and the only such union of tribes that existed north of Mexico during this period. Their tribal homelands were located in what today is New York State, between the Hudson River and Lake Erie, but their hunting and war parties ranged as far as Hudson's Bay to the north, the Mississippi River to the west, the Atlantic coast to the east, and the Carolinas to the south. Their unity, courage, and military and diplomatic skills enabled them to withstand European incursions for well over a hundred years, until their ill-fated alliance with the British during the Revolutionary War. In reading the Wallace essay, how do you, a twentieth-century observer, respond to Iroquois attitudes and practices regarding the division of labor, status of the sexes, conduct of war, treatment of prisoners, and child rearing? What evidence of European influences on the lives of Native Americans do you find in the essay?*

The first document provides yet another view of life among the Seneca. Mary Jemison was a so-called white Indian. The daughter of colonists, she was captured by the Seneca in 1755 when she was twelve, and was adopted into the tribe. Mary, in turn, adopted their way of life. When she related the story of her life to Dr. James Seaver in 1823, she was still living among the Indians. In the excerpt included here she recalls her thoughts and experiences after four years in captivity. Contrary to initial expectations of the English colonizers, few Native Americans, if any, permanently entered white society. However, there is evidence of a considerable number of English colonists who ran off to join the Indians and of white captives who, when given the opportunity to return to their homes, chose to remain among the Indians. What clues do Mary Jemison's experiences provide to help explain these phenomena?

Unfortunately, the prevalent view held by colonial whites was that Indians were "barbarous" and "savage." A typical expression of this attitude is found in the second document, an excerpt from a letter to the Freeman's Journal and North American Intelligencer. *What policy toward the Indians does the author, Henry Brackenridge, propose? Might motives other than those stated have accounted for Brackenridge's hatred of the Indians?*

By the time of the final document, 1805, the once-mighty Iroquois shared the fate of other Indians before them: encroachment on their lands and pressure to abandon their religion and way of life. The document presents a speech by Red Jacket, a Seneca warrior and subchief. Born in 1751, Red Jacket was old enough

to have been active during the years when Iroquois power and prestige were at their height. Now he headed what detractors called the "pagan faction"—Iroquois who sought to maintain their traditional culture and to keep European influences outside the borders of their reservation. In this speech, Red Jacket is replying to Missionary Cram's suggestion that Native Americans convert to Christianity and accept European ways. What is Red Jacket's view of the European assault upon Indian life?

ESSAY

The Seneca Nation of Indians

Anthony F. C. Wallace

A Seneca village in the eighteenth century was a few dozen houses scattered in a meadow. No plan of streets or central square defined a neat settlement pattern. The older men remembered days when towns were built between the forks of streams, protected by moats and palisades, and the dwellings within regularly spaced. But these fortified towns were no longer made, partly because of their earlier vulnerability to artillery and partly because times had become more peaceful anyway after the close of the fifty-odd years of war between 1649 and 1701. Now a village was simply an area within which individual families and kin groups built or abandoned their cabins at will; such focus as the area had for its several hundred inhabitants was provided by the council house (itself merely an enlarged dwelling), where the religious and political affairs of the community were transacted. Year by year the size of a village changed, depending on wars and rumors of war, the shifts of the fur trade, private feuds and family quarrels, the reputation of chiefs, the condition of the soil for corn culture, and the nearness of water and firewood. The same village might, over a hundred years' time, meander over a settlement area ten or fifteen miles square, increasing and decreasing in size, sometimes splitting up into several little settlements and sometimes coalescing into one, and even acquiring (and dropping) new names in addition to the generic name, which usually endured.

The traditional Iroquois dwelling unit was called a longhouse. It was a dark, noisy, smoke-filled family barracks; a rectangular, gable-roofed structure anywhere from fifty to seventy-five feet in length, constructed of sheets of elm bark lashed on stout poles, housing up to fifty or sixty people. The roof was slotted (sometimes with a sliding panel for rainy days) to let out some of the smoke that eddied about the ceiling. There

was only one entrance, sometimes fitted with a wooden or bark door on wooden hinges, and sometimes merely curtained by a bearskin robe. Entering, one gazed in the half-light down a long, broad corridor or alleyway, in the center of which, every twelve or fifteen feet, smoldered a small fire. On opposite sides of each fire, facing one another, were double-decker bunks, six feet wide and about twelve feet long. An entire family—mother, father, children, and various other relatives—might occupy one or two of these compartments. They slept on soft furs in the lower bunks. Guns, masks, moccasins, clothing, cosmetic paint, wampum, knives, hatchets, food, and the rest of a Seneca family's paraphernalia were slung on the walls and on the upper bunk. Kettles, braided corn, and other suspendable items hung from the joists, which also supported pots over the fire. Each family had about as much room for permanent quarters as might be needed for all of them to lie down and sleep, cook their meals, and stow their gear. Privacy was not easily secured because other families lived in the longhouse; people were always coming and going, and the fires glowed all night. In cold or wet weather or when the snow lay two or three feet deep outside, doors and roof vents had to be closed, and the longhouses became intolerably stuffy—acrid with smoke and the reeking odors of leftover food and sweating flesh. Eyes burned and throats choked. But the people were nonetheless tolerably warm, dry, and (so it is said) cheerful.

The inhabitants of a longhouse were usually kinfolk. A multifamily longhouse was, theoretically, the residence of a maternal lineage: an old woman and her female descendants, together with unmarried sons, and the husbands and children of her married daughters. The totem animal of the clan to which the lineage belonged—Deer, Bear, Wolf, Snipe, or whatever it might be—was carved above the door and painted red. In this way directions were easier to give, and the stranger knew where to seek hospitality or aid. But often—especially in the middle of the eighteenth century—individual families chose to live by themselves in smaller cabins, only eighteen by twenty feet or so in size, with just one fire. As time went on, the old longhouses disintegrated and were abandoned, and by the middle of the century the Iroquois were making their houses of logs.

Around and among the houses lay the cornfields. Corn was a main food. Dried and pounded into meal and then boiled into a hot mush, baked into dumplings, or cooked in whole kernels together with beans and squash and pieces of meat in the thick soups that always hung in kettles over the fires, it kept the people fed. In season, meats, fresh fruits, herb teas, fried grasshoppers, and other delicacies added spice and flavor to the diet. But the Iroquois were a cornfed people. They consumed corn when it was fresh and stored it underground for the lean winter months. The Seneca nation alone raised as much as a million bushels of corn each year; the cornfields around a large village might stretch for miles, and even scattered clearings in the woods were cultivated. Squash, beans, and tobacco were raised in

quantity, too. Domesticated animals were few, even after the middle of the century: some pigs, a few chickens, not many horses or cattle. The responsibility for carrying on this extensive agricultural establishment rested almost entirely on the women. Armed with crude wooden hoes and digging-sticks, they swarmed over the fields in gay, chattering work bees, proceeding from field to field to hoe, to plant, to weed, and to harvest. An individual woman might, if she wished, "own" a patch of corn, or an apple or peach orchard, but there was little reason for insisting on private tenure: the work was more happily done communally, and in the absence of a regular market, a surplus was of little personal advantage, especially if the winter were hard and other families needed corn. In such circumstances hoarding led only to hard feelings and strained relations as well as the possibility of future difficulty in getting corn for oneself and one's family. All land was national land; an individual could occupy and use a portion of it and maintain as much privacy in the tenure as he wished, but this usufruct title reverted to the nation when the land was abandoned. There was little reason to bother about individual ownership of real estate anyway: there was plenty of land. Economic security for both men and women lay in a proper recognition of one's obligation to family, clan, community, and nation, and in efficient and cooperative performance on team activities, such as working bees, war parties, and diplomatic missions.

If the clearing with its cornfields bounded the world of women, the forest was the realm of men. Most of the men hunted extensively, not only for deer, elk, and small game to use for food and clothing and miscellaneous household items, but for beaver, mink, and otter, the prime trade furs. Pelts were the gold of the woods. With them a man could buy guns, powder, lead, knives, hatchets, axes, needles and awls, scissors, kettles, traps, cloth, ready-made shirts, blankets, paint (for cosmetic purposes), and various notions: steel springs to pluck out disfiguring beard, scalp, and body hair; silver bracelets and armbands and tubes for coiling hair; rings to hang from nose and ears; mirrors; tinkling bells. Sometimes a tipsy hunter would give away his peltries for a keg of rum, treat his friends to a debauch, and wake up with a scolding wife and hungry children calling him a fool; another might, with equal improvidence, invest in a violin, or a horse, or a gaudy military uniform. But by and large, the products of the commercial hunt—generally conducted in the winter and often hundreds of miles from the home village, in the Ohio country or down the Susquehanna River—were exchanged for a limited range of European consumer goods, which had become, after five generations of contact with beaver-hungry French, Dutch, and English traders, economic necessities. Many of these goods were, indeed, designed to Indian specifications and manufactured solely for the Indian trade. An Iroquois man dressed in a linen breechcloth and calico shirt, with a woolen blanket over his shoulders, bedaubed with trade paint and adorned with trade armbands and earrings,