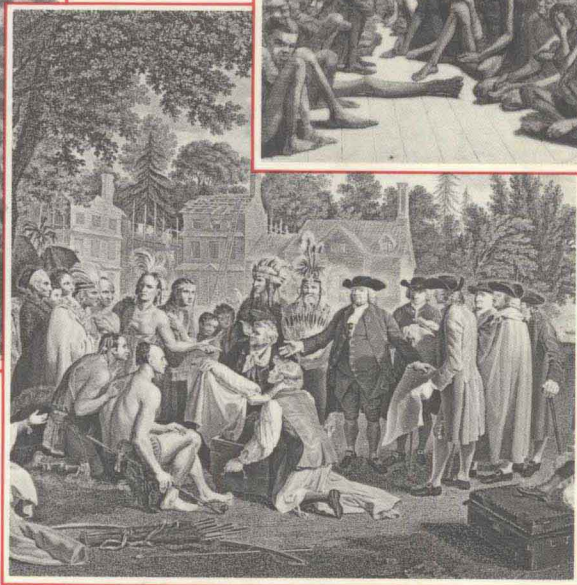
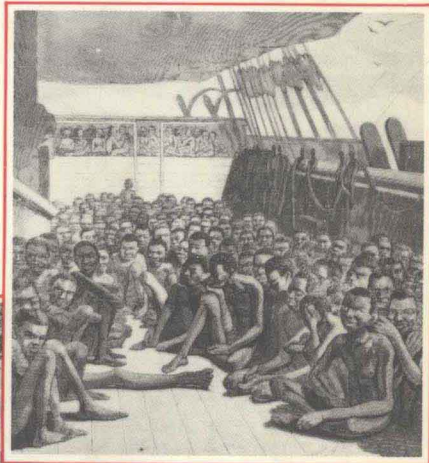


THIRD EDITION

RED, WHITE & BLACK

The Peoples of Early
North America



GARY B. NASH

THIRD EDITION

**Red, White,
and Black**

**The Peoples of Early
North America**

GARY B. NASH

University of California, Los Angeles



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Acknowledgments

The pages that follow began to take form in my mind in 1970 when I participated in redesigning the introductory course in American history at the University of California, Los Angeles. This effort was directed at making American history more understandable to an ethnically, socially, and intellectually diverse undergraduate audience by studying it as the process of change that occurred when people of widely varying cultural backgrounds interacted over a period of four centuries. Although this does not sound like a startling innovation, I discovered that it required me to read broadly in areas that had largely escaped my notice during fifteen years of studying and teaching colonial American history—anthropology, ethnohistory, African history, and Latin American history. To say that they “escaped my notice” is to put the point obliquely, for one of the thrusts of this book is that we read, think, and write selectively and in ways that reflect our cultural biases. Nothing more than changing my “angle of vision” was required to make it apparent that early American history and the early history of the American peoples were two different subjects and that the latter was comprehensible only by vastly widening the scope of my reading and thinking about the subject.

In revising this book for this third edition I have been assisted by three talented graduate students: David Finch, John Mellona, and Jonathan Sassi. Also, I wish to thank the following for their valuable assistance in reviewing the manuscript for this book: David L. Coon, Washington State University; Gerald H. Davis, Georgia State University; Michael Kay, University of Toledo; and Peter H. Wood, Duke University.

Gary B. Nash

"A people without history is like wind upon the buffalo grass"

Old Teton Sioux saying

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Introduction

“God is English.” Thus John Aylmer, a pious English clergyman, exhorted his parishioners in 1558, attempting to fill them with piety and patriotism.¹ That thought, though never stated so directly, has echoed ever since through our history books. As schoolchildren, as college students, and as presumably informed citizens, most of us have been brought up on what has passed for the greatest success story of human history, the epic tale of how a proud, brave offshoot of the English-speaking people tried to reverse the laws of history by demonstrating what the human spirit, liberated from the shackles of tradition, myth, and oppressive authority, could do in a newly discovered corner of the earth. For most Americans, colonial history begins with Sir Walter Raleigh and John Smith and proceeds through William Bradford and John Winthrop to Jonathan Edwards and Benjamin Franklin. It ends on the eve of the Revolution with wilderness-conquering settlers preparing to pit themselves against a mother country that had grown tyrannical.

This is ethnocentric history, as has been charged frequently and vociferously in the last few decades, both by revisionist white historians and

¹Quoted in Carl Bridenbaugh, *Vexed and Troubled Englishmen, 1590–1642* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1968), p. 13.

by those whose citizenship is American but whose ancestral roots are in Africa, Asia, Mexico, or the native cultures of North America. Just as Eurocentrism made it difficult for the early colonizers and explorers to believe that a continental land mass as large as North America could exist in the oceans between Europe and Asia, historians in this country have found it difficult to understand that the colonial period of our history is the story of a minority of English colonizers interacting with a majority of Iroquois, Delawares, Narragansetts, Pequots, Mahicans, Catawbas, Tuscaroras, Creeks, Cherokees, Choctaws, Ibos, Mandingos, Fulas, Yorubas, Ashantis, Germans, French, Spaniards, Swedes, Welsh, and Scots-Irish, to mention only some of the cultural strains present on the continent.

In recent years, American historians have tried to provide a corrective to white-oriented, male-dominated, hero-worshipping history. But often their efforts have been devoted to restocking the pantheon of national heroes with new figures whose skin is not so pale. Pedestals, for example, have been erected for Crispus Attucks, the half-Indian, half-black fisherman of Boston who fell first at the Boston massacre; for Ely Parker, the Seneca general who helped the North win the Civil War and later served his friend, Ulysses Grant, when the latter attained the presidency; and for Cesar Chávez, the leader of the United Farm Workers, who has brought major gains to the agricultural workers in this country.

This kind of historical revisionism does not serve us very well. To be sure the old mythology has been altered by including new figures in the national drama. But has American history been more than slightly rewritten if the revisionism consists primarily of turning a monochromatic cast of characters into a polychromatic one with the story line unchanged? Vine Deloria, Jr., an outspoken Indian leader, has charged that much of the “new” history still “takes a basic ‘manifest destiny’ white interpretation of history and lovingly plugs a few feathers, woolly heads, and sombreros into the famous events of American history.”² How revisionist is a history that still measures all events of our past in terms of the values of white society, that views American history through an Anglo-American lens, and that regards Indians and Africans in the colonial period as inert masses whose fate was wholly determined by white settlers?

The pages that follow proceed from the belief that a fuller and deeper understanding of the colonial underpinnings of American history must examine the interaction of many peoples, at all levels of society, from a wide range of cultural backgrounds over a period of several centuries. For the “colonial period” this means exploring not only how the English and other Europeans “discovered” North America and transplanted their cultures there, but also how societies that had been in North America and Africa for

²Vine Deloria, Jr., *We Talk, You Listen: New Tribes, New Turf* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1970), p. 39.

thousands of years were actively and intimately involved in the process of forging a new, multistranded culture in what would become the United States. Africans were not merely enslaved. Native Americans were not merely driven from the land. As Ralph Ellison, the African American writer, has reasoned: "Can a people . . . live and develop for over three hundred years by simply reacting? Are American Negroes simply the creation of white men, or have they at least helped to create themselves out of what they found around them?"³ To include Africans and Indians in our history in this way, simply as victims of the more powerful Europeans, is hardly better than excluding them altogether. It is to render voiceless, nameless, and faceless people who powerfully affected the course of our historical development as a society and as a nation.

To break through the notion of Indians and Africans being kneaded like dough according to the whims of the invading European societies, we must abandon the notion of "primitive" and "civilized" people. There is still some utility in pointing out differences in technological achievement—the Europeans' ability to navigate across the Atlantic and their ability to process iron and thereby to manufacture guns, for example. But if we take these achievements as constituting the marks of a "superior" culture coming into contact with an "inferior" one, we unconsciously step in a mental trap in which Europeans are the active agents of history and the African and Indian people are the passive victims.

Africans, Indians, and Europeans all had developed societies that functioned successfully in their respective environments. None thought of themselves as inferior people. "Savages we call them," wrote Benjamin Franklin more than two centuries ago, "because their Manners differ from ours, which we think the Perfection of Civility; they think the same of theirs."⁴ To think of Indians simply as victims of European aggression is to bury from sight the rich and instructive story of how Narragansetts, Iroquois, Delawares, Pamunkeys, Cherokees, Creeks, and many other nations, which had been changing for centuries before Europeans touched foot on the continent, responded creatively and powerfully to the newcomers from across the ocean and in this way reshaped themselves while reshaping the course of European settlement.

This book adopts a cultural approach to our early history. It looks at the land mass which we know as "North America" as a place where a number of different cultures converged during a particular period of history—between about 1550 and 1750, to use the European system of measuring time. In the most general terms we can define these cultural groups as Indian, African, and European, though, as we will see, this oversimplifica-

³Ralph Ellison, *Shadow and Act* (New York: New American Library, 1964), p. 301.

⁴"Remarks Concerning the Savages of North America" (1784), in *The Writings of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Albert H. Smyth (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1907), X: 97.

tion is itself a Eurocentric device for classifying cultures. In other words, this book is not about colonial American history as usually defined—as the English colonization of thirteen colonies along the continent's eastern seaboard—but about the history of the *peoples* of North America during the two centuries that preceded the American Revolution.

Each of these three cultural groups was exceedingly diverse. In their cultural characteristics Iroquois were as different from Natchez as English from Egyptians; Hausas and Yorubas were as distinct as Pequots and Creeks. Nor did the subgroups in each of these cultural blocs act in concert. The French, English, and Spanish fought wars with each other, contending for power and advantage in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, just as Hurons and Iroquois or Creeks and Cherokees sought the upper hand in their respective regions. Our task is to discover what happened when peoples from different continents, diverse among themselves, came into contact with each other at a particular point in history. It is social and cultural process and change that we are primarily concerned with—how societies were affected and their destinies changed by the experience of contact with other cultures. Anthropologists call this process “transculturation” and historians call it “social change.” Whatever the terms, we are studying a dynamic process of interaction that shaped the history of American Indians, Europeans, and Africans in North America in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

It is worth remembering that when we speak of “cultural groups” or “societies” we are referring to abstractions. A *society* is a group of people organized together so that their needs—the sustaining of life at the most basic level—can be met. *Culture* is a broad term that embraces all the specific characteristics of a society as they are functionally related to each other—technology; modes of dress and diet; economic, social, and political organization; religion; language; art; values; methods of child-rearing; and so forth. Simply stated, “culture” means a way of life, the framework within which any group of people—a society—comprehends the world around it. But “culture” and “society” are also terms which imply standards or norms of behavior. This is what is meant by “cultural traits” or “group behavior.”

To employ such terms is to run the danger of losing sight of the individual human beings, none of them exactly alike, who make up a society. Culture is a mental construct that we employ for the sake of convenience so that highly varied and complex individual behavior can be broadly classified and compared. Because we are Americans, belonging to the same nation, speaking the same language, living under the same laws, participating in the same economic and political system, does not mean that we are all alike. Otherwise there would be no generation gap, no differences in aesthetic taste, no gendered values, no racial tension, no political conflict. Nonetheless, taken collectively, Americans typically organize their lives dif-

ferently than do people in other parts of the world. While we must be aware of the problems of a cultural approach to history, it at least provides a way of understanding the interaction of the great mass of individuals of widely varying backgrounds who found themselves cohabiting one part of the "New World" several centuries ago.

One other cautionary note is necessary. Though we will often speak of racial groups and racial interaction, these terms do not refer to genetically different groups of people. For half a century anthropologists poured their intellect and energy into attempts to classify all the peoples of the world, from the pygmies of Borneo to the Aleuts in Alaska, according to genetic differences. Noses were measured, cranial cavities examined, body hair noted, lips described, and hair and eye color classified in an attempt to define scientifically the various physiological types of humankind and then to demonstrate that these characteristics coincided with degrees of "cultural development." It should come as no surprise that this massive effort of Western white anthropologists resulted in the conclusion that the superiority of the Caucasian peoples of the world could be "scientifically" proven.

Today, genetic sciences have wiped away this half-century effort, and we are now far less convinced that significant genetic difference separate "racial groups" as previously classified by anthropologists. It is now apparent that Europeans in the New World fashioned different codes of race relations based upon their own needs and upon attitudes concerning how people should be classified and separated. "Negro" in Brazil and in the United States, for example, came to have different meanings that reflected conditions and values, as well as degrees of social mingling, not genetic differences. As Sidney Mintz wisely reminds us, "The 'reality' of race is thus as much a social as a biological reality, the inheritance of physical traits serving as the raw material for social sorting devices, by which both stig-mata and privileges may be systematically allocated."⁵ Moreover, this social sorting is highly arbitrary—down to the present day when, for example, the U.S. Census Bureau obliges every resident to choose one racial category as if no people whatsoever existed with mixed racial inheritance.

Thus we gain little insight into the historical process by distinguishing cultural groups at the biological or physiological level. We are not considering genetically different groups but human populations from different parts of the world, groups of people with cultural differences. Most of all, we will be inquiring into the way these peoples, brought into contact with each other, changed over the course of several centuries—and changed in a manner that would shape the course of American history for generations to come.

⁵Sidney Mintz, "Toward an Afro-American History," *Journal of World History*, 13 (1971): 318.

CHAPTER

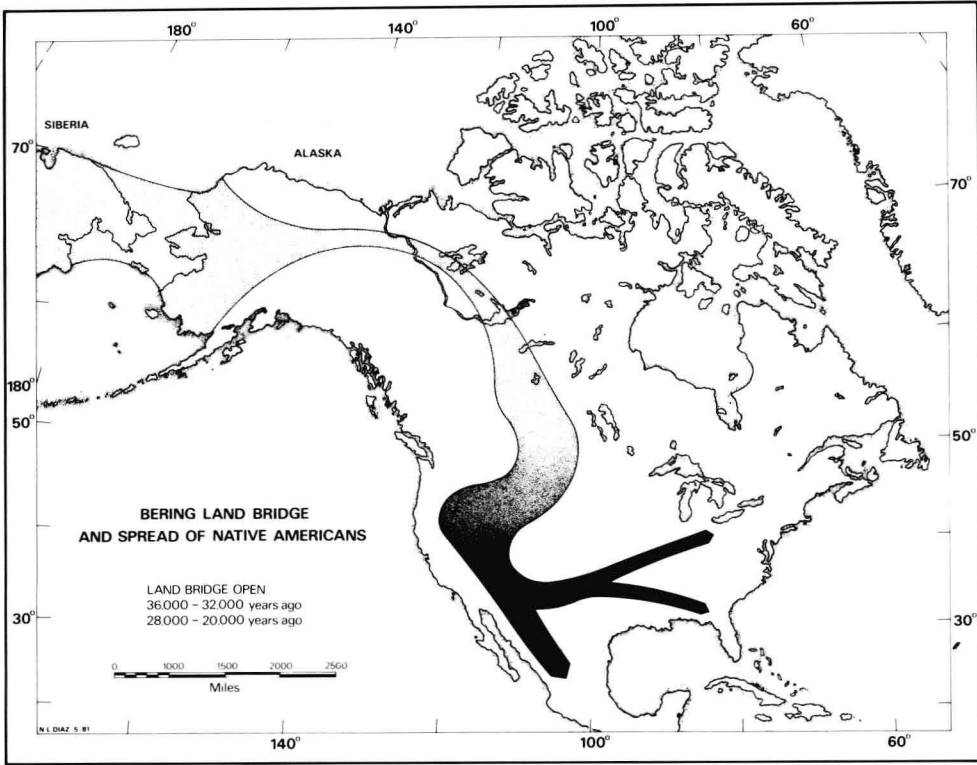
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Before Columbus

The history of the American peoples begins not in 1492, the date which most of our history books take as their point of departure, but more than 350 centuries before the birth of Christ. It was then, according to Anglo-American historians, that humans first discovered what much later would be called North America. Thus American history can begin with some basic questions: Who were the first inhabitants of the “New World”? Where did they come from? What were they like? How had their societies changed over the millennia that preceded the arrival of Europeans?

Almost all the material evidence suggesting answers to these questions comes from archaeologists who have excavated ancient sites of early life in North America. By unearthing objects of early material culture—pots, tools, ornaments, and so forth—and establishing the age of skeletal remains of the “first Americans,” they have dated the arrival of **man in America to about 35,000 B.C.**

Although many Native American peoples have their own creation stories about their origins in North America itself, anthropologists generally agree that these first inhabitants of the continent were men and women from Asia. Nomadic peoples from the inhospitable environment of Siberia, they migrated across the **Bering Straits between Siberia and Alaska** in search of more reliable sources of food. Geologists have determined that



Siberia and Alaska were connected by a land bridge only during the two long periods when massive glaciers covered the northern latitudes, locking up most of the world's moisture and leaving the floor of the Bering Sea exposed. These two long periods were from 32,000 to 36,000 years ago and again from 20,000 to 28,000 years ago. At other times the melting glaciers raised the level of water in the Bering Straits, inundating the land bridge and thus blocking foot traffic to North America. So when Europeans found a way to reach North America in ships less than 500 years ago, they encountered a people whose ancestors had come on foot between 20,000 and 36,000 years ago.

Although most anthropologists agree that the migration was of Asian peoples, particularly those of Mongoloid stock from northeast Asia, the skeletal remains of these migrants also reveal non-Asian characteristics. It is probable that they represent a potpourri of different populations in Asia, Africa, and Europe, which had been mixing for thousands of years. But whatever the prior infusion of genes from peoples of other areas, these first Americans were Asiatic in geographical origin.