

PATRIARCHY, SOVEREIGNTY, AND THE AMERICAN INDIANS

HISTORY 1100.3,
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I. POINTS OF CONTRAST: NORTH AMERICAN INDIAN LIFE & POLITICS

- ◆ A. Geography and Demography of Pre-Contact America
 - 1. 90% of population south of the Rio Grande.
 - 2. In present-day Mexico and South America, conqueror peoples like Aztecs and Incas had empires, lived in large cities.
 - 3. In less densely populated North, small, seasonally mobile village-based societies were the rule.
 - 4. Great diversity in north: climatically-adapted culture areas with 100s of different languages.
 - Major area of first contact: Eastern Woodlands, based on mixed agriculture (summer) and hunting (winter) economy.
- ◆ B. Most seemingly European empire-like northern native group: The Iroquois Confederacy (Haudenosaunee).
 - 1. Fierce reputation for fighting & captive-taking.
 - 2. Most famous for the creation of their confederacy, largest & best developed political unit in Native North America.
 - Also known as the “Five Nations” (E to W): Mohawks, Oneidas, Onondagas, Cayugas and Senecas.
 - "The Great Law of Peace"
 - League as a diplomatic gathering rather than a government.

I. POINTS OF CONTRAST: NORTH AMERICAN INDIAN LIFE & POLITICS (CONT.)

- ◆ C. Where Fathers Did Not Rule: Family Life in the Eastern Woodlands
 - 1. Lineages and "clans" as basic social units.
 - 2. Women in Eastern Woodlands Indian societies:
 - "Matrilineal" descent & "matrilocal" residence
 - Gender-based division of labor: women did the farming (intercropped corn, beans, & squash), men the hunting.
 - Relatively egalitarian customs regarding sex, marriage
 - Many white woman captives took easily to Indian gender relations. Story of Mary Jemison.
 - Important, direct political influence for women
 - 3. Mildness of Indian child-rearing practices: no father figures, "breaking the will," corporal punishment.
- ◆ D. God was not a Father: Notes on Indian Spirituality
 - 1. Note on Indian religion: open-ended & non-exclusive, spiritualized nature (animism), lacked concept of original sin.
 - 2. Indians were not "frontier hippies" living in harmony with nature.

I. POINTS OF CONTRAST: NORTH AMERICAN INDIAN LIFE & POLITICS (CONT.)

- ◆ E. The Myth of the Chief: The Indians' Politics of Consensus
 - 1. Lack of governments with coercive powers among the eastern tribes.
 - 2. Consensual, collective decision-making, but NOT democracy (majority rule).
 - Those who disagreed with a group decision could simply leave and form their own tribe: some Cherokees became Chickamaugas.
 - Break-up of the Iroquois League during the Revolutionary War – Oneidas vs. Mohawks (led by Joseph Brant).
 - 3. No written laws, and enforcement of social standards by public opinion and clan vengeance.
 - 4. Chiefs not rulers but “beloved men.”
- ◆ F. Indian ideas of land “ownership” as right to use, not hold as exclusive, private possessions
 - “Indian givers”
- ◆ G. Conclusion: Eastern Woodland society functioned well w/o sovereignty, patriarchy, or coercive authority.

II. PATRIARCHY, SOVEREIGNTY, AND COLONIZATION



- ◆ **A. Native approach was to be open, flexible, often willing to incorporate Europeans & their culture**
 - 1. Military and political alliances: Iroquois alliances w/Dutch & English, Huron alliances w/French, Wampanoags with Pilgrims.
 - 2. Trade with Europeans (fur & deerskins) & cultural change.
 - a) Growth of mixed-blood population
 - b) Social impact of trade: overhunting, disrupted communities, loss of traditional culture, alcoholism.
 - c) Political impact of trade: European alliances and new, deadlier forms of warfare. Iroquois & the Beaver Wars.
- ◆ **B. European ideas of political, religious, and racial sovereignty & patriarchy justified and promoted conquest, conversion, and colonization.**
 - 1. Race: The more alien a people seem to Europeans, the freer Europeans felt to exploit and even enslave them.
 - 2. Christianity: Adam as the first patriarch, with dominion over all nature, including infidel humans.
 - Doctrine developed that only Christians could own land.
 - 3. Gender & sex: Alleged Indian violations of patriarchal norms, including sexual ones like “sodomy” and berdaches, were promoted as justifications for conquest and exploitation.

II. PATRIARCHY, SOVEREIGNTY, AND COLONIZATION (CONT.)

◆ C. The Spanish Empire in the Americas



1. The reconquista of Iberia from the Moors (Muslims) ending 1492, same year as Columbus expedition.

2. The papal "donation" of non-Christian lands to Spain, 1493.

3. *Reconquista* made seamless transition to the conquest of the Americas, to gain wealth, territory and spread Christianity.

- Conquistadores, priests, and *encomienda* : The making of new patriarchs in the New World.

4. *Requerimiento*: Key document of Spanish colonization was declaration of religious war on the inhabitants of the New World.

5. Patriarchy & sovereignty as the secret to the Spaniards' success: they faced natives (like the Aztecs/Nahua) much more similar to them than the English would further north. Replaced the heads of existing empires.

- Hernan Cortes and the conquest of Mexico

6. Spaniards used the native population's labor to extract vast amounts of silver and gold from the New World, funding an empire that overran much of Europe as well as the Americas.

7. Cultural conquest was much less complete than the political economic, with plenty of syncretism between Spaniards and native majority.





Tenochtitlán, Aztec Capital





Cherokee village of Echota, present Georgia





Wampanoag Village, New England





TYPICAL IROQUOIAN STOCKADED VILLAGE

NATIVE AMERICAN CULTURE AREAS AT THE TIME OF EUROPEAN CONTACT



The Spanish and Portuguese Colonial Empires, c. 1580



- Spanish Habsburg possessions under Philip II
- Austrian Habsburg possessions
- Boundary of the Holy Roman Empire
- Battle

