RACE, CULTURAL GROUPS, SOCIAL DIFFERENTIATION

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CIVILIZATION AND ITS EFFECT ON INDIAN CHARACTER

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NO BETTER expression of a wide spread opinion concerning the virtues of the primitive races of America, free from the contaminating influence of European civilization, could be found than the following preamble to the will of one of Spain's early conquistadores:

Lejesama, with his will proved in the city of Cuzco on the 15th of November, 1589, before Geronimo Sanchez de Quesada, public notary—"First, before beginning my will, I declare that I have desired much to give notice to his Catholic Majesty king Philip, our lord, seeing how good a Catholic and Christian he is, and how zealous in the service of the Lord our God, concerning that which I would relieve my mind of, by reason of having taken part in the discovery and conquest of these countries, which we took from the Lords Yncas, and placed under the royal crown, a fact which is known to his Catholic Majesty. The said Yncas governed in such a way that in all the land neither a thief, nor a vicious man, nor a bad dishonest woman was known. The men all had honest and profitable employment. The woods, and mines, and all kinds of property were so divided that each man knew what belonged to him, and there were no law suits. The Yncas were feared, obeyed, and respected by their subjects, as a race very capable of governing; but we took away their land, and placed it under the crown of Spain, and made them subjects. Your Majesty must understand that my reason for making this statement is to relieve my conscience, for we have destroyed this people by our bad examples. Crimes were once so little known among them, that an Indian with one hundred thousand pieces of gold and silver in his house, left it open, only placing a little stick across the door, as the sign that the master was out, and nobody went in. But when they saw that we placed locks and keys on our doors, they understood that it was from fear of thieves, and when they saw that we had thieves amongst us, they despised us. All this I tell your Majesty, to discharge my conscience of a weight, that I may no longer be a party to these things. And I pray God to pardon me, for I am the last to die to all the discoverers and conquerors, and it is notorious that there are none left but me, in this land or out of it, and therefore I now do what I can to relieve my conscience."[1]

This old Spaniard viewed the native society of Peru as an outsider, a member of another culture group, and at a point of time distant enough to lend enchantment to the notion that the societies owing allegiance to the Incas were once possessed of all the qualities and virtues idealized by our own civilization. It is the same today; there is a prevalent concept that the American Indian was one of the noblest of men, and that he suffered a moral downfall as a direct result of association with the white man.

Let us try to get away from this spirit of anti-patriotism, as it were, regarding our own times and consider a few of the outstanding defects in native character, as judged by our own code, and determine to what extent these shortcomings may be attributed to the white man's influence.

It is frequently alleged that the aborigine was of the most tractable sort, hospitable, honest, naïve, and truthful

[1] Markham, C. R. *The Travels of Cieza de Leon*, p. XXXIII (*Calancha*, lib. i, cap. 15, p. 98).

in his native state, and continued so at the time of early contact until the misdeeds and the overreaching of the white man placed evils before him which he was not slow to imitate and to acquire. Thus the virtues of primitive man disintegrated into the vices of civilization.

Now as a matter of fact hospitality in aboriginal societies was limited to members of the individual group, and to those persons belonging to other clans or tribes which maintained marital, commercial or military relationships with it. Hospitality was a characteristic of the peace group, just as it is today. The savage extended the privileges of hospitality to the early white man for various reasons; he accepted him into his own peace group in accord with custom the same as a member of any other friendly tribe. The Caucasian represented a race type which was entirely strange and foreign to the Indian. With an inadequate stock of knowledge and faith, and with utter dependence upon the supernatural, it is little wonder that the aborigines thought the white horsemen were centaurs, and stood aghast to see the beast and man parts separate themselves. And, as is well known, the Spaniards were regarded as beings of a divine nature, come in accordance with an ancient promise to their god Quetzalcoatl. The Bahama Islanders are said to have regarded the white faced, bearded Spaniards as messengers from the oversea heaven of their ancestors, come to take them with them. Furthermore the guns, clothing and equipment of the Spaniards imposed upon the superstitions of the natives to such an extent as to gain for the former a ready welcome and subservience on the part of the Indians.[2] To a greater or less extent this same scene was enacted wherever the aborigines first came in contact with the pale faces and accounts for their extreme friendliness; it would be dangerous not to do homage to the Gods.

Putting aside the unusual conditions of the earliest contact, commerce and trade accounted largely for the amiable and hospitable behavior of many tribes toward the white man. He brought within their reach the most desired products of civilization, liquor, firearms, and other trade goods of scarcely less importance to the savage, such as knives, axes, kettles, and cotton goods. White men possessing the accoutrements of civilized warfare, before such became common in the hands of the natives, were always welcome for it was unusual that a tribe did not have an enemy against whom the assistance of the powerful visitor was sought. Thus in 1637 the Narragansetts invoked the aid of the colonists against the powerful Pequots, and the Algonkins were ever solicitous of French help against their arch-enemy, the Iroquois.

The fact that the American Indian had no concept of private ownership of land might also be adduced as one of the reasons for his passivity when the earliest settlers came to live beside him. He recognized only the right of private property in movables and chattels; land was plentiful and free to all; therefore it was nothing to him that the white man chose to occupy his country until the presence of the latter, with habitations and enclosures, interfered with the Indian's livelihood by scaring off the game. The peace group was gradually contracted, and the red man looked upon the Caucasian as a member of a foreign group whose interests were incompatible with his own. And therewith the old-time hospitality ceased.

Let us now consider the much mooted question as to whether association with

[2] Zimmerman, A. *Die Europäischen Kolonien*, I, 270.

the European and the colonist has taught the American aborigine an utter disregard for truth and honesty, or whether those faults are characteristic of the native. In order to judge fairly of this matter let us get a few cases before us.

The Tarahumare while in his native state, according to Lumholtz, never cheats at bargains. If he has anything to sell that is in any way defective he always draws attention to the flaw, and if a jar has any imperfection, it requires much persuasion to make him part with it. "Often I trusted Indians with a silver dollar or two for corn to be delivered a few days later, and never was I disappointed by them."[3] Le Clercq cites a very interesting report coming from one of the Recollect Fathers at Tadoussac:

> I remarked a great trait of justice in their chief. After we made peace he complained that we sold our goods too dear when the Indians came to trade, and he asked that they should be sold cheaper in the future. Our factor for the merchants, seeing his importunity, told him that he would sell cheaper to him but not to the rest. This Indian then began to say to this factor in a disdainful way: "You make fun of me to say that you will sell cheap to me and dear to my people. If I did so I should deserve to be hung and beheaded by my people. I am a chief; I do not speak for myself; I speak for my people." This I witnessed.[4]

The Eskimos at Cape Thompson were most eager to trade with Beechey's men, and although they were exceptionally good at driving hard bargains, they were found to be very honest, extremely good-natured, and friendly.[5] Old experienced traders among the Indians have frequently asserted that they lost less money on long-standing accounts, aggregating large sums, than in their comparatively small dealings with the white people in their neighborhood. One successful trader among the Sioux who, in the early nineties, lent some $30,000 to his Indian neighbors in anticipation of a payment they were soon to receive from the Government, in commenting upon the integrity of the natives said, "I did not lose more than $150 on the whole transaction, and that I lost from a half-breed who did not live on the reservation."[6] The Navaho is reported to be honest and reliable in his dealing with the white man, but like most people, of whatever race, he aims to get as great a return as possible.[7] The Slave and Dog-rib Indians encountered by Mackenzie showed no disposition to purloin anything, although they grew so familiar that it was hard to keep them out of the tents belonging to the members of the party.[8] The Tupis held most things with the exception of their wives and children in common. Thus they had little to quarrel about and theft was unknown. Says Burton,

> In the wild parts of Brazil, upon the Ribeira d'Iguape, for instance, when I first travelled (1865), boxes might be left open without the least danger. But a little leavening of colonists from the Southern States of the North American Union so changed the social state, that next year locks and padlocks would not keep out the pilfering finger.[9]

Many additional cases might be cited where aborigines, having had little to do with races of superior culture, are reported as very honest and reliable, but it must be remembered, on the other hand, that examples are quite as numerous where natives, little touched by civiliza-

[3] Lumholtz, Carl. *Unknown Mexico*, I, 244.

[4] Le Clercq, Father C. *First Establishment of the Faith in New France* (tr. by Shea, J. G.), I, 136.

[5] Beechey, F. W. *Voyage to the Pacific and Bering Strait*, p. 226.

[6] Leupp, F. E. *The Indian and His Problem*, pp. 11–2.

[7] Hrdlička, Aleš. "Observations on the Navaho," in *American Anthropologist*, II (N. S.), p. 343.

[8] Mackenzie, Sir Alex. *Voyages—and an Account of the Fur Trade*, I, 31.

[9] Burton, R. F. "The Captivity of Hans Stade" (*Hakluyt*, vol. 51).

tion, are represented as accomplished rogues. Thus the people of the islands and shore of Bering Strait and Kotzebue Sound were notorious among the trading vessels for pilfering. On several occasions the villagers of Cape Prince of Wales fairly took possession of vessels with small crews and walked off with whatever they desired.[10] The Indians of Prince William Sound, says Portlock, seemed to think it a disgrace to be clumsy and caught in the act of stealing; it was a virtue to be successful and undetected. At Cook's River the natives were most audacious thieves, and "what was very remarkable, even the little boys were furnished with small hooked sticks for the purpose of picking pockets."[11]

The Indians of Nootka Sound traded with the strictest honesty when Cook first visited them, but with longer acquaintance these same people became dangerous thieves. One would amuse the boat-keeper while his companions were stealing whatever was within reach. Cook excused their acts in part by attributing such knavery to childish curiosity. The aborigines frequently cheated in selling animal oil by mixing it with water.[12] That the Indian neighbors of the New England colonists had no particular reputation for honesty can readily be seen from such laws as the one of 1666 enacted by Rhode Island to the effect that no Indian could keep a hog with cutmarks in its ears, nor could anyone sell a sheep, swine, or other skin without the ears, under severe penalties. The inference is plain—the Indians would steal pigs if they could, and the colonists thus prevented placing temptation before them.[13] The Macusis Indians possessed a noticeable tendency to steal small objects, but things of importance were usually left alone.[14] The Indians in the region of La Plata could not be civilized, and from hunters of wild animals they became hunters of domesticated animals; it was easier and more profitable to steal than to trade or to domesticate animals.[15]

From the foregoing examples it is evident that there is no justification for drawing a hard and fast generalization that intercourse with the white man caused the native to lose his natural honesty and truthfulness. The fact is that the Indian has been brought up in accord with a code of mores peculiar to his own individual group. The code prescribes and regulates the rights and duties of every member to his fellowmen; it applies only to those who belong to the tribe, or to other groups which are related by commercial, marital or other ties tending to bind them together. Outsiders are not protected for the code does not extend to them. A few examples will serve to illustrate this point.

The Patagonians are described as haughty, independent, faithful to their primises made between one another, and obliging to each other in their mutual relations. But toward Christians, that is members of the "out group," they are false, deceitful, rancorous and dishonorable, "for they are educated to be thieves."[16] Here it is clearly a case

[10] Nelson, E. W. "The Eskimo about Bering Strait," in *18th Annual Report, B. A. E.* (1896–7), p. 299.

[11] Portlock, Nathaniel. *A Voyage Round the World*, pp. 249, 222, 114.

[12] Cook, Jas. *Third Voyage*, II, 270–2, 279.

[13] Weeden, W. B. *Economic and Social History of New England*, I, 29.

[14] Blake, R. H. "Notes on the Rio Alto Branco, North Amazonas," in *Royal Geog. Journal*, vol. 47, p. 367 (May, 1916).

[15] Daireaux, E. *La vie et les moeurs a la Plata*, I, 52.

[16] Hutchinson, T. J. "The Tehuelche Indians of Patagonia," in *Transactions of the Ethnological Society of London*, N. S., VII (1868), p. 321.

of two different codes of conduct applying —one to fellow-members of the local group, the other to non-members. To the Eskimos the foreigner is outside the pale of the law; in their eyes no wrong is committed in deceiving a stranger; rather, it is an honorable action, and a clever thief preying upon outsiders is greatly admired by the members of his clan.[17] Among the natives of Bering Strait,

> Stealing from people of the same village or tribe is regarded as wrong. The thief is made ashamed by being talked to in the *kashim* [assembly] when all the people are present, and in this way is frequently forced to restore the articles he has stolen. . . . . To steal from a stranger or from people of another tribe is not considered wrong so long as it does not bring trouble on the community. The Eskimos living about the trading stations have adopted some ideas in regard to this matter from the whites. As a result of this, coupled with the memory of some wholesome chastisements that have followed theft at various times, the property of white men is tolerably safe in most places.

What happened was a forcible enlargement of the peace group to include the white men at the trading station.

In this connection it is also interesting to note that the Unalit display a curious, innate distrust of all strangers, and when asked to do anything for white men always insist upon pay in advance. In the same way they would hesitate and even refuse to give white men any articles of value to be paid for at another time; but on the other hand, it was a constant practice among them to seek credit at the trading stations, to be paid when they should have procured the necessary skins. In such matters, however, they were very honest, paying all debts contracted in this way. It is curious, too, that very often the same Eskimo who would be perfectly honest and go to great trouble to meet his obligations would not hesitate to steal from the trader who had trusted him.[18] The Tarahumare are extremely chary of selling anything to a stranger, and will even deny that they have anything to sell. Whenever a Tarahumare is actually induced to sell any of his belongings, he does so with the attitude of conferring a great favor upon the buyer. A purchase, however, seems to serve as a medium to draw the stranger into the "we group," for it establishes a kind of brotherhood between the two negotiants who afterward call each other *narangua*.[19]

Ratzel is inclined to think that the encroachments of the white man upon the game preserves of the Indian, thus reducing his means of subsistence, is in large part responsible for the greater ratio of crime committed by natives upon members of the "out group" than upon their fellow tribesmen who, of course, come under the protection and regulation of the native societal code. "What the agriculturalist or the stock breeder wrings for himself by the sweat of his brow is regarded by these nomads as legitimate booty. Thousands of Indians in Texas and Mexico lived by robbery exclusively."[20] In this connection it is to be noted that what we conventionally call dishonesty was introduced to the Indian with the rest of our civilization which we brought into his country. Food, among the old-fashioned Indians, was always regarded as common property; the rule being to let him who was hungry eat, wherever he found that which would stay the cravings of his stomach.[21] Ulloa informs us that if an Indian finds himself without food and without money he

[17] Bancroft, H. H. *Native States of the Pacific*, II, 64. (Quoted by Letourneau, Ch., *L'évolution du commerce*, p. 16.)

[18] Nelson, E. W. "The Eskimo about Bering Strait," in *18th Annual Report, B. A. E.* (1896–7), p. 294.

[19] Lumholtz, Carl. *Unknown Mexico*, I, 244.

[20] Ratzel, F. *Völkerkunde*, I, 468.

[21] Leupp, F. E. *The Indian and His Problem*, p. 9.

appropriates whatever he needs when no one is looking; but always the smallest piece or modicum under the impression that it will not be missed. If discovered or caught in the act he stoutly maintains that it was not theft, but a case of necessity without profit to him or bad intention on his part.[22] When a Bering Strait Eskimo is hired to shoot waterfowl, and chances to kill a seal, he always considers it as his own property despite the fact that he was hired to hunt and was paid for his time. The only way the employer could obtain the chance rewards of the hunt would be to pay for such in addition to the regular wages.[23]

It might be expected that the introduction of iron tools and other products of civilization would increase the incentives for theft. This indeed is true, but in the early days when goods of the white trader were relatively rare in the tribe and their possession so significant, the discovery of the thief and the reclamation of purloined articles was inevitable. This fact, coupled with adverse public opinion within the tribe, might be added as a further explanation for the infrequency of theft within the group,[24] but would act in no way as a check upon spoliation of members of the "out group", for such is not considered a crime.

To recapitulate: Admitting that the contact with certain degraded elements of the white race has had a degenerative influence upon the American aborigines, there certainly is no evidence to support the broad generalization that contact with European civilization has changed a noble race of hospitable, truthful, and honest men into lying, deceptive thieves and rogues. The native is born and brought up under a certain code of mores, that is, the prosperity policy of his own group. For the protection and preservation of the society this code defines and prescribes the duties and obligations of each member to every other member and to the group. But it does not extend to outsiders; they are unprotected; expediency alone determines their treatment —not a balanced judgment as to right or wrong. Moreover we have a conflict of two codes developed under entirely different life conditions. What is right and proper in one is frequently forbidden and regarded as a crime by the other. Thus the Indian's character is good only in so far as it coincides with the mores and customs of our group; in all other respects it is bad. It is largely this adherence to contrary mores which makes the contact Indian appear to us as a rogue devoid of any sense of honor or justice.

[22] Ulloa, Don Antonio de. *Voyage de l'Amerique*, I, 236–7.

[23] Nelson, E. W. "The Eskimo about Bering Strait," in *18th Annual Report, B. A. E.*, p. 308.

[24] Von Martius, C. F. *Beiträge zur Ethnographie u. Sprachenkunde*, I, 90. Ratzel, F. *Völkerkunde*, I, 460.