

Religion, Greed, and War in the Early Americas

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The Americas, once a land of peace, stability, and tranquility, inhabited by a docile race of humans who lived conservatively alongside the environment, had changed considerably since its inception by colonizers in search of the New World, beginning with the discovery of Admiral Christopher Columbus, to the scramble for the new world, in search of religious freedoms and individual prosperity, and eventually its continuous war for the new inhabitants colonial and personal liberty amongst themselves and ultimately the crown, seeking to cut ties with the Great Britain with which it hailed from, citing oppression as their reasoning, ultimately severing their relationship with the colony's "motherland" as the declaration of independence being their tool for liberation, however, this will not be an end to wars in North America, but the beginning of the end of ties with Great Britain, and establishment of the new world, set out to rise as a force to be reckoned with.

Before the arrival of Columbus to the new world, the inhabitants seemed to be in a state of peace, stability, and tranquility, inhabited by docile and trusting humans, living conservatively alongside their land which they held dearly to themselves, worshipping daily as visible by their active preservation. In the words of Columbus himself, "The people are very docile, and for them longing to possess our things, and not having anything to give in return, they take what they can get, and presently swim away."¹ Surprisingly, though, the inhabitants wore scars from battles amongst fellow natives, so perhaps the site of Columbus and his men arriving without hostility gave them initial pleasure in dealing with Columbus and his men. This does not go without saying that the indigenous population lived without hostility, as Columbus noticed some individuals sporting scars born to them by rivaling native tribes.

¹ Christopher Columbus, Journal of the First Voyage of Columbus (1492) P. 113

The land itself was packed full of untouched, pristine resources with an ideal climate for cultivation and inhabitation and holding all the trees of Spain in its existence as well as those not found in Spain. When Columbus journaled about the Island, he said it contained gold, "It is a very green island, level and very fertile, and I do not doubt that they sow and gather corn all year round, as well as other things. I saw many trees unlike those in our country..." and further stated, "... so unlike that it is the greatest wonder in the world to see the great diversity..."²

It was what the land held, in addition to what Columbus observed as a complete lack of religion, which enabled Columbus to lay claim to the new world, "...he, in the presence of all, had taken, as he now took, possession of the said island for the King and the Queen his Lords, making the declarations that are required, as is now largely set forth the declarations that are required, as is now largely outlined in the testimonies which were then made in writing."³ In this action, Columbus claimed the Americas in the name of the King, the Queen, and the holy spirit, disregarding the inhabitants as competent humans.

It is quite obvious that the natives were not completely lacking any religious faith nor were they imbeciles, for they had accomplished architectural and religious feats, as stated by Garcilaso de la Vega, "They (the Castilians) came unto the temple. It was large, being more than a hundred paces long and forty wide; the walls were high in keeping with the size of the room, and the roof was very high and steeply pitched... so that the rain would not come into the houses."⁴

² Christopher Columbus, *Journal of the First Voyage of Columbus* (1492) P. 119

³ Christopher Columbus, *Journal of the First Voyage of Columbus* (1492) P. 110

⁴ Garcilaso de la Vega, *An Account of the wonders found in the temple and the burial place of the lords of Cofachiqui* (1540) P. 8

The riches contained in the temples by Natives were also quite extravagant, but to them, they were not riches, but representations of the ones they've loved which have now passed. "Such quantity of pearls is no cause for wonder if it is considered that those Indians do not sell any of those that they find, but bring them all to their burial place, and that they gave done so for many centuries."⁵ In reading this statement and knowing that the temple was eventually pillaged, it makes you consider who the true savages were, with these Castilians claiming to be a faithful bunch, I don't think this could have been further from the truth as how else would group enable themselves such disrespect as to pillage ones religious temples? These observations paired with Columbus' search for gold, truly highlight the search for resources, specifically land, slaves, and gold. "I was attentive and took the trouble to ascertain if there was gold."⁶

The beginning of arrival of Europeans to the Americas brought drastic change to the continent and instilled distrust in its indigenous inhabitants who now lived in constant fear and competition with the settlers. Much of this had its roots in earlier interactions between the Spanish and the Native Americans, however, it continued with new frontiers as what the colonists initially relied on, were their abilities to sack and pillage what those natives had already established, a failure in their planning from the beginning. "Trade they would not, and find their corn we could not; for they had hid it in the woods: and being thus deluded, we arrived at Jamestown, half sick, all complaining, and tired with the toil, famine, and discontent, to have only but discovered our gilded hopes, and such fruitless certainties, as Captain Smith

⁵ Garcilaso de la Vega, *An Account of the wonders found in the temple and the burial place of the lords of Cofachiqui* (1540) P. 11

⁶ Christopher Columbus, *Journal of the First Voyage of Columbus* (1492) P. 112

foretold us...”⁷ The initial inhabitants also lacked work ethic and essentially came to the new world looking for a simple life, but it’s not what they found. John Smith pointed out the frailty of these men when stating, “...but the axe so oft blistered their tender fingers.” Alluding to the weak demeanor of the men of these first colonies.

The colonists nor the Natives would catch a break, because as the colonizing populations grew, so did the outbreak of pathogens, but unfortunately the pathogens attacked colonists as well as natives, with the natives faring far worse. “All the French born in the country were attacked by this contagion (smallpox), as well as the Savages...”⁸ It was however during this time that some natives put new faith in European religion as the nurses fearlessly cared for them while at the same time, natives began to resent priests as every time they came to convert tribes, that is when they fell sick, demonizing pastoral black robes.⁹

The Pastors in their black robes were not the only thing the Natives did not trust, for they did not trust white men in general and specifically Englishmen, even the most minuscule amount, as can be viewed in Wampanoag’s Grievances, “if 20 of their honest Indians testified that an Englishman had done them wrong, it was as nothing; and if but one of their worst Indians testified against any Indian or their king when it pleased the English, that was sufficient.”⁸ Even in their joint council, Indians have been on the shorter end of the stick, having their land invaded and rights slowly removed, war and further oppression were all but inevitable.

⁷ Captain John Smith, From the Generall Historie of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles... (London, 1624) P. 16

⁸ Paul Le Jeune and Jerome Lalemant, The Jesuit Relations (1640) P. 19

⁹ Paul Le Jeune and Jerome Lalemant, The Jesuit Relations (1640) P. 21

⁸ Wampanoag Grievances against the Colonist of New England (1675) P. 2

Although greed was a huge factor in the initial colonization of the new world, in search of gold and resources, it was often exclaimed to be done as an act of pure faith, often resulting in further suppression of the indigenous population. This eventually cleared the way for more religious colonization of the new world by inhabitants seeking religious freedoms from the Anglican church, which was continually persecuting individuals who were looking to move away from the Crown's format of what religion ought to be, which had been accepted by the puritans as corrupt, and following the puritan desire to *purify* the religious teaching to align with the bible instead of political will and power, or so it seemed...⁹

The first Puritans came to the new world in two waves, the first being separatists of the Puritan belief system, establishing colonies in what came to be eventually known as Rhode Island, and the second wave, a much larger and stricter form of Puritan beliefs, established the Massachusetts bay colony. Both groups came for religious freedom, but the first group's goal was religious freedom for all, allowing every individual to practice their faith in god however they so choose, as was believed that any enforced uniformity of religion "denies the principles of Christianity and civility."¹⁰ Massachusetts Bay colonies differed greatly as their main goals were to establish their vision of what a true Puritan society would look like, essentially their vision of heaven on earth or a "City Upon a Hill"¹¹ while trying to align other inhabitants of the new world with their views.

This division between the two sects of Puritan beliefs began to demonstrate the first real rift between colonies, shifting from what before was the colonists pitted solely against natives.

⁹ John Winthrop, General Observations & Model of Christian Charity (1629-1630) P. 29

¹⁰ Roger Williams, Freedom of Conscience (1848) P. 2

¹¹ John Winthrop, General Observations & Model of Christian Charity (1629-1630) P. 29

We now begin to see immense religious persecution brought on by the Massachusetts Bay Colonies against those who share their interpretation of what faith is. The first recorded incident of religious persecution brought on against individuals within the colonies themselves began with Anne Hutchinson. Anna Hutchinson was a traditional Puritan, holding that anyone may speak the words of God if they let him in. She believed that divine light could be given to anyone, that predetermination was invalid, and that anyone could earn their place in heaven through the right life and choices in faith. This went against the Massachusetts Bay Colonies' version of Puritanism as on appointed men could speak of God and religious scripture.¹² Regardless of Anne's fight for what she believed to be free and proper faith, read straight from the bible in addition to messages given to her in divinity, she was banished from the Massachusetts Bay Colony and went on to help form Rhode Island.

As time went on, the Bay colony grew more extreme, perhaps out of fear of losing religious control over their inhabitants, which we can see demonstrated against Mary Dyer, a supporter of Anne Hutchinson, who spoke words of god as she would see fit, but the main difference is that Mary claimed to be speaking directly as the voice of God as well as use god's wrath as a threat against her persecutors,¹³ which did not go over well with the magistrates or polity. Mary Dyer initially left with Anne Hutchinson as a supporter of her beliefs, eventually returning to the Bay colonies multiple times to get them to see their flaws in the religious persecution of fellow free religious speakers. The courts banished her multiple times, each time with her returning with the same message, "I came in obedience to the will of God the last

¹² The Massachusetts Bay Colony Case Against Anne Hutchinson (1637) P. 35

¹³ Mary Dyer's Banishment & Execution (1659) P. 4

General Court, desiring you to repeal your unrighteous laws of banishment upon pain of death; and that same is my work now, and earnest request, although I told you, that if you refused to repeal them, the Lord will send others of his servants to witness against them.”¹⁴

It was at this point that the General Court, not only took her words as a threat to the stability of the colony under religious control, but also as a slight against themselves and a test of their own words, and she was hanged.

After the execution of Mary Dyer, we begin to see religion grow as a tool control or persecute whoever you sought to, often used for personal reasons like jealousy or further oppression in the form of the Salem Witchcraft trials using extradentary obscure articles of evidence, with often to actual material or tangible value in reality, such as a literal gaze striking the afflicted to the ground, whether the accused was present or not actually mattered, but merely the accusation was all that was necessary.¹⁵ Some occurrences cannot quite be explained, like the sick and dying cattle or deaths of others in the absence of the accused¹⁶, which can lead you to think, that karma is perhaps beginning to fall on the colonies, maybe even giving some truth to what Mary Dyer had said before her execution. Regardless, there was an implosion and social decay amongst the colony in Salem regarding the Witchcraft hysteria, short-lived, however, we close in the late 17th century with the beginning of the enlightenment spreading from Europe to the new world and beginning to dampen the effects of religious persecution and witchcraft craze throughout Massachusetts.¹⁷

¹⁴ Mary Dyer’s Banishment & Execution (1659) P. 5

¹⁵ Cotton Mathers, Accounts of Salem Witchcraft Trials (1693) P. 49

¹⁶ Cotton Mathers, Accounts of Salem Witchcraft Trials (1693) P. 50

¹⁷ Dr. Brian Mueller, Lecture on Religion in Colonial America (2022)

With the colonies no longer excessively focused on religious oppression, and an influx of colonizers arriving in the new world, we now begin to see a new push for lands and resources, with fears and rivalries growing between France and Britain and eventually leading to war amongst themselves, and eventually between the colonies and their motherland.

We first see the rift in the new world between the French and British in what is known as the Treaty of Utrecht, in which the Caribbean islands were to remain neutral, in neither the hands of the French nor the British, but, to Britain's dismay, France had begun to plant crops and colonize these islands regardless of the treaties that had been signed.¹⁸ To Britain, this was a great threat because they were deeply invested in the American colonies and relied heavily on its success for their trade. All the colonies had many benefits in their developments, each offering their unique advantages. Britain understood that the colonies were the envy of France and that they one day may try to overrun the divided colonies and make them their own.¹⁹ At this point, the British pursued actions, initiating the French Indian War, lasting seven years. Through a mixture of shifting alliances with native Americans, the British eventually took control of all French land, leaving America now split between Spain and Great Britain.²⁰

After the conclusion of the Seven Year's War, colonists were to remain in their vicinity of America, to the east of the Proclamation line of 1763. This was not adhered to as the colonists thought they were participating in the Seven Years' War to unlock more land available for settlement and so colonists pushed west.²¹ Great Britain did little to regulate the colony's

¹⁸ A General View of the Conduct of the French in America, and our Settlements there, Gentleman's Magazine (1755) P. 1

¹⁹ A General View of the Conduct of the French in America, and our Settlements there, Gentleman's Magazine (1755) P. 10

²⁰ Dr. Brian Mueller, Lecture on Religion in Colonial America (2022)

²¹ Dr. Brian Mueller, Lecture on Religion in Colonial America (2022)

westward expansion and remained idle while further atrocities were committed against the natives, in the land promised sacred to. The colonizers inhabited land under the guise of trade, often drunk and rambling, and failing to leave when asked to do so, when their business was done, but instead remained, staking claim to the land as their own.²²

The Natives relied on the British Government to establish a governing body along the Ohio, to control the inhabitants of their own, but unfortunately, those calls fell on deaf ears. Instead of the British focusing on the acts of their colonies perpetuated against the natives, they turned to recoup an immense national debt they had incurred fighting the French, leading Great Britain to enforce taxation on the colonies.

The first measure of taxation against the colonies came in the form of the Stamp Act, which called for taxation to be paid to the British government on stamps that were required to be affixed on all types of printed matter, simply to generate revenue. As one would expect, the colonists were quite displeased with this measure, and to Britain's displeasure, these actions against the colonies pushed them to greater unity and began the circulation of the question as to whether their need for Britain was worth the constant intervention in their daily lives and liberties.²³

It is through the Stamp Act and others like it that followed, attempting to force the American colonies to order paper and glass products straight from Britain while simultaneously suppressing the colony's ability to make these items for themselves, which pitted a further divide between the motherland and the Americas and leads to a beginning to the boiling over

²² Sir William Johnson, *The Uncommon increase of Settlements in the back Country* (1772) P. 2-3

²³ Stamp Act Congress, *Declaration of Rights and Grievances of the Colonies* (1765) P. 1-2

of tension between the new nation and their governing body abroad.²⁴ It was through these tensions that the flames of war and call for unity arose, with the Stamp Act resulting in the formation of the Sons of Liberty, who went on to inflame resistance against the British Parliament. The British House of Commons eventually repealed the Stamp Act as it was highly detested in America but did so with following it by imposing duties on all glass, painter's colors, paper, and tea that was to be imported into any colony or plantation in America and was the straw that finally broke the camel's back.

With the flames of war now raging against Great Britain, we now see many avenues of division, not just a result of taxation. We now see individuals highlighting the other concerns in being tied to Great Britain as Thomas Paine said, "Whenever a war breaks out between England and any foreign power, the trade of America goes to ruin, because of her connection with Britain"²⁶ concluding with the colonies desire to further distance themselves from the motherland. Already in the grips of war with Great Britain, Thomas Paine and Thomas Jefferson had given the colonists the inspirational verbal tools they needed to carry on the fight for their independence and the eventual signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1783, securing their liberty and taking over all land to the east of the Mississippi²⁷ securing themselves the rights and liberties of a newly formed nation, or so they thought...

America, from its inception to the call for Independence, experienced a tremendous number of growing pains, with beginnings with Columbus' arrival to the new world, setting sight upon a land unlike any other he's ever seen. A land rich in life and natural resources, its

²⁴ John Dickinson, Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania (1767-68)

²⁶ Thomas Paine, Common Sense (1776) P. 97

²⁷ Dr. Brian Mueller, Lecture on The War for Independence (2022)

indigenous inhabitants lived conservatively among the land they cherished and held so dear, which in the eyes of settlers, was the same land they were eager to be exploited, and felt was underappreciated and used poorly by its indigenous inhabitants. It was clear however, that these new inhabitants, the colonists, in bringing their religions, desires for lordship, and mastery of the land while displacing the indigenous population, all but knew how to live in America, as they fought amongst themselves, first over religion and control of the early colonies, and eventually over the power to govern themselves, seeking and eventually gaining their independence from the country from whence they came. Closing this chapter, of Greed, Religion, and War in North America.