

Indian Givers How the Indians of the Americas Transformed the World
Jack Weatherford, Ballantine Books, 1988

“Every step in the discovery and conquest of America was spurred by greed for gold that overshadowed the quest for silver, spices or souls. Columbus gave evidence of this in his diaries with the oft repeated statement “I was anxious to learn whether they had gold.” In the end, Columbus brought back only a small amount of gold, but it was enough to whet the appetite of all Europe.” P 6

“When Hernando Cortes conquered the Aztecs, he immediately demanded gold from their leader, Moctezuma Xocoyotzin; the conquistadores tortured and killed many Aztecs, including the next and last Aztec leader, Cuauhtemoc, to obtain more gold.” P 6

“In the first fifty years of the conquest of America, the amount of silver and gold circulating in Europe trebled, and the annual output from America was ten times the combined output of the rest of the world.” P 14

“At the time of the discovery of America, Europe only had about \$200 million dollars worth of gold and silver, approximately \$2 per person. By 1600, the supply of precious metals had increased approximately eight fold.” P 14

“Europe’s prosperity boomed, and people all the teas, silks, cottons, coffees and spices which the rest of the world had to offer.” p 16

“The main commodity traded at the Fort was beaver pelts , which the men pressed into small bundles of approximately ninety pounds each and shipped to London via Montreal. The entire process took two years from the trapping of the animal to the arrival of the fur on the English market. Workers removed the unwanted long hairs and saved only the soft, short hairs, which they matted into a thick felt. The downy underhairs made a pliable and strong felt ideal for the manufacture of the top hats that men prized at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Beaver fur surpassed other fur for making felt because the hairs stuck together so well, did not lose their shape and waterproof, a property of great importance in rainy Europe before the invention of the umbrella.

Trappers also brought in cheaper furs such as muskrat to Fort Williams; these went into making lower quality felt hats for sale to poorer men. Other pelts such as wolf, fox, rabbit, mink, bear, wolverine, raccoon, and even squirrel, could be used by tailors to line coat pockets; more expensive furs lined the insides of coats.

The fur trade began strictly as a luxury trade, but the operations of the Hudson’s Bay company grew so extensive and furs became so plentiful, that in time, even the middle classes could afford beaver. The extensive trapping and use of the beaver led it to be called the democratizing fur, because even though its trade started as a trickle in 1600, it became a stream by 1650 and a flood by 1700 with the Hudson’s Bay Company.” P 24,25

“Not until cotton arrived in England however, did the phrase “cotton cloth” appear in English; the Oxford English Dictionary’s earliest date for it is 1552. The long-strand cotton of the American Indians so surpassed in quality the puny cotton of the Old World that the Spaniards mistook American Indian cloth for silk and interpreted its abundance as yet further proof that these new lands lay close to China. For thousands of years before European conquest of America, the Indians had been using this carefully developed cotton to weave some of the finest textiles in the world.” P 43

“Cochineal quickly emerged as the most important Indian dyes in North America. The dye came from the bodies of the females of the scale insect ... One pound of dye requires the processing of up to 70,000 insects.

Cochineal became a staple of the British Textile industry, and it provide the scarlet dye for the brilliant British army uniforms, which earned the English soldiers the nickname of “redcoats.” P 46

“Based on the Indian technology, other dye woods found in America allowed for new levels of quality in making purple, brown and even black dye.” These found widespread application not only in textile and food use, but also in making glass, staining wood, processing leather, making ink and printing.” P 46

“The Indians of America used rubber for untold millennia in a variety of ways. The Indians first extracted the sap or latex growing in the rubber tree, *Hevea brasiliensis*, and cured it over fire before using it. They made raincoats or rubber coated ponchos to protect themselves from the rain, rubber soled shoes for walking, rubber balls for playing games, rubber bottles for transporting liquids, and rubber ropes for carrying and fastening.” P 47

“The Americas in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries promised vast resources-gold, silver, furs, as well as the seemingly inexhaustible agricultural potential for crops of tobacco, sugar cane, rice coffee, indigo, and hundreds of other plants.” P 49

“Indians of the Andes have cultivated the potato on their mountain slopes and in their valleys for at least the last 4,000 years. Apparently, the potato descended from a tuberous *Solanum* that grew wild throughout the Americas and was used by Indian groups as far north as the southwestern United States. , where the Navajos made it a major part of their diet. “ P 63

“It is difficult to imagine what Ireland would be today without the potato. What would the Russians, the Germans, the Poles, and Scandinavians eat? Without the potato, the soviet Union might never have become a world power, Germany would not have fought two wars, and northern Europe and the Benelux countries would not have one of the world’s highest standards of living... Together with maize corn from Mexico, potatoes were what French historian Fernand Braudel called the “miracle crops.” P 65

“The Indians gave the world three fifths of the crops now in cultivation.” P 71

“When Columbus arrived in America, thinking he was in the East Indies near the Spice Islands, he erroneously called the natives Indians and assumed that if they were Indians, then they must be flavoring their food with pepper.” P 101

“With the arrival of the first foods from America, Italian cuisine exploded with new ideas, and the tables of rich and poor alike groaned under the weight of many marvelous new dishes. Yellow, orange, green and red tomatoes from cherry to almost melon size found their way into the Italian Kitchen to be pickled, sliced, chopped, diced, dried, pureed, and made into hundreds of sauces... With virtually no other ingredients, the Italians had the perfect sauce for spaghetti, ravioli, lasagna, and a host of other noodle dishes, as well as for meats.” P 105

“The Indians taught the New Englanders to catch and enjoy a number of ocean foods that they had not known in Europe. The clam ranked primary among these, even though the Puritan settlers thought it poisonous until the Indians taught them to bake the clams in an earthen oven with seaweed. New Englanders still follow this same clambake procedure today... The Indians of New England also taught the settlers to use the cranberry, particularly to accompany the Indian turkey... Indians also dropped spoonfuls of corn meal into pots of hot bear fat to make a fried bread that later became known to the settlers as hush puppies... The same cooking procedure with wheat dough instead of corn dough produced fry bread, or Indian bread... Indians also dipped this crispy fried bread into maple syrup or dusted it with sugar to make the precursor of the modern doughnut without the hole.” P 109

“ Together with their animals and machines, the Europeans brought horrendous epidemic diseases that had been unknown to the New World. These diseases traveled through the Indian population faster than through the European.

The Indian civilizations crumbled in the face of the Old World not because of any intellectual or cultural inferiority. They succumbed in the face of disease and brute strength. While American Indians had spent millennia becoming the world’s greatest farmers and pharmacists, the people of the Old World had spent a similar period amassing the world’s greatest arsenal of weapons. The strongest, but not necessarily the most creative or the most intelligent won the day.” P 252

Native Americans, A History In Pictures, Arlene Hirschfelder, Dorling Kindersley Publishing, Inc, NY, NY, 2000

Tecumseh-1768-1813

“Brothers, when the white men first set foot on our grounds, they were hungry; they had no place on which to spread their blankets, or to kindle their fires. They were feeble; they could do nothing for themselves. Our fathers commiserated their distress, and shared freely with them whatever the Great Spirit had given to his red children. They gave them food when hungry, medicine when sick, spread skins for them to sleep on, and gave them grounds, that they might hunt and raise corn.” P 37

“For one beaver skin, a trapper could buy one of the following:

½ pound (23g) beads

1 kettle

1 pound (45g) shot

5 pounds (2.25 kg) sugar

1 pound (45 g) tobacco 12 buttons

12 fish hooks

For four skins, a trapper could buy: 1 pistol

For six skins a trapper could buy: 1 blanket

For twelve skins a trapper could buy” 1 rifle.”

P 47

North American Indian Jewelry and Adornment, From Prehistory to Present, Lois Sherr Dubin, Harry N. Abrams, Inc, NY, NY, 1999

“On the eve of Columbus’s New World voyage in 1492, a wide range of Indian cultures existed between the Arctic Ocean and northern Mexico. Much of North America was occupied by various forms of village-farming societies, but hunting and gathering bands, which stood in stark contrast to the agricultural civilizations of the Mississippian peoples.”

P 35

European entry into the American continent caused substantial changes in Native lives. A large percentage of Indian people died from European-introduced diseases for which they had no natural immunity. . .Increased competition for land by Euro-American colonists resulted in forced removals and resettlement. And introduced trade items altered indigenous methods of manufacture, subsistence and ornamentation.

“Now metal tinklers attached to garment fringes replaced rattling deer dewclaws; copper kettles served as metal sources for adornment. Glass beads and silver brooches substituted for the sacred crystal and shell that had been exchanged across North America for thousands of years. . .

Imported cloth replaced indigenous skin clothing as the large game disappeared. Once introduced, cloth was readily adopted because it was more easily worked, lighter in weight, and easier to clean than animal skin. . . .The ancient associations of the colors red and black were reflected in trade broadcloth in those colors, intended to smoked skins painted with red ocher.

Early contacts between native Americans and Europeans provided initial economic benefits for both sides. The fur trade began as a mutual exchange between two differing but developed cultures. In it’s final stages however, when Indians relied on non native products to survive, Euro-American traders set the exchange in terms that reduced the Indians to poverty. The fur trade bought other complications. An excessive hunting of

pelts disrupted balanced and tradition patterns of belief based upon sacred human/animal partnerships.” P 36

“Late eighteenth century traders made the hide of a large white-tail deer the standard unit of value. Called “the Buck,” it was equated to an American silver dollar and could be exchanged for metal tools, guns, trade cloth and glass beads.” P 192

The History of Beads, From 30,000 BC to Present, Lois Sherr Dubin, Harry N. Abrams Inc, NY,NY,1987

“For thousands of years prior to European colonization, Indian civilizations made the North American Continent their home. . . Although each group of Indians produced objects specific to its customs and beliefs, all North American Indians seem to have shared an appreciation for beads. At least eight thousand years before Europeans crossed the Atlantic, Indians were making, wearing, and trading beads of shell, pearl, bone, teeth, stone, and fossil crinoid stems.

Imported glass beads, first introduced to North American native populations by Christopher Columbus in 1492, had a significant economic and aesthetic impact on Indian material culture. The earliest glass beads were gifts from explorers and missionaries, but in the sixteenth century the small seed beads became an important medium of exchange in the expanding North American fur trade. The availability of these small beads, along with the introduction of trade cloth and thin steel needles, led to the decline of the age old decorative techniques, including quillwork, and the rise of beadwork as the predominant Indian craft.

The intermingling of Indian and European bead making concepts is perhaps best exemplified in the story of wampum-the most important shell bead in North American history. Although wampum existed before the arrival of Europeans, it was the introduction of steel tools by the Dutch that greatly expanded wampum production into an industry that had broad political and economic ramifications for both Indians and colonists.

While North American Indians typically made beads from local materials, they eagerly sought imported stones, shells and metals to make rare beads that would be prestigious. Extensive trade networks crisscrossed North America. Native copper from Lake Superior, sometimes in the form of rolled tubular or rounded beads, was traded several hundred miles away in the Midwest and Woodlands area as early as 3000 B.C. Prehistoric southwest cultures traded turquoise throughout the western region and into Mexico. Marine shells from the Florida coast were traded north, made into beads in Illinois, then distributed to the agricultural societies of Mississippi, Ohio and Illinois river valleys about A.D. 1100. Dentalium shells from the Pacific Northwest were traded throughout the Plains, and Minnesota pipe stone (catlinite) was widely traded through the Great Lakes and Plains region for two thousand years.

The best known shell bead was wampum: small cylindrical, centrally drilled white and purple beads made primarily of the quahog clam shell. Strung on leather thongs or woven into belts with sinew thread, wampum was sometimes worn as decoration but developed far greater significance as currency and was used for objects commemorating major political and ceremonial events.”

Indigenous to American Indians: Cotton, potatoes, cochineal, rubber, cocoa, chocolate, corn, beans, maple syrup, pepper, tomatoes, cure for scurvy, democratic form of government,