

**“Thus It Happened Long Ago”:
Contact and Conflict in Indigenous and Imperial American Narratives**

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- **Origin of topic:**

When I was a young girl, my first exposure to Native Americans came through the Disney movie "Pocahontas." From that point on I was absolutely fascinated by Native American culture and history. This fascination has persisted to this day, but after a few more years of familiarizing myself with Native Americans and the history of colonization, I have enough knowledge to look upon the "Pocahontas" movie with awareness of its many gaping misrepresentations and falsehoods. The most glaring of these, in my opinion, is the scene that depicts the initial contact between the English and the Native Americans. The scene contains images of Native Americans depicted as superstitious mystics, wildly dancing settlers, and John Smith swinging on vines singing about how he plans to dominate the land. Images such as these appealed to a six-year-old version of myself who knew nothing of history, but when I was older it dawned on me: the initial contact between Native Americans and Europeans in North America did not happen that way. A voice in the back of my head always wondered: how did it really happen? Throughout my years of schooling, I never seemed to find an answer to this question. A Euro-centric education taught me the history of colonization, but it was from the perspective of the colonizers only. The time of initial contact was ignored in all of my history classes, as if the significance of Native American-European contact became significant only in the context of the colonial history leading up to the founding of the United States. Nowhere did I find an answer to the question that had plagued me since my childhood. However, last semester I took Dr. Krumholz's ethnic literature class, which re-exposed me to the history and literature of Native Americans and reinvigorated my interest in the topic. As the semester passed and I began to more seriously consider applying for the Young Scholars program, I began to see it as the perfect opportunity to quit waiting to be given an answer and to find one on my own.

- **Topic proposal, description of questions and goals, work plan, and methodology:**

The sociopolitical environment in which America finds itself in the year 2009 is an exciting one to say the least. The first African-American man was just elected president by speaking of "A More Perfect Union," and thousands of students across the nation are studying at multiracial campuses and challenging the racism that has held our nation in shackles since its founding. And yet, amidst these transformations, cultural conflicts persist. In June of 2002, a Cherokee woman named Barbara Crandell was arrested for praying on top of burial mounds at the Octagon Earthworks, a historic Native American mound complex that is leased to a private country club. Crandell viewed it as her right as a Native American to pray on what she views as a public historic site, whereas the owners of the Moundbuilders Country Club viewed her presence on their property as a crime. Clearly, even in modern-day America conflicts exist between people of different cultures and their different views of the world. This fact seems much less surprising when you consider the history of America, a landscape that is essentially a minefield of cultural conflicts, many of which remain unresolved. This consideration prompts the question: when did it all begin?

To trace the roots of this history of cultural conflict, one must venture as far back as the earliest settlement of the American continent. Upon their arrival, the Europeans met with native people who were already established there, people whose appearance, cultures, and ways of viewing the world were completely in opposition to their own. A brief study of American history reveals that great conflict ensued as a result of these meetings and that, in the end, the Europeans

were victorious in their endeavor at conquest and colonization. However, much is left out in the period between contact and colonization, a period that is absolutely essential to the understanding of American literature, history, and culture. To this day, American culture is rooted in this space of contact and conflict.

America is built upon the foundation of cultural conflicts that happened when peoples from two different sides of the world met face-to-face for the first time on this very continent during that essential time of contact. What reactions did both sides have to the sight of the other? Through what cultural lens did each side see the world, and in what ways did these world views differ? What sorts of friction arose and culminated when the two cultures lived in close proximity to each other? Did every case result in conflict? And, in the cases where conflict did ensue, was either side solely to blame for the conflicts? Did either side try to avoid it? Is the stereotype of European explorers as violent, bloodthirsty conquerors true? Is the trope of the peaceful, helpful Indian, upon which one of our most important holidays is based, true in all cases? Did all cases of conflict explode into violence? Were attempts made to bridge the gaps between the cultures during this time of conflict? And, if so, why did these attempts fail, and thus enable such situations as the aforementioned mound conflict to arise?

In order to examine these questions, I will view both sides of the story and look through the lenses of both the explorers and the native peoples during the time of contact. I will do this by studying Europe at the time of conquest, reading oral narratives composed by both the explorers and those available by the tribes themselves, and by studying the culture of the Native American tribes living in the regions where contact took place. In the Southwest, I will explore it by reading the 1542 *Chronicle of the Narvaez Expedition* by Cabeza de Vaca, a Spanish conquistador. I will compare his observations, cultural traditions, and experiences with those of the Yuchi, Zuni, and Pima tribes living in the regions he explored and compare his narrative to those written by the native peoples. For the Northeast, I will read *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God*, the captivity narrative of Mary Rowlandson, a Puritan woman who was taken hostage by Native Americans. I will study her experiences alongside the culture and narratives of the Narragansett, Wampanoag, and Nipmuc Indians living in the region. And in the far northern regions, I will read the 1655 *Novum Belgium*, the narrative of Isaac Jogues, a Jesuit minister who was captured by the Iroquois, along with studying and reading the oral narratives of the five tribes making up the Iroquois nation.

Along with reading these texts, I will conduct research on different schools of theory that are pertinent to my topic. One such school of thought is contact theory, which is used to study contact on the American frontier without offering priority or primacy to any region or group. Another such school is Native American literary theory, which states that all Native American literature must be read and critiqued within the cultural and historical context of Native America as opposed to Europe. Another pertinent school of thought that I will research is postcolonial theory, which studies the literary legacy of colonization on the writings of indigenous peoples. This research will enable me to gain a much fuller understanding not only of the cultural context in which the original contacts took place, but even how and why the conflicts that arose at that time are still present in modern-day American society.

I would like to discuss the continued existence of these cultural conflicts by interviewing several individuals. One such individual is Barbara Crandell, the Cherokee woman who was arrested for praying at the mounds, along with the owners of the country club who feel she violated their property rights. Another individual is Richard Shiels, a professor of history at the Newark branch of OSU and the director of the Newark Earthworks Center who specializes in

American colonial history. Another individual is John Jackson, a professor of black studies at Denison University, who is conducting a research project about the Earthworks. These interviews will assist me in better understanding the topic of cultural contact in the settlement of America, and it is only by gaining a full understanding of each culture that I will be able identify how and why conflict existed. And, once I understand the roots of these conflicts, I will be capable of considering ways in which to solve them. In the words of Barack Obama: "We have to acknowledge the progress we made, but understand that we still have a long way to go. That things are better, but still not good enough." The same problem of cultural lenses that plagued this continent at its earliest settlement persists, and it is only through understanding on the part of both sides that any hope exists of moving past this ongoing cycle of contact and conflict.

Schedule of work:

- **Weeks 1-2:**
 - Meet with Dr. Shuler Monday & Thursday at 2 pm
 - Read *The Chronicle of the Narvaez Expedition* and research Cabeza de Vaca
 - Research Yuchi, Zuni, and Pima tribes; read narratives ("Creation of the Whites," "Zuni Emergence Myth")
 - Research contact theory (Annette Kolodny, Andrew Wiget, Tzvetan Todorov)
- **Weeks 3-4**
 - Meet with Dr. Shuler Monday & Thursday at 2 pm
 - Read *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God* and research Mary Rowlandson
 - Research the Massachusetts Bay Colony
 - Research the Iroquois, the Huron, and the Delaware; read narratives ("The Origin of Stories," "Iroquois or Confederacy of the Five Nations")
 - Research Native American literary theory (Elvira Pulitano, Ronald Takaki)
- **Weeks 5-6**
 - Meet with Dr. Shuler Monday & Thursday at 2pm
 - Read *Novum Belgium* and research Isaac Jogues
 - Research Jesuit missionaries and their efforts at converting Native Americans (*The Relations of 1647* by Father Jerome Lalemant)
 - Continue researching the Iroquois nation along with Algonquin and Chippewa; read narratives ("Algonquin Creation Myth," "Anishinabe Migration Story")
 - Research postcolonial theory in relation to North America (Mary Louise Pratt, Leela Gandhi)
- **Weeks 7-8**
 - Meet with Dr. Shuler Monday & Thursday at 2pm
 - Compose final thesis for paper
 - Outline and begin composing paper
 - Begin work on final presentation
- **Weeks 9-10**
 - Meet with Dr. Shuler Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at 2pm
 - Continue writing and finish paper
 - Continue working on and finish final presentation

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