ROOTS
of
AMERICAN RACISM
Essays on the Colonial Experience

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Americans are vitally, if sometimes painfully, aware of our cultural variety. We used to call our polyglot nation a "melting pot"; nowadays we use less assimilationist tropes—"simmering stew" or "tossed salad." But for better or for worse (we haven't agreed on the proper cultural recipe), we are incredibly varied in geographic backgrounds and their related patterns of belief and behavior. It all began, of course, in the colonial era.

In a broader sense, it began much earlier, with the first humans who ventured across the land bridge between northeastern Asia and northwestern America. Human variety accompanied extensive immigration before the final ice age as inevitably as it would several millennia later; by the sixteenth century, when people from the "Old World" first arrived on the eastern seaboard in appreciable numbers, America already boasted a wide range of cultures—those institutions, customs, and beliefs that reflect, and shape, who we are. European immigrants from many nations soon increased and vastly complicated the cultural map, as did the forced migration of Africans with widely varying heritages. American multiculturalism and multiracialism were here to stay. But the great challenge of how to live together peacefully, productively, and equitably proved even more difficult in the colonial period than it does today.

This collection of essays explores some of the major events and issues of interaction between Europeans, Indians, and Africans in English America (and, in the first essay, the early years of the United States) in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. Several of the essays in this collection address aspects of what, by hindsight, we call "race relations." Other essays treat interactions between Europeans and Native Americans that were not initially based on notions of race but rather on deep cultural differences—over religion, government, land, law, education, and war, to name only the most obvious arenas of early contact.
between peoples from opposite sides of the Atlantic Ocean. Some of those contacts were friendly and mutually beneficial; many were hostile if not lethal. British America witnessed an often bitter contest of cultures as well as an unusually blatant exploitation of “races.”

Although biological and social scientists have demonstrated—convincingly, I believe—that “race” is not a valid human category, a belief in race, however misguided and mischievous, often played a decisive role in early America’s human interaction. The task of recognizing and assessing the role of “race” is important yet difficult, partly because the sources are less abundant than for later periods and also because certain words did not mean then what they do today. “Race” was itself applied inconsistently to a variety of social collectives that we now label nations or ethnic groups or even species. In 1619, for example, the Virginia legislature rhetorically linked human and canine categories when it prohibited the sale to Indians of any “dog or bitche whatsoever, of the English race.” But though the word was often used imprecisely, it sometimes had a modern ring. An early seventeenth-century English traveler to Africa insisted, with his era’s typical disparagement, that the people’s dark color came from God’s curse on Noah’s grandson Chus rather than from the climate or soil, “for neither . . . will other Races in that Soyle prove black, nor that Race in other Soyle grow to better complexion.”

Judging, then, from English and American literary evidence and the colonists’ pejorative actions, white Americans generally (and perhaps Native Americans and Afro-Americans too; much less is recorded about their perceptions of “others”) sorted the Western Hemisphere’s population into two, later three, broad “racial” categories.

In an earlier era, before Europe’s dramatic explorations of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the idea of human races—huge biologically distinct subdivisions of humankind that coincided roughly with the earth’s major geographic divisions—was known but rarely affected human interaction. In Europe, some theologians and laymen pondered the possible differences between the descendants of Noah’s three sons, but their musings had little practical application. When contact between the world’s peoples rapidly expanded in the age of reconnaissance and revealed, to many European eyes at least, striking differences in appearance, customs, and beliefs, some observers insisted that God (or nature, or circumstances) had organized humans into a few immutable categories, sometimes called “races” but often given other labels. Belief in such groupings became more widespread and more invidious as time passed, for accompanying a belief in the existence of races was usually a conviction that the differences were qualitative—that one’s own branch of the human tree was innately superior in physical, mental, and moral attributes. Although “race” is now widely discredited in scientific literature as intellectually unsound and socially pernicious, the misconception profoundly shaped early Euro-American relations with Africans (from the outset) and Native Americans (from the late seventeenth century onward). In sum, race is a historical reality, though not a scientific fact, which has influenced American history from the beginnings to the present.

Along with the concept has come a substantial vocabulary of terms that both help and hinder our understanding of the social dynamics of “race relations.” They help by creating some useful distinctions among various types of belief and behavior; they hinder by generating misunderstandings and inviting disputes over definitions. Some of the essays in this collection address the confusing terminology of “race,” but the following brief definitions of some of the critical concepts should clarify at the outset my own preferences.

Race: A belief that races exist and that members of one or more races are innately inferior in certain characteristics, usually in intelligence. For a classic expression of racist thought in the early twentieth century, see the entire entry for “Negro” in the magisterial eleventh edition of the Encyclopaedia Brittanica (1911). In the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries, “racism” was less frequently articulated and less reliant than it would later become on “scientific” evidence, but, as I argue at various points in this book, its ugly head had already reared.

Racialism: Dictionaries and general usage, especially in Britain, where (unlike the United States) the term is common, use it as a synonym for racism.

Race prejudice: Prejudging a person or situation on the basis of presumed racial characteristics. “Race prejudice” has usually been interchangeable with “racism” or “racialism,” but some writers draw a distinction. “Racism is to race prejudice,” an English scholar proposes, “as dogma is to superstition. Race prejudice is relatively scrappy and self-contradictory. It is transmitted largely by word of mouth. Racism is relatively systematic and internally consistent. In time it acquires a pseudo-scientific veneer that glosses over its irrationalities and enables it to claim intellectual respectability. And it is transmitted largely through the printed word.” Although I find some merit in this distinction between ostensibly identical terms, it has not been widely adopted and is not used in this book.

Race (or racial) discrimination: Unequal treatment of someone on the basis of his or her presumed racial affiliation.

Ethnocentrism: A preference for one’s own ethnic or national group, sometimes to the point of hostility toward other ethnic ways and beliefs. Ethnocentrism’s basis is cultural, not racial; one presumes his or her own language, literature, religion, and customs to be superior to other people’s. In its mildest form ethnocentrism is almost inevitable and relatively benign, holding merely that among many admirable cultures, we have chosen—perhaps because we were born into it—a particular pattern of customs and beliefs. Early America usually witnessed the more blatant, aggressive variety.

Roots of American Racism addresses issues in Indian-white and black-white relations that seemed important and interesting to me at various times.
CHAPTER ONE

From White Man to Redskin: Changing Anglo-American Perceptions of the American Indian

The use of color terminology for major social groups, especially "whites" and "blacks," is nowadays virtually universal, even though those labels are chromatically inaccurate and encourage a dangerous homogenization of human categories. Yet as shorthand labels for what most people probably perceive as significant divisions of the human species, chromatic labeling seems as deeply entrenched as is the concept of "race" on which it rests. It has not always been so: "black" and "white" were rarely applied to humans (in print, at least) until the sixteenth century; "red" and "yellow" came into frequent use two centuries later. In colonial British America and subsequently in the United States, the late emergence of "red" as a descriptive term for Native Americans is fraught with significance because, in conjunction with other trends in Indian-white relations, it tells much about changing ethnic/racial perceptions.

This essay's roots are in my immersion over the years in the documentary evidence of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century European contact with American natives. Time and again I was struck by the contrast between the virulence of the Europeans' cultural animosity toward Indians and their overwhelmingly favorable assessments of the Indians' physical characteristics. With few exceptions, the documents suggested a widely shared British and Continental perception of American natives as biologically admirable but socially abhorrent; nature had blessed them, nurture had cursed them. To ethnocentric Westerners, the obvious notions—Spanish, French, English, or other, depending on the observers' own affiliation—of how to behave, to dress, to worship, to think. As the following pages relate, British Americans' perceptions and the resulting policies changed slowly but profoundly between the mid-sixteenth century and the mid-nineteenth.

The ideas presented in this essay were first aired in 1978 at a Washington, D.C., area seminar, held on the University of Maryland campus, and later, in truncated form, at other scholarly gatherings. It was published in the American Hist-
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When Thomas Jefferson wrote his Notes on the State of Virginia (1784), he professed to draw heavily "on what I have seen of man, white, red, and black." Here, as elsewhere, Jefferson demonstrated a knack for phraseology: he was race and recently employed it in numerous book and article titles. Color terminologies about modern race and early national technology is as firmly fixed in writings on early America as it is in conversations about modern race relations. The tacit justification for using the chromatic metaphor in colonial and early national studies—apart from its ironic parody of "red, white, and blue"—is basically sound: Indians, Europeans, and Africans played central roles in early America, and the commonly accepted color labels are convenient and unambiguous, even though they exaggerate human complexions. Implicitly, if not explicitly, such usage further suggests that differences in pigmentation, underlay colonial America's social and political policies. But such an interpretation and the assumptions on which it rests are misleading: not until the middle of the eighteenth century did most Anglo-Americans view Indians as significantly different in color from themselves, and not until the nineteenth century did red become the universally accepted color label for American Indians. To read later perceptions of Indian pigmentation into the first centuries of racial contact is fallacious, because, in general, it distorts the nature of early ethnic relations and, in particular, it obscures the evolution of Anglo-American attitudes toward the Indians.

Color, of course, was not the only characteristic to shape British-American perceptions of non-Europeans. Also important in the formulation of attitudes toward the natives of Africa and America were cultural traits: religion, government, economy, language, technology, and social mores. Important too were physical traits other than skin color: stature, proportions, facial features, and hair texture. But from the dawn of England’s intellectual awakening to the African and American continents in the mid-sixteenth century, color perceptions were fundamental to Anglo-American assessments of peoples strikingly different from themselves, because color was more than a matter of aesthetic preference. Pigmentation also symbolized a cluster of behavioral and biological characteristics. In the case of Africans—but not Indians—color prejudice combined with cultural and religious prejudice to place blacks in a tragically inferior status. That eventually happened to Indians, too, though not quite to the same extent and not until two centuries of culture contact had altered Anglo-American perceptions.

To generalize baldly what this essay elaborates: English and American writers, and most likely the mass of their countrymen, believed at the outset of England’s age of expansion that Africans were inherently and immutably black—a color fraught with pejorative implications—and that therefore Africans were fundamentally unassimilable even if they adopted English ways and beliefs. They were, as their color proclaimed, a separate branch of humankind. By contrast, Anglo-Americans believed that American Indians were inherently like themselves and that they were approximately as light-skinned as Europeans; they could—indeed would—be assimilated into colonial society as soon as they succumbed to English social norms and Christian theology. The basic beliefs about Africans held fast throughout the colonial period and beyond. The assumptions about Native Americans underwent a slow but drastic change in the late seventeenth century and throughout the eighteenth as Anglo-Americans shifted their perception of Indian character and, concomitantly, of Indian color from innately white to innately dark and eventually to red. That transformation, reflecting a confluence of European and American ideas and events, signaled important changes in white America's fundamental perception of the native population. The new perception, in turn, helped assure the Indians' continued segregation and heighten their exploitation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Although the Indians' position in British America was always precarious, not until they were thought of as inherently inferior "redmen" rather than unenlightened "whites" did their separate and unequal status become firmly fixed in the American mind. Only then could the bulk of American writers hold that Indians were prevented by nature—rather than by education or environment—from full participation in America's democracy and prosperity.

I

Early English contact with Africa spawned a vast range of literature—plays, poems, sermons, and secular tracts, as well as accounts of travel and exploration—that reveals a profound antipathy toward African appearance and culture. As Winthrop D. Jordan's White over Black (1968) convincingly demonstrates, virtually all descriptions of the "dark continent" portray its inhabitants as unattractive, un-Christian, and grossly uncivil. In theory at least, the Africans' cultural shortcomings, as perceived by ethnocentric Englishmen and their continental counterparts, could be ameliorated; their physical characteristics could not. And among the several aspects of African appearance—stature, facial features, and hair texture for example—that displaced the "Redskin."
disturbing was the darkness of African skin. Descriptions of African people invariably stressed their blackness, always disapprovingly. Europeans accepted with little debate the prevalence and permanence of the African's dark complexion. Doubts focused instead on its cause—whether from tropical heat, disease, or divine judgment—and on the reasons for the different degrees of blackness within the continent. An early example of an argument for environmental causation and its implications was André Thévet’s *New Founde Worlde*, translated into English in 1568 and widely read in Britain. Extreme solar temperature, Thévet argued, drew heat from the heart and other interior parts, leaving Africans cold on the inside, scorched on the surface. Differences in prolonged exposure to the sun produced chromatic variety: “Those of Arabia and of Egypt are betweene black and white, others browne coloured whom we call white Moors, others are cleane black.” Three decades later, George Abbot, master of University College, Oxford, and the future archbishop of Canterbury, summarized the prevailing English view of African color. By then, the causal explanation had largely shifted from geographical to theological, but the original color perception remained the same: “all the people in generall to the South, lying within the Zona torrida, are not only blackish like the Moors: but are exceedingly black . . . so at this day, they are named Negroes, as them, whome no men are blacker.”

As Abbot suggested, the English name for central and southern Africans came from their skin color. Throughout Europe, in fact, Africans were almost invariably labeled by color. To the English, they were “blacks,” “blackamoares,” or “Negroes”; to the Spanish, Portuguese, and Italians, they were “negros” and “negras”; to the Dutch, they were “negers.” And in each language the word for “black” carried a host of disparaging connotations. In Spanish, for example, *negro* also meant gloomy, dismal, unfit, and wretched; in French, *noir* also connoted foul, dirty, base, and wicked; in Dutch, certain compounds of *zwart* conveyed notions of anger, irascibility, and necromancy; and “black” had comparable pejorative implications in Elizabethan and Stuart England. An early seventeenth-century cleric neatly tied the contempt for blackness to the standard theological explanation of African complexion, which asserted that Africans were descended from Noah’s disobedient son: “the accursed seed of Cham . . . had for a stamp [of] their fathers sinne, the colour of hell set upon their faces.” Predictably, to the English eye, the lighter the skin, the less hellish its connotations. Poet Thomas Peyton incorporated the prevailing chromatic hierarchy into a verse description of Africa:

The Libian dusky in his parched skin,
The Moor all tawny both without and in,
The Southern man, a black deformed Elfe,
The Northern white like unto God himselfe.

Thus, whether using an English word or borrowing an equivalent term from a Continental language, Englishmen in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries subtly and succinctly reflected their contemptuous view of the African. Captain John Smith, who had seen far more varieties of humankind than had most of his contemporaries, articulated the assumed connection between color and character when he described Africa as “those fryed Regions of blacke brutish Negers.”

Not until the eighteenth century did Englishmen, either at home or in America, develop a somewhat comparable perception of Indians. Rather, Englishmen and Continental Europeans initially labeled the natives on the basis of culture, not color, and whatever pejorative connotations such terms carried were social rather than biological. No single label predominated, although since Columbian times “Indian,” occasionally modified by “West” if the context did not distinguish American from Asian Indians, was the overwhelming favorite. “Natives” probably ranked second in frequency to “Indians.” “Savages” (often spelled “salvages”), “barbarians,” and “heathens” were also commonly used by Europeans, especially in the sixteenth century, as were, less frequently, “wild people” or “brutish people” and such neutral terms as “country people,” “naturals,” “inhabitants,” “old inhabitants,” or “old people.” “Americans” and “Virginians” denoted Indians until the swelling colonial population made such words ambiguous; henceforth, “Americans” usually meant European immigrants and their descendants, while the definition of “Virginians” shifted from the natives to the English settlers of the first permanent British colony. Similarly ambiguous, “natives” began as a term for Indians but was soon (though inconsistently) applied to the colonists.

English and Continental writers rarely applied color terms to the original American inhabitants. Not that Europeans were unconcerned with the Indians’ color. They were intrigued by it; for two centuries after 1492, most published accounts of America gave at least some attention to Indian complexion, and many examined it meticulously. During the first decades after 1492, writers took pains to deny that the Indians were black, to counteract the prevailing supposition that all people in torrid latitudes ought to be as dark as Africans. (The discovery that the Indians were not black dealt a crippling blow to the geographic explanation of human color, although that argument in modified form lingered into the nineteenth century.) Columbus, for example, reported that the natives in the Caribbean Islands were “not at all black, but the colour of the Canarians, and nothing else could be expected, since this is in one line from . . . the Canaries.” Voyagers to more southerly latitudes found that the inhabitants of the equatorial zone were not appreciably darker, which gave rise to more expansive descriptions of their color and to various causal explanations, especially after Europe realized that America was a separate land mass and its inhabitants were perhaps a distinct branch of humankind.
Most early chroniclers of America's natives called them olive, tawny, or brown, occasionally russet or yellow, and sometimes a combination of such colors. Sir Walter Raleigh, for example, joined two of the standard hues when he described the women of Guiana as "brown and tawny." English plays and poems of the era often resorted to more imaginative descriptions, reflecting both the variety of New World reports and the confusion they produced in the European mind. A masque of 1609 specified that America be represented by a woman in "a skin coate the colour of the juice of Mulberries," and Thomas Peyton's *The Glasse of Time* (1620) described the "American" as "Olive coloured of a sad French green." Presumably, Peyton's readers knew what he meant.

Surprisingly, in light of today's wide acceptance of red as the American Indians' color label, Europeans rarely associated that color with the Indians before the late eighteenth century, and the few such references are to red stains. Walter Bigges, who accompanied Sir Francis Drake to the West Indies in 1585–86, observed that the natives of Dominica had "their skin coloured with some painting of a reddish tawney." George Percy corroborated Bigges's judgment when the Virginia expedition of 1607 stopped at the island en route to the mainland: "their bodies are all painted red to keep away the bitings of Muscetos." A few years later, William Strachey described the coloring of Virginia's Indians. "Their heads and shoulders they paynt oftenest," he reported, "and with suche diversitie or Antarctique, the whiter most commonly they painted red to keepe away the bitings of Muscetos." But neither "redskins" nor "reds" appears in the early literature, and the few references to "red Indians" denoted East Indians. "This World's Sunne," asserted John Davies in 1599, still clinging to the climatological explanation,

Makes the More black, & th' European white,
Th' American tawny, and th' East-Indian red.

Part of the confusion over the Indian's color stemmed from the differences in complexion from region to region, from tribe to tribe, and even within tribes. David Ingram, a sailor on Sir Humphrey Gilbert's expedition to North America in 1568, reported that the Indians in the southern part were olive, those in the north tawny. In 1583 Antonio de Espejo observed that in the area that later became New Mexico "the women are whiter skinned than the Mexican women." A decade later, Thomas Blundeville insisted that Indians in hot zones are "browne bay like a Chestnut, and the higher they dwell to either of the Poles Arctic or Antarctique, the whiter most commonly they be." And readers of Richard Hakluyt's *Divers Voyages Touching the Discoverie of America* (1582) could find in the accounts of coastal North America a considerable chromatic range. In Florida the Indians were "of tawny colour" and in future South Carolina they were "of colour russet, . . . not much unlike the Saracens." Virginia's Indians were "more white than those that we founde before," while the Narragansetts of southern New England had "the colour of brasse, some of them encline more to whitenes: others are of yellowe colour." Clearly the Indians were not all of the same hue. Clearly too they were—on the surface at least—appreciably darker than Englishmen and other Europeans. But the reason for the Indians' color was debatable. In the sixteenth century, both heredity and environment had their champions; by the early seventeenth century, a consensus endorsed environment. Most chroniclers who knew the Indians well insisted that they were naturally white-skinned. That judgment had to overcome an earlier contention, which circulated widely in England, that Indians were dark-skinned: Richard Eden's *Decades of the New World* (1555), a compilation of travel narratives that extensively describes America's inhabitants, includes an account "Of the Colour of the Indians" by Francisco López de Gómara, a participant in the early Spanish conquest. He argued that West Indians were "in general eyther purple, or tawny lyke unto sodde quynses, or of the colour of chestnuttes or olyves: which colour is to them natural and not by theryn goynge naked as many have thought." Gómara qualified his emphasis on heredity, however, by adding that "theyr nakednesse have sumwhat helped therunto" and by acknowledging wide variation within the Indies, "with suche diversitie as men are commonly whyte in Europe and blacke in Affricke, even with lyke variety are they tawnie in these Indies, with divers degrees diversly inclynyng more or lesse to blacke or whyte." And a few pages later Gómara quoted, without comment, Jacobus Gastaldus's description of Newfoundland's inhabitants as "whyte people." Perhaps in reaction to Gómara's insistence that some West Indians were naturally dark, and to other observers' failure to account for the Indians' outward appearance, many subsequent authors stressed the innate whiteness of North American Indians. In 1578 George Best argued against climate as the cause of human complexion, partly because "under the Equinoctiall in America the people are not blacke, but white." In 1587 René de Laudonnière, commander of an ill-fated Huguenot outpost in Florida, depicted the Indians there as olive. He added, however, that "when they are borne they be not so much of an olive colour and are far whiter. For the chief cause that maketh them to be this colour, proceedes of anointings of oyle . . . and because of the sun which shinet hotte upon their bodies." A Dutch scholar, Jan Huwyn van Linschoten, echoed Laudonnière. "When they come first into the world," he wrote in 1598, they "are not so blacke but very white: the blacke yellowish colour is made upon them by a certaine oyment. . . . Their colour likewise changeth as they goe naked, and with the burning heate of the sunne." Shortly after the turn of the century, Martin Pring explained that the Indians he had seen along the northeast coast were "a swart, tawnie, or Chestnut colour, not by nature
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but accidentally.” William Strachey, writing of the Indians around the Chesapeake Bay, insisted in “A True Description of . . . Their Colouro that their tawny skin came partly from the sun and partly from a combination of “arsenickstone,” ointments, and juices applied “so sone as they ar borne” and reinforced with daily painting. That Strachey may in some measure have been attempting to refute Gomara is suggested by the analogy both used to describe the resulting complexion. The Indians dye themselves, Strachey noted, because they consider it “the best beauty, to be neereast a kynd of Murrey, as a sodden Quince is.” Both “murrey” (reddish blue) and “quince” (dull yellow) appeared frequently in European descriptions of the Indians.

For English readers, the most convincing evidence of the Indians’ whiteness undoubtedly came from their compatriots, such as Strachey, who settled temporarily or permanently in America. From Virginia, Captain John Smith described the Indians near Jamestown as “a colour browne when they are of any age, but they are borne white.” Another participant in the Jamestown venture thought the Indians’ skin to be tawny, “not so borne but with dying and paynting them selves, in which they delight greatly.” And John Rolfe, whose marriage to Pocahontas made him an unimpeachable authority on the natural hue of at least one Virginia Indian, attributed “their blackness” to ointments and smoky houses, which, he contended, had the same effect on Indian hides that smokehouses had on English bacon.

Virginia’s Indians differed in customs and language from those in many parts of British America, but not, apparently, in their innate color. In 1666 George Alsop described the Susquehannocks of Maryland and eastern Pennsylvania: “Their skins are naturally white, but altered from their originals by the several dyings of Roots and Barks, that . . . metamorphize their hydes into a dark Cinamon brown.” William Penn reported similarly on the natives of his colony. They are “of Complexion, Black,” he observed in 1683, “but by design, as the Gypsies in England.”

And several New England writers, whose familiarity with Indians could scarcely be doubted, reached the same conclusion. William Wood (1634), Thomas Morton (1637), and Roger Williams (1643), among others, testified that the Indians in their vicinity were naturally white.

Many of these early English colonists, including Penn, Williams, and missionary John Eliot, believed that Indians were probably descended from the lost tribes of Israel and that Indians therefore possessed essentially the same pigmentation as Europeans.

There were, of course, varying shades of pigment even among Europeans—from very light in Scandinavia to relatively dark in Spain—and occasionally Indians were compared to “swarthy Spaniards.” But several commentators insisted that the natives of North America were scarce, if at all, darker than the average Englishman. “Their color is not much unlike the Sunne burnt Countrie man, who laboureth daily in the Sunne for his living,” according to Dionysse Settle, who had accompanied Martin Frobisher to the northern coast in 1577. “Their infants,” insisted Thomas Morton after several years among the Massachusetts Indians, “are of complexion white as our nation, but their mothers in their infancy make a bath of . . . such things as will whaine their skinne for ever, wherein they dip and washe them to make them tawny.” And the Reverend William Crashaw, a staunch supporter of the Virginia enterprise, told of “a Virginian [Indian], that was with us here in England, whose skinne (though hee had gone naked all his life, till our men persuaded him to bee clothed) . . . was little more blacke or tawnie, than one of ours would be if he should goe naked in the South of England.”

Englishmen, then, perceived Indians as essentially white and, at most, a shade darker than themselves.

Despite this belief, and despite almost universal praise of the Indians’ physique and physiognomy, Englishmen in Europe or America harbored a deep prejudice against almost all aspects of Indian culture. William Strachey is representative. Writing from Virginia in 1612, he described the Indians as “generally tall of stature, and stright, of comely proportion, and the women have handsome lymbes, slender armes, and pretty handes.” Of Indian beliefs and customs, however, Strachey was mostly contemptuous: “their chief god . . . is no other indeed then the devill”; “they are a people most voluptuous”; “vindictive and jelous they be” and “very barbarous.” In fact, many of the same pejoratives that had been applied to Africans appear in descriptions of Indians. In 1559 William Cuningham described Africans as “blacke, Savage, Monstrous, & rude.”

He considered Indians not much better—in some respects “comparably to brute beasts”—but the absence of a color label for the Indians points to a crucial difference in perception. Although Englishmen’s descriptions of Indians often are almost as negative as their accounts of Africans, their criticisms are of customs, not bodies, of nurture, not nature. To be sure, the catalogue of imagined Indian shortcomings is long: nakedness, cannibalism, barbarism, idolatory, devil worship, brutality, lechery, indolence, and slovenliness. Some observers mitigated the New World natives’ alleged vices by reciting their virtues: hospitality, integrity, eloquence, hardiness, stoicism. But the lists of negative qualities, especially those compiled by armchair explorers, are usually more extensive and more emphatic. George Best, for example, had seen Inuits (Eskimos) in the Far North and admired their intelligence, modesty, and strength; he also thought them “brutish and uncivil people” who “live in Caves of the Earth, and hunte for their dinners . . . even as the Beare, or other wilde beastes do. They eat rawe fleshe and fishe, and refuse no meate, howsoever it be stickning. They are desperate in their fighte, sullen of nature, and ravenous in their manner of feeding.” The Historie of Travayle in the West and East Indies (1577), the last of Richard Eden’s influential translations of Continental narratives, offers a diatribe against
the Mexican Indians that concludes, "God never created so corrupte a people for vice and beastliness, without any mixture of goodnesse and civilitie." And George Abbot accused the Indians of being "naked, uncivil, some of them devourers of mans flesh, ignorant of shipping, without all kinde of learning, having no remembrance of history or writing among them, ... utterly ignorant of scripture, or Christ, or Moyses, or any God."35 Even John Rolfe, requesting permission to marry Pocahontas, complained that her "education hath bin rude, her manners barbarous, her generation accursed, and ... [she is] discrepant in all nutriture from my selfe." Finally, King James I, in a statement that effectively summarized his subjects' ethnocentric perception of America's natives, called them "beastly Indians, slaves to the Spaniards, refuse of the world, and as yet aliens to the holy covenant of God."36

James's "as yet" was important. However, much he and his countrymen abhorred Indian customs and beliefs, they thought that the Indians would one day be converted into neo-Englishmen. The English themselves, many writers readily admitted, had once been barbarian and pagan; their Roman conquerors had brought the twin blessings of civility and Christianity, for which Rome deserved abundant praise.35 Would not the Indians similarly respond? Once they saw the clear superiority of English life and faith, the American natives would embrace such advantages avidly (Fig. 1.1). Early English reports from the New World encouraged such expectations. George Best recalled that natives captured by the Frobisher expedition quickly "beganne to growe more civill"; George Peckham announced optimistically that the Indians were "thirsting after christianitie"; and the elder Richard Hakluyt drew on explorers' chronicles to predict that the Indians in the area of prospective English settlement were ready "to submytte them selves to good government, and ready to embrace the christian faythe." Accordingly, much of the promotional literature of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries made conversion and the uplifting of the Indians a major goal of English colonization.36

In short, early English writings reflect a deep bias against Indian culture but not against Indian color, shape, or features; the American native was socially deplorable but physically admirable. The challenge to English colonists was therefore educational: the natives must be converted to Protestant Christianity, taught English language and law, and trained in the social mores of Tudor-Stuart England. They must become Englishmen in everything except geographic origin. Africans, however, largely for reasons of inherent outward appearance and what it implied about their fundamental nature, were already deemed permanently debased and actual or potential slaves. The difference in English attitudes toward Indians and Africans is underscored in Nathaniel Field's epitome of the two major parts of the world that had recently been opened to English scrutiny: "wilde Virginia, Black Affricke."37 Black people would remain forever different in appearance and probably in behavior, England's imperialists believed, but wildmen could be transformed by instruction in civility and Christianity.

II

In 1634 William Wood, an early Massachusetts settler who had recently returned to England, published a detailed description of New England's flora, fauna, and native inhabitants. Wood left no doubt about the natural color of the Indians in that region. "Their swarthiness is the sun's livery," he insisted, "for they are born fair." The first American edition of Wood's book appeared in Boston in 1764. Its editor, Nathaniel Rogers, added a footnote to that observation: "this was one of the popular errors given into by our author."38

Rogers's editorial comment reflects a fundamental shift in color perception from the early seventeenth to the late eighteenth century: by the later date, most Anglo-Americans no longer saw the Indian as inherently white. "The number of purely white People in the World is proportionately very small," Benjamin Franklin observed in 1751. "All Africa is black or tawny. Asia is chiefly tawny. America (exclusive of the new Comers) wholly so."39 Many of Franklin's contemporaries concurred in his basic judgment, although they did not necessarily accept his choice of colors. Jonathan Carver, who traveled through the American colonies in the 1760s, noted that "their skin is of a reddish or copper colour." And, although Carver denied that he would "enter into a particular enquiry whether the Indians are indebted to nature, art, or the temperature of the climate for the colour of their skin," he gave his opinion any-

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Fig. 1.1

Seal of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, 1629-90. Early Anglo-American expectations of Indian conversion are reflected in this woodcut, carved by John Foster, in which the Indian invites the English to "COME OVER AND HELP US." Courtesy, American Antiquarian Society.
way. "It appears to me to be the tincture they received originally from the hands of their Creator; but ... at what time the European whiteness, the jetty hue of the African, or the copper cast of the American were given them ... I will not pretend to determine."40 Robert Hunter, writing in the 1780s, similarly described the Indians' hue when he observed a boy "not contented with his natural copper color ... [who] was painted red in different places." A more explicit statement of the Indians' innate darkness and their efforts to be even darker appeared in John Filson's *Kentucky* (1774): "the Indians are not born white; and take a great deal of pains to darken their complexion, by anointing themselves with grease, and lying in the sun. They also paint their faces, breasts and shoulders, of various colours, but generally red."41

The perceptual shift from Indians as white men to Indians as tawny or redskins was neither sudden nor universally accepted. Throughout the eighteenth century, some authors insisted that the Indians were inherently white. After a brief residence in Pennsylvania in the 1750s, German immigrant Gottlieb Mittelberger reported—perhaps from personal observation, perhaps from reading William Penn—that the Indians "are born as white as we ourselves are."42 More impressive dissent from the new consensus came from James Adair, a longtime supervisor of Indian affairs and an authority on Indian life. The first page of his *History of the American Indians* (1775) stated unequivocally that the "copper or red-clay colour" of the American Indians was "merely accidental, or artificial"; following most sixteenth- and seventeenth-century writers, he ascribed Indian complexion to climate and ointments. Yet at times even Adair hinted at a fundamental color distinction between Europeans and Indians. "All the Indians," he noted, "are so strongly attached to, and prejudiced in favour of, their own colour, that they think as meanly of the whites, as we possibly can doe of them."43 Adair thus had it both ways: he considered the Indians innately white—which was necessary to his belief in their Jewish origin—yet he implicitly reinforced the image of dark-skinned natives and white-skinned Europeans viewing each other as distinct color categories.

That perception had been growing since the late seventeenth century. At first it appeared as a contention that stains and paints increased, rather than caused, the Indians' darkness. "They are of a tawny colour," reported a Virginia colonist in 1689, "and make themselves more so, by anointing their bodies with bear's grease." Soon after the turn of the century, former South Carolina governor John Archdale attested that the "Natives are somewhat Tawney, occasioned, in a great measure, by Oyling their Skins, and by the naked Raies of the Sun." Similarly, John Lawson in 1709 described the Indians of the Carolinas as "tawny, which would not be so dark, did they not dawb themselves with Bears Oil, and a colour like burnt Cork."44 By 1728, when William Byrd published his *History of the Dividing Line*, the Indians' color seemed indisputably darker than European-Americans', but Byrd thought it could be "blanched" by two generations of intermarriage. Other commentators, by mentioning the Indians' dark hue without attributing it to environmental or cultural influences, implied a natural darkness. "Their skins," according to Daniel Gookin, supervisor of Indians in Massachusetts, "are of a tawny colour, not unlike the tawny Moors in Africa." Reverend Samuel Lee, also of Massachusetts, described the Indians as "tawny colourd: like the Tartarians."45 Writing in the last quarter of the seventeenth century, neither Gookin nor Lee attributed the dusky hue to stains or the sun, as had most of their New England forebears.

The shift in color ascription, explicit or implicit, is not the only sign that European perceptions had changed. The terminology of ethnic identification also altered significantly between the early years of English colonization and the eve of the American Revolution. Almost without exception, sixteenth- and seventeenth-century writers referred to people of the Old World as Englishmen, Spaniards, Frenchmen, and so forth, often as Christians, seldom as whites except to distinguish them from blacks. The few exceptions suggest that the contrast between the Indians' *acquired* color and the Europeans' *natural* hue provided some observers with a handy label for Europeans of whatever nationality, but such usage remained rare in Indian-European contexts until the eighteenth century. A New Netherland document of 1652, for example, complained that "some malicious and evil disposed persons have not scrupled to inform ... the Indians what sum and price the Dutch or Whites are giving each other for small Lots," but few if any other seventeenth-century Dutch documents use "whites" (blancken) in Indian contexts. The author of the anomalous statement from 1652 may have previously served on the African coast, as had many early Dutch officials, and hence have drawn on the vocabulary of black-white relations in the Dutch slave trade.46

Now and again early English writers also used "white" to designate Europeans. At Roanoke Island in the 1580s, Arthur Barlowe described the natives as "yellowish" and the Europeans as "white people"; Ralph Lane in one instance designated the latter "white men." Both cases are unusual in early English chronicles. In a somewhat different vein, Quaker leader George Fox's journal of his American travels—recorded in the 1670s but not published until the twentieth century—reported a New England Indian's account of an ancient belief that "a white people should come in a great thing of the sea." Assuming that Fox correctly transcribed the Indian's words and that Fox's editor faithfully transcribed his manuscript, Indians may have adopted color terminology as early as did Anglo-Americans, although here too the chromatic term did not necessarily imply innate rather than acquired color. It may have been a native parallel to the early European use of "tawny" and "sodden quince."47
No such ambiguity clouds a South Carolina law of 1696 “for . . . Determining all Causes and Controversies between White Man and Indian.” Among Carolina legislators at least, and presumably among some of their contemporaries, “whites” was emerging as a legitimate label for Americans of European descent in lieu of “Christian” and “English.” Perhaps the South’s recent influx of Africans prompted an increased sensitivity to pigmentation and encouraged color classifications: the earliest surviving instances of such terminology appear in southern documents. But authors and officials in northern colonies were not far behind. Cotton Mather’s _Negro Christianized_ (1706) used “whites” primarily in contrast to blacks, but in one passage he differentiated both from a third division of humanity: “As if the great God went by the _Complexion_ of men, in His Favours to them! As if none but _Whites_ might hope to be Favored and Accepted with God! Whereas it is well known that _Whites_, are the least part of Mankind. The biggest part of Mankind, perhaps, are Copper-Coloured; a sort of _Tawnies_.” By the 1730s “whites” appeared frequently in Pennsylvania Council minutes and in Indian treaties.48 By the second half of the eighteenth century, “white” had become a common appellation for a European of whatever nationality or whatever longevity in America. (National labels, of course, continued to be used where appropriate, especially to distinguish among several groups of European colonists.) For example, Philadelphia naturalist John Bartram usually referred to “Indian” and “English” in his published _Travels_ (1751), but he occasionally used “whites” and “white men” to mean Europeans in general. Similarly, Jefferson asserted in his _Notes on the State of Virginia_ that he considered “the Indian . . . to be in body and mind equal to the white man,” and he clung to such terminology whenever he compared natives and European-Americans.49

Apparently, Indians adopted a similar vocabulary—if we can accept the surviving translations—as George Fox’s journal entry implied and as several eighteenth-century sources corroborate. As early as 1687, an Onondaga sachem contended that the kings of England and France “are both of one Skinn meaning [the interpreter added] white Skinned, & not brown as they [sic] Indians are.” This evidence of an emergent Indian sense of color categories and the implication that the differences were innate became more frequent and more explicit in the eighteenth century. In 1744 an Indian spokesman argued that the difference between Europe and America “may be known from the different Colours of our Skin.” In 1751 John Bartram quoted an Indian who advocated “peace and good harmony between the Indians and White People”; a quarter century later missionary Samuel Kirkland recorded an Indian spokesman as saying, “We have no . . . inclination of interfering in the dispute between Old England and Boston; the white people may settle their own quarrels between themselves.” Indian speeches even applied such words in retrospective accounts, as in an oration of 1773, which began with a brief résumé of Indian-European contact: “Brother, when we first saw the White People . . .”50

Anglo-American usage of _tawny_ also reflected the new emphasis on color terminology. Until the last quarter of the seventeenth century, it was almost always an adjective, modifying Indians or natives; thereafter, it increasingly became a noun. In 1680, for example, Morgan Godwyn in _The Negro’s & Indians Advocate_ discussed the conversion to Christianity of “Tawnys and Blacks”; in the next several decades many authors employed similar terminology.51 No doubt the temptation was strong among Anglo-Americans and Indians to find generic words to describe themselves and each other. Europeans had applied—or, rather, misapplied—“Indians” to the natives since 1492 but had no convenient term for themselves. “Europeans” implicitly excluded Euro-Americans; “Christians” soon lost its diagnostic precision; and British America’s growing ethnic diversity made “Englishmen” inappropriate. To some extent, perhaps, the coinage of color terms was inevitable as blacks became more numerous and as Indians came increasingly to be seen in racial rather than national or tribal terms. But the persistence of “Indians” and the tardy appearance of “redmen” on the linguistic scene suggest a lingering reluctance to perceive the Indians in an essentially biological rather than cultural light, a reluctance that weakened, however, as the eighteenth century wore on.

Other, more subtle, indications of a growing pejorative perception of Indian color appear in American writings of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Some are vague, as in Cotton Mather’s tale of a “bewitched” girl’s encounter with the devil: “hee was not of a _Nego_, but of a _Tawney_, or an _Indian Colour_.” Even if Mather meant an Indian’s acquired hue, the assignment of “an _Indian Colour_” to the devil tells something about Mather’s—or the girl’s—image of Indians.52 Also vague but at least as suggestive in its implications is Governor William Gooch’s commentary on the Virginia law of 1724 for “the better government of Negroes, Mulattoes, and Indians,” which deprived men in those categories of the political franchise, even if they were free and owned property. In a series of letters to Alured Popple in 1735–36, Gooch explained that the basic issue was complexion: dark-skinned inhabitants were disfranchised purely on the basis of color. Gooch admitted that the number of free blacks and mulattoes “is so inconsiderable, that ’tis scarce worth while to take any Notice of them,” but a dark skin, he insisted, should not disable anyone who had attained free-ship. He said nothing about Indians. Gooch either tacitly included them among blacks and mulattoes, or else none had been accorded free-ship. That he probably subsumed Indians under the rubric of mulattoes is strongly suggested by the Virginia Assembly’s declaration of 1705 that “the child of an Indian and the child, grand child, or great grand child of a negro shall be deemed, accounted, held and taken to be a mulatto.” In any event, the implication of Gooch’s remarks and the
intention of Virginia’s legislation were to include Indians among the colony’s colored population.53

Similar intentions appear in other colonial statutes. During the seventeenth century, specific laws rarely applied to both Indians and blacks; the two groups were usually accorded separate and distinct legislative attention. Eighteenth-century lawmakers, however, often lumped them together. New York, for example, frequently proscribed the activities of its “Negro, Indian or Mulatto” populations; southern colonies used similar language but often added a category of “mustizoes” (part Indian, part black or white). Laws against intermarriage are particularly telling. As early as 1691 Virginia passed an antimiscegenation law aimed at Indians as well as blacks. (Its 1662 law, while using color as the basis for racial separation, did not mention Indians.) To be sure, Virginia’s antimiscegenation laws after 1705 ostensibly ignore Indians, but they were automatically encompassed by the new definition of mulattoes. In 1715 and again in 1741 North Carolina curbed racial intermarriage. Drawing on the intent and almost verbatim on the blatantly racist language of Virginia’s act of 1691, the Carolina legislators in 1741 sought to prevent an “abominable Mixture and spurious Issue” by levying a prohibitive fine against any white person who married “an Indian, Negro Muster, or Mulatto Man or Woman, or any Person of mixt Blood, to the Third Generation, bond or free.”54 Other colonies did not explicitly prohibit Indian-white marriages before the American Revolution, although Massachusetts almost did in 1705. Samuel Sewall, a supporter of missionary efforts among the New England tribes, claimed to have thwarted the attempt.55 In most colonies the taint of color prejudice and the cultural gulf were sufficient deterrents to intermarriage.

Comparable clues to changing Anglo-American perceptions of the Indian are laws concerning servants and slaves. In 1705 Virginia legislated protections for white servants by bracketing together the people it considered non-Christian and nonwhite: “[N]o Negroes, Mulattoes, or Indians, although Christians, or Jews, Moors, Mahometans, or other Infidels, shall, at any Time, purchase any Christian Servant, nor any other, except of their own Complexion.” South Carolina in 1712 considered “all negroes, mulattoes, mustizoes or Indians” to be slaves unless they could prove otherwise; later in the century Georgia borrowed heavily from her colonial neighbor when prescribing slavery for “all negroes, Indians, mulattoes, or mestizoes, who now are, or hereafter shall be in this province (free Indians in amity with this government, and negroes, mulattoes, or mestizoes, who now are or hereafter shall become free, excepted).”56

Even eighteenth-century New Englanders, with their sparse black and Indian populations, were almost as ready as their southern counterparts to fuse the two groups in legislation. Cases in point are New Hampshire’s “Act to Prevent Disorders in the Night” of 1714 and the regulations proposed in 1723 by Boston’s selectmen to control its colored population. The New Hampshire legislation empowered local officials and “Her Majesties good Subjects” to “Apprehend or Cause to be Apprehended any Indian, Negro, or Molatto, Servant or Slave that shall be found abroad after Nine a Clock at Night, and shall not give a good and Satisfactory Account of their business.” Boston’s “Articles for the Better Regulating Indians Negroes and Molattos within this Town” set appalling restrictions on non-European residents, whether slave, servant, or free. One provision, for example, required that “every free Indian Negro or Molatto Shal bind out, all their Children at or before they arrive at the age of four years to Some English master.”57 That Indians shared with blacks and mulattoes such repressive policies in colonies as diverse as New Hampshire, Massachusetts, New York, Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia (others could be cited) speaks volumes about shifting Anglo-American racial perceptions.

By the eve of the American Revolution, Anglo-Americans had taken the next logical step: they defined “Americans” wholly in terms of themselves. Americans, James Otis assured readers of his Rights of the British Colonies Asserted and Proved (1764), were not “a compound mongrel mixture of English, Indian, and Negro, but . . . freeborn British white subjects.” Hector St. John de Crèvecœur agreed. “The American, this new man,” he explained in 1786, was a transplanted European or his descendant. A year later, John Jay expanded that notion in The Federalist, number 2: “Providence has been pleased to give this one connected country, to one united people, a people descended from the same ancestors, speaking the same language, professing the same religion, attached to the same government, very similar in their manners and customs.”58 By the prevailing definition, Indians (and Negroes) simply were not Americans.

Nor, in the eyes of many Anglo-Americans, did Indians merit eventual incorporation into American society. Anglo-America’s fundamental contempt for Indian culture remained relatively constant throughout the history of British America and beyond. What changed under the influence of the new perception of Indians as innately dark-skinned were expectations of the Indians’ civil and theological redemption. Initially the Indians had been viewed as likely prospects for anglicization; by the middle of the eighteenth century they were usually dismissed as incapable and unworthy. Accompanying that judgment was a weakening of the few protections that Indians, as individuals or as tribes, had enjoyed in the previous century.

In the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, English optimism had served as a real, though grossly imperfect, shield against wholesale slaughter, enslavement, or flagrant abuse of the Indians, except in periods of outright war. Although all British colonies subjected Indians to some legal discrimination—prohibitions against serving in the militia or acquiring guns, horses, and liquor, for example—and to individual acts of insult or exploitation, colonial governments often protected Indian rights and punished white transgressors.59 Governmental concern stemmed partly from self-interest, of course: abuse of the Indians could
bring lethal retaliation and costly wars. But in most colonies some genuinely humane leaders shared the widespread contempt for Indian culture but tried to treat individual Indians justly and peacefully. Because those leaders considered the Indians to be as truly and as perfectly God's creatures as anyone, they counted on education and conversion to make Indians into Englishmen. Among the most solicitous of Indian welfare were George Thorpe in early Virginia, the second Lord Baltimore in Maryland, William Penn in Pennsylvania, and Edward Winslow and the elder Jonathan Mayhew in New England. Most missionaries, too, sought to protect the Indians' lives and well-being while attempting—as missionaries by definition must—to alter the Indians' basic beliefs.

The protections afforded by government and church officials gradually faded during the seventeenth century as public sentiment turned increasingly cynical about the possibility of coexistence and ultimate conversion and as the swelling European-American population became increasingly difficult to regulate. By the mid-eighteenth century, the best the Indian could expect was seclusion on an ever-shrinking reservation or westward migration in the face of an advancing colonial frontier. Powerful tribes won some respect for their usefulness as allies or their danger as enemies; the rest, judging from the writings of the time, were considered by most Anglo-Americans a nuisance to be ignored, enslaved, or eliminated. As Benjamin Franklin observed in 1764 after a major atrocity in western Pennsylvania, "The Spirit of killing all Indians, Friends and Foes, [has] spread amazingly thro' the whole Country." Two years later, Sir William Johnson reported to Whitehall that in the backcountry from Virginia to New York the settlers "murder, Robb and otherwise grossly misuse all Indians they could find . . . and [are] treating the Indians with contempt, much greater than they had ever before experienced." The settlers, Sir William lamented, "perpetrate Murders whenever opportunity offers."

The stereotypical frontier view that "the only good Indian is a dead Indian" was an American reality long before General Sheridan coined the infamous phrase.

Even missionaries reflected the changing view of Indian color and character. During the eighteenth century a new wave of missionary enthusiasm revived efforts in many colonies to Christianize the Indians, now that the danger from Indian hostility had receded and as the Great Awakening aroused Christian consciences throughout British America. In a resurgence of attempts to indoctrinate the Indians in English ways and beliefs, several new schools and colleges admitted native youths. Even among educators and institutions, however, the image of the Indian was less hopeful and more susceptible to racial—as distinct from cultural—bias than it had been in the previous century. Plans for Virginia's Indian College at Henrico in the early 1620s and the Harvard charter of 1637 had reflected the seventeenth century's expectation of rapid success based on the biological equality of Indians and Englishmen. Eighteenth-century efforts reveal a different perception.

The early career of Dartmouth College is illustrative. Several critics of Eleazar Wheelock's missionary school in Lebanon, Connecticut, the precursor to his college in Hanover, New Hampshire, attributed its slim success to English prejudice, freely admitting that they themselves "could never respect an Indian, Christian or no Christian, so as to put him on a level with white people on any account." One of the critics insisted, on the basis of "the irresistible aversion that white people must ever have to black [sic]," that "Mr. Wheelock's attempt [is] altogether absurd and fruitless. . . . [A]s long as the Indians are despised by the English we may never expect success in Christianizing of them." And it can hardly be coincidental that Wheelock frequently referred to his Indian students as "black" or to his prize pupil, Samson Occom, as "my black son." Even some of Wheelock's students absorbed notions of abject inferiority and its related color terminology. One Mohegan called himself a "good for nothing Black Indian," and "a despicable Lump of polluted Clay . . . inclosed in this tawny skin." The degradation of the Indians had, for Wheelock and his students at least, reached the point where Native Americans were rhetorically almost indistinguishable from the Africans who had suffered a century and a half of enslavement and extreme prejudice. It is not, therefore, surprising that in 1764 Thomas Hutchinson of Massachusetts complained, "We are too apt to consider the Indians as a race of beings by nature inferior to us, and born to servitude." By Hutchinson's time, thousands—perhaps tens of thousands—of Indians were, in fact, enslaved in British colonies from Massachusetts to Barbados. The eighteenth century's view of Indians as innately dark and inferior thus had frightful implications for America's aboriginal inhabitants.

Documenting the shifts in Anglo-American perceptions of Indian color is easier than explaining them. Contemporary authors were oblivious to the changes; they were too close to the phenomena and too involved in them. To a large extent, of course, the reasons for changing attitudes can only be surmised, for they reflect a vast and complicated alteration in millions of disparate individuals whose perceptions of the Indian cannot be precisely reconstructed. Nonetheless, Anglo-American writings of the eighteenth century offer important clues to the psychological imperatives that encouraged "white" Americans to believe that Indians were significantly and irrevocably darker than themselves. At least three major interrelated and mutually reinforcing influences are apparent: the Anglo-Americans' anger at Indian hostility, their frustration over Indian rejection of Christianity and "civility," and their adoption of eighteenth-century racial theories.

First, chronologically, was the transformation of the Indian in English eyes from potential friend to inveterate enemy. That change took place
to King Philip’s War. The Indians were “Monsters shapt and fac’d like men,” wrote one New England poet, and most of his compatriots undoubtedly agreed. Even book titles reflect the shift in attitude. In 1655, John Eliot could write hopefully of the Indians’ progress toward conversion in A Late and Further Manifestation of the Progress of the Gospell amongst the Indians in New England: Declaring Their Constant Love and Zeal to the Truth, with a Readiness to Give Account of Their Faith and Hope, as of Their Desire to Be Partakers of the Ordinances of Christ. Twenty years later, in the midst of New England’s struggle for survival, an anonymous pamphleteer suggested a far different view of the Indians in a Brief and True Narration of the Late Wars Risen in New-England, Occasioned by the Quarrelsome Disposition, and Perfidious Carriage of the Barbarous, Savage, and Heathenish Natives there. As warfare increasingly became the dominant mode of English-Indian contact, the image of the Indian as vicious savage made deep inroads on the Anglo-American psyche. Cotton Mather, whose rhetorical flights often exaggerated but seldom misrepresented colonial sentiments, gave revealing advice to New England’s soldiers in King William’s War: “Once you have but got the Track of those Ravinous howling Wolves, then pursue them vigorously; Turn not back till they are consumed. . . . Beat them small as the Dust before the Wind. . . . Sacrifice them to the Ghosts of Christians whom they have Murdered. . . . Vengeance, Dear Country-men! Vengeance upon our Murderers.” The culmination of a century and a half of military escalation came in 1776 in the Declaration of Independence’s only reference to the Indians: The king “has endeavored to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian savages, whose known rule of warfare is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions.” Nearly a decade of border warfare exacerbated the revolutionaries’ fear and hatred of the Indians. “The white Americans,” observed a British traveler in 1784, “have the most rancorous antipathy to the whole race of Indians; and nothing is more common than to hear them talk of extirpating them totally from the face of the earth, men, women, and children.”

War-bred animosities did not require a difference in color perception, but the unconscious temptation to tar the Indian with the brush of physical inferiority—to differentiate and denigrate the enemy—appears to have been irresistible. Wartime epithets have often invoked outward appearance, however irrelevant (witness the “yellow Japs” of World War II), and British Americans frequently resorted to pejorative color labels. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, as war raged along the northern New England frontier, Cotton Mather castigated “those Tawny Pagans, than which there are not worse Divels Incarnate upon Earth,” and “a swarthy Generation of Philistines here; the Indian Natives, I mean, whom alone we are like to have any Warrs withal.” Nearly a century later, when the bulk of the Indians sided with Great Britain during the American Revolution, Henry Dwight complained of “copper Colour’d Vermin” and hoped that an American army would “Massacre those Infernal Savages to such a degree that [there] may’n’t be a pair of them left, to continue the Breed upon the Earth.” Logically enough, “redskins” eventually emerged as the epithet for enemies who usually used red paint on the warpath. Not coincidentally, perhaps, the first reported use of that term appears in a passage about Indian assaults on frontier settlements. In a sentence that suggests the impact of war on changing English attitudes, Samuel Smith of Hadley, Massachusetts, recalled in 1699 that several decades earlier his father had endured Indian raids in the Connecticut valley. “My Father ever declart,” Smith remembered (using terminology his father probably did not), “there would not be so much to feare iff ye Red Skins was treated with suche mixture of Justice & Authority as they cld understand, but iff he was living now he must see that wee can do nought but fight em & that right heavily.”

The Indians’ refusal to adopt English concepts of civility and religion poisoned Anglo-American attitudes as thoroughly as did warfare. Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century expectations of rapid and wholesale anglicization met constant rebuff; by the end of the seventeenth century it must have been clear to all but the more optimistic missionaries that most Indians would never be Christian in faith or English in allegiance and customs. Converts in the southern and middle colonies numbered only a handful; most of John Eliot’s “praying towns” had been scuttled by King Philip’s War and its aftermath; and even the Quakers in Pennsylvania, despite a commendable effort to treat the Indians fairly, had won few to English ways or beliefs. Occasional successes notwithstanding, the missionary movement had failed. Even less successful was the broader mission of eliminating customs that Englishmen subsumed under the heading of “savagery,” such as nakedness, scarification, tribal law and government, hunting instead of herding, and, perhaps most important of all, an exclusively oral language. Some technological assimilation had occurred, as had some imaginative blending of religious ideas, but the overwhelming majority of Indians steadfastly held to their traditional ways and rejected most of the alien culture’s offerings.

Who was to blame? The most obvious scapegoat was the Indian himself. He stubbornly resisted spiritual and material improvement, his critics charged, and they eventually concluded that his resistance stemmed either from a deeply ingrained antipathy to “civilization” or from a natural incapacity for improvement. Benjamin Franklin explained to a correspondent in 1753 that “Little Success . . . has hitherto attended every attempt to Civilize our American Indians in their present way of living . . . . When an Indian Child has been brought up among us, taught our language and habituated to Our Customs, yet if he goes to see his relations and make one Indian Ramble with them, there is no persuading him ever to return.” Franklin did not consider the Indians inherently incapable of adopting English ways; they simply and obstinately preferred their own. Many of Franklin’s contemporaries were less char-
itable. The editor of the 1764 edition of William Wood's *New England's Prospect*, for example, thought the Indians incurably barbarian and pagan. "The christianizing the Indians," he peevishly noted, 

scarcely affords a probability of success; for their immense sloth, their incapacity to consider abstract truth . . . and their perpetual wanderings, which prevent a steady worship, greatly impede the progress of Christianity, a mode of religion adapted to the most refined temper of the human mind. . . . The feroce manners of a native Indian can never be efficed, nor can the most finished politeness totally eradicate the wild lines of his education.

Almost predictably, the editor believed that Indians were not born white; with few exceptions, contempt for Indians as people, as well as for their culture, correlated highly with a belief in their innate darkness.86

A third major influence toward perceiving the Indians as inherently tawny or red came from eighteenth-century naturalists. Few of them had firsthand information about the American Indians—most were European scholars who never visited the New World—but in their frantic attempt to classify systematically all plant and animal life, including the principal divisions of humankind, they contributed directly to the notion of Indians as inherently red and indirectly at least to the belief in their inferiority.

Initially, the naturalists' categories had no hierarchical intent. Their taxonomies were horizontal, not vertical, and each branch of humanity enjoyed equality with all others. Before long, however, the subdivisions of *Homo sapiens* acquired descriptive judgments that suggest a relative superiority in Europeans and corresponding inferiority in other races. Such a view meshed comfortably with the eighteenth century's emphatic belief in natural order, metaphorically expressed as a "Great Chain of Being," in which all creatures from microorganisms to angels had permanent places on a hierarchical continuum. The idea of an orderly chain of life had existed for centuries; it flourished in the fifteenth century, for example, when Sir John Fortescue recorded a classic description: "In this order angel is set over angel, rank upon rank in the Kingdom of Heaven; man is set over man, beast over beast, bird over bird, and fish over fish . . . so that there is no worm that crawls upon the ground, no bird that flies on high, no fish that swims in the depths, which the chain of this order binds not in most harmonious concord."81

Not until the eighteenth century, however, did ranks within humankind receive much attention. Then, because natural scientists almost invariably chose skin color as the principal criterion of racial identity, darkness of hue became "scientifically" linked to other undesirable qualities. As Winthrop Jordan has pointed out, for Africans the "Great Chain of Being" soon became a "Great Chain of Color" on which whites regarded blacks as divinely relegated to a lesser rank of humanity.82 In the eighteenth century, American Indians also became victims, though not quite so pejoratively, of the color chain's invidious implications.

The second edition of Charles Linnaeus's *General System of Nature* (1740) presented the Swedish botanist's preliminary attempt at human classification. The previous edition (1735) had said almost nothing about humankind; the new and greatly enlarged version gave only a few lines to the subject, but they were enough to establish four basic groups: "Europaeus albus, Americanus rubescens, Asiaticus fuscus, Africanus niger." Seven subsequent editions, published between 1740 and 1756, repeated those color categories verbatim. In the tenth edition (1758), Linnaeus expanded his discussion of humans. To the four original categories he added two others—wild men and monsters, to whom he assigned no colors—while again ascribing white, red, yellow, and black to Europeans, Americans, Asians, and Africans. But Linnaeus no longer restricted his entries to physical description; he now attributed several character traits to each race. Europeans were, among other things, sanguine, brawny, gentle, and inventive; Americans choleric, obstinate, content, and free; Asians melancholy, rigid, haughty, and covetous; Africans phlegmatic, crafty, indolent, and negligent.83 The Indians, to be sure, fared far better than Africans and Asians in this Linnaean glossary, and Linnaeus even hinted at the noble savage image ("content," "free") that was rapidly gaining favor among European intellectuals. But an unavoidable message in Linnaeus's highly subjective and immensely influential treatise was that American Indians were naturally red and somewhat inferior to whites.

Most of Linnaeus's scientific contemporaries concurred. In 1744, four years after Linnaeus's first description of Americans as red, Dr. John Mitchell of Virginia investigated "the proximate cause of the Colour of Negroes, Indians, white People, etc." Drawing on Newton's *Opticks*, Mitchell argued that the thickness of the skin determined the amount of light reflected by the epidermis and, hence, the extent of its darkness. He saw all humankind as varying only in shade—the Indians differed from Europeans in degree rather than substance—yet even Mitchell argued that the Indians of America and Asia (whom he considered of about the same color) constituted a distinct race and a distinct color category. He also contended that tawny was the original human color: Africans had become darker, Europeans lighter, "Americans retaining the primitive and original Complexion."84 Perhaps from a desire to defend Native Americans from European charges of physical inferiority, Mitchell thus gave considerable dignity to Indian color. In that regard, Mitchell was unique.

Of the two prominent eighteenth-century authors who differed significantly with Linnaeus on the Indians' natural hue, one preceded him by almost two decades and admitted sparse knowledge of America. Richard Bradley's *A Philosophical Account of the Works of Nature* (1721) lists Indians among the world's white-skinned people. Of his five categories of humankind, which Bradley based on hair texture as well as on skin color, he included in "the White Men" two subcategories: "Europeans,