



NECESSITY OF WORLDVIEW UNDERSTANDING FOR
SUSTAINABLE PEACE: A CASE STUDY OF UNITED
STATES RELATIONS WITH NATIVE AMERICANS
IN THE 18-19TH CENTURIES

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Introduction

Rights of indigenous people around the world continue to be fragile.¹ Such tenuous rights have been the cause for ethnic tension around the globe often resulting in attempts of genocide. Fighting for those rights has erupted in countless numbers of conflicts even in our day. In regards to land, for instance, the right is inherent in the struggle of the Papuan cause for self-determination. The right to land is inherent in the struggle of Palestinians as well.² Many indigenous people the world over continue in the struggle for self-determination. Lessons, then, that can be gleaned from history will serve well for understanding the importance of mutual respect related to group rights. The case of U.S. relations with Native Americans will help in this understanding and might further sustainable peace once such lessons are heeded.

The story of the United States of America is one of continual struggle for peace from the War of Independence to the Indian Wars of the 1800s to the current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. It is the story of an immigrant nation's challenge to implement ideals that are certainly universal, but interpreted by the times in which we live and ambitions of those holding power. These inalienable rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness often came at the expense of ethnic groups who were viewed as potential obstacles to such rights. The Euro-American ethnic hegemony present in North America from the colonial period until the beginning of the modern age of war was the impetus for westward expansion as expressed in Manifest Destiny and for the hope of economic prosperity by fulfilling the American Dream. This hegemony often resulted in the displacement of native people and the incitement to war.

Religious motivation also played a salient role as the Whites believed they had been sent by God to subdue the land.

The United States government has broken nearly every treaty ever signed with Native Americans.³ More often than not, treaties were broken due to the expanding appetite of White settlers and the government's encouragement of Manifest Destiny. At times the expansion was theologically motivated. At other times it was purely economic as gold was being discovered in Cherokee lands in Georgia and Lakota lands in South Dakota. This insatiable appetite of many White people for Native Americans lands specifically and conquest generally threatened peace and brought a new nation to the brink of, if not in reality, committing genocide.⁴

This article will argue that many of the issues between Euro-Americans and Native Americans could have been mitigated by mutual understanding. Particularly on the part of the Euro-Americans who touted cultural superiority and God-given entitlement as a chosen people, the Christian worldview should have demonstrated humility and love when engaging people of different worldviews. Thus, it becomes of primary importance to understand not only culture but the ethnicity and religion of a people in order to effectively engage and impact a lasting worldview change.

Worldview: Culture, Ethnicity and Religion

David Naugle argued that a worldview is constructed by how people reason, interpret and know. In this manner, it explains the reality a person confronts. He stated that worldview is, "best understood as a semiotic phenomenon, especially as a system of narrative signs that establishes a powerful framework within which people think (reason), interpret (hermeneutics), and know (epistemology)."⁵ Such narrative signs are characteristically found in three salient features of worldview. Worldview, then, is created by the degree in which one's culture, belief system (whether religious or non religious) and ethnicity/race interact to explain the perception of reality (see figure 1).

Culture, ethnicity and religion are all salient features that contribute to the manner in which people make sense of events in their world. Each feature addresses the questions of ultimate meaning as well as personal and social identity. They are deeply embedded in an individual and provide the framework of assumptions that are collectively held and which govern social relations thus offering cohesion and peace among groups of people. In other words, where a worldview is shared there you will find a people who live at peace with each other. As such, I suggest that culture, ethnicity and religion coalesce to form the framework from which people make sense of events happening around them. Each contributes in manners of degree to the way in which we perceive reality. When there are competing worldviews vying for prominence mutual understanding is imperative in order to sustain peace.

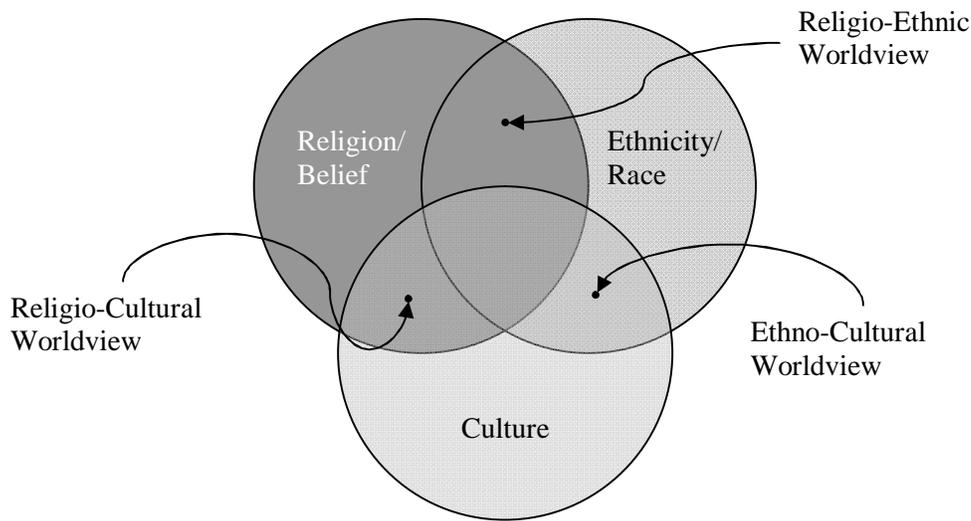


Figure 1: Worldview

According to Clifford Geertz and many others culture is a, "historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life."⁶ These cultural patterns, or symbol systems, are webs of social and psychological processes that give life meaning. Geertz argued that these cultural patterns define who people will become. He noted, "Becoming human is becoming individual, and we become individual under the guidance of cultural patterns, historically created systems of meaning in terms of which we give form, order, point, and direction to our lives."⁷

Fredrik Barth argued that culture is a result of an ethnic group's organization rather than a primary characteristic of it. Therefore, it is inadequate to think of classifying people as members of ethnic groups according to particular characteristics of the culture. He suggested that there is no one-to-one correlation between ethnicity and culture.⁸ However, Barth stated that some cultural features maintain ethnic boundaries. An ethnic group has a "continual organizational existence with boundaries" that distinguishes the group as diverse.

George de Voss defined an ethnic group as a "self-perceived inclusion of those who hold in common a set of traditions not shared by others with whom they are in contact."⁹ Typically, shared religious beliefs, language, common ancestry and a degree of historical continuity characterize those traditions. According to De Voss, ethnic identity is a subjective social process based on a real or deliberate creation of a past to justify social belonging.¹⁰

Whereas culture is achieved, ethnicity is ascribed. As an ethnic group reorganizes itself and creates new social realities, culture changes while leaving the identity of the group intact. Cultural characteristics can be shared across ethnic boundaries. However, ethnicity is more about relationships between people who share a common identity, ancestral and social, than about structured patterns of society. Ethnic groups, then, share a common historical memory, cultural particularities that serve as boundaries and often territorial constraints that reinforce "us" and "them."

In addition to culture and ethnicity, religion plays a significant role in forming a worldview. Emile Durkheim defined religion in terms of a system of beliefs and practices related to the sacred that united a community.¹¹ Geertz's definition of religion is perhaps more instructive.

A religion is (1) a system of symbols which act to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.¹²

While comprehensive in nature, Geertz's understanding is relatively complicated. Steve Bruce defined religion simply as consisting of "beliefs, actions, and institutions which assume the existence of supernatural entities with powers of action, or impersonal powers or processes possessed of moral purpose."¹³ All three definitions contribute to an understanding of religion as a system of beliefs and rituals whereby individuals, concentrated in groups of like-minded adherents, relate to spiritual beings.

Religion then relates to culture and ethnicity because it deals with the way in which humans relate to the world around them and in particular to the unseen spirit world. It helps people find meaning and solutions to their own weaknesses and failings as it provides a framework in which a person can interpret the world. In so doing it gives practitioners security in understanding the questions of why things are the way they are. Religion is an aspect of one's worldview which deals with the spiritual realm and its manifestations in the human realm.

Much of the history of U.S. relations with Native Americans might be understood as competing worldviews vying for self-determination. Both the Euro-Americans and the Native Americans of the seventeenth



to nineteenth centuries held deep cultural, ethnic and religious beliefs that propelled them in increasingly adversarial positions and provoked strong and often deadly responses to the other. Each naturally believed that their worldview was superior. However, where the Euro-Americans attempted to impose their worldview on Native Americans, more often than not Native Americans did not understand and felt their way of life was being threatened.

*Historical Background of U.S. Relations
with Native Americans*

Relations between Indians and early European settlers were always somewhat tenuous. From the arrival of the first Puritans seeking a land where they could freely and peaceably practice their religion, Indians were often looked upon and treated as savages simply because they were different. In spite of early attempts by the Wampanoag who inhabited the area around Massachusetts to have peaceful relations, the new arrivals to the continent were self-assured of the right to the land because of European-Christian superiority. Such assurance was bolstered when diseases, such as small pox, were viewed as God's hand in clearing the way for exerting European Christian civilization.¹⁴ Subsequent wars with neighboring tribes further assured the settlers of their God given right to occupy the land. The 1637 Pequot War was viewed by the settlers as a preemptive attempt to demonstrate European strength and resulted in the death of 700 men, women and children who were burned in their homes.¹⁵ Such actions resulted in Indian suspicion of the White settlers.

Resulting from the manner in which the English treated the Pequot, early treaties between the Wampanoag and English were jeopardized as there was growing concern that the English would betray their friendship as well. Simultaneously, there was a decreasing desire for Indian goods for trade among the new arrivals and increasing desire for English goods. Eventually such a trade imbalance would result in Indian indebtedness to the English and in due course dispossession of land in order to pay the debt. While Massasoit (1581-1661), the first Wampanoag chief to enter into relations with the English, enjoyed relative peace with the new settlers his son Metacom would not.

Metacom (1639-1676), who was known as King Philip to the English would remark in reference to those early White settlers, "We were the first in doing good to the English and the English the first in doing wrong."¹⁶ After a trial for the murder of a "Praying Indian" one who had been converted to Christianity and the subsequent execution of the convicted Wampanoag, Metacom mounted a war with the English that

would last a bit more than a year. Ultimately on August 12, 1676 Metacom was killed and decapitated. His head was displayed impaled on a stake as a reminder of God's deliverance of the Indians into the hands of the English.

There were certainly those colonialists who attempted to live at peace with Native Americans. William Penn (1644-1718) is but one example. Penn's holy experiment for a peaceable kingdom where Whites and Indian lived together was abruptly shattered when the Paxton Boys systematically wiped out the remaining Conestoga. Armed with the biblical mandate to subdue the earth, many colonialists appealed to the laws of God and nature as their rationale for usurping Indian land and dispossessing the indigenous population since they were not cultivating it as the Whites.¹⁷ To the White, land was to be possessed and exploited for its resources and this was certainly the perspective that Native Americans had of the Europeans. As one native leader stated in a 19th century interview, "The white man has come to be the symbol of extinction for all things natural to this continent. Between him and the animal there is no rapport and they have learned to flee from his approach, for they cannot live on the same ground."¹⁸

Early American identity was fixated on the White Europeans. After the War of Independence and the subsequent Treaty of Peace of 1783 that allowed the newly formed United States of America to occupy land from the Appalachian Mountains to the Mississippi, the government looked for means to rid the region of Native Americans. Not only did the treaty liberate the United States from European control, but Congress believed the treaty gave them explicit claim to Indian Territory. Henry Knox, secretary of war in 1789 wrote, "Congress were of the opinion, that the Treaty of Peace, of 1783, absolutely invested them with the fee of all the Indian lands within the limits of the United States; that they had the right to assign, or retain such portions as they should judge proper."¹⁹

The hunter/gatherer lifestyle of the native population was evidence enough for the Enlightenment educated president Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) to say, "The end proposed should be their extermination, or their removal beyond the lales of Illinois river. The same world will scarcely do for them and us."²⁰ Jefferson believed that even though Native Americans exhibited signs of civilization their ultimate civility in the Euro-American sense might not be in their fate. In his mind one of two things might occur; either they would be assimilated into American society or they would be extinguished. According to Anthony Wallace, "The Jefferson vision of the destiny of the Americas had no place for Indians as Indians."²¹ Jefferson, and by extension Jeffersonians, viewed liberty from an ethnocentric perspective. The "owe the people" were not simply any people, but explicitly Euro-Americans and specifically men. Summarizing Jefferson's ethnocentrism, Joyce Appleby, professor of history at UCLA wrote,



Jefferson raised his voice against slavery on several important occasions, but died convinced that Whites and free blacks could never prosper together once slavery ended. He enjoyed the conversation of intelligent women, but taught his daughters that women were created for men's pleasure. He approached Native American culture with avid curiosity, but recommended the ruthless destruction of Indian ways. These repellent convictions jostled strangely with Jefferson's generous conception of the human potential.²²

Wallace further noted, "The Jeffersonian state was not an empire; it was egalitarian, democratic and ethnically exclusive."²³ Even though Chief Justice of the Supreme Court John Marshall (1755-1835) referred to Native Americans as "domestic dependent nations," many in the government believed they were among the "spoilers of the American dream," or at least the Jeffersonian version of the dream. In some ways, the manner in which the U.S. government treated native people was nothing short of ethnic, or to be more charitable, at least cultural cleansing.²⁴

While Jefferson was at times optimistic in regards to the civilization of the Indians taking place by his first congressional address of his presidency his optimism related to southern tribes. Even though Indian relations were an important aspect of his policies, he was more concerned with seeing the White population fill the newly formed republic.²⁵ His Indian policy pursued peace as much as was possible. Along with peace, land was of primary importance in order to ensure White settlers places to expand the reach of the new government. Ultimately his hope was for the civilization of the Indians and the prevention of inciting the British and French to war.

In an 1803 letter to William Harrison, then governor of the Indiana Territory, Jefferson stated his desire to live in peace with the Indians. His hope was that they would be drawn to an agrarian lifestyle as the wildlife they hunted disappeared. By so doing, Jefferson hoped that the Indians would find that they no longer had need of the forest and would be willing to sell them for necessities they required in order to farm. He wrote to Harrison in confidence that he would not let the Indians know his plans. Jefferson, so it appeared, was attempting to lure the Indians in becoming dependent on farming and on the necessities the U.S. government could provide. Jefferson wrote to Harrison,

To promote this disposition to ex-change lands, which they have to spare and we want, for necessities, which we have to spare

and they want, we shall push our trading uses, and be glad to see the good and influential individuals among them run in debt, because we observe that when these debts get beyond what the individuals can pay, they become willing to lop them off by a cession of lands.²⁶

The strategy to acquire Indian lands by indebting them to the government appeared in multiple letters of Jefferson. The government tried to dissuade traders from interaction with Indians in order to fulfill this strategy. The Trade and Intercourse Act of 1790 was re-instated under Jefferson in order to prevent the settlers from carrying on any exchange of goods or dialogue with the Indians. Jefferson's strategy to dispossess the Indians of their land included exclusive trade with the government. With exclusive trading rights, the government could set the price of goods which ultimately would indebted the Indians. Repayment could only be made in land. By the end of his presidency, Jefferson secured some 200,000 square miles of Indian land. The acquisition was as much for expansion as it was for a military strategy that essentially secured supply routes and pushed the tribes to the interior of the country in order to encircle and thus control them.²⁷

While Jefferson was certainly interested in native culture, such interest was purely academic. Politically, he had a different agenda and he would not be alone. Andrew Jackson (1767-1845) would also be complicit in U.S. treatment of indigenous people. There were certainly glimmers of hope among the so-called Five Civilized Tribes.²⁸ However, in the end, economically motivated policy would see the dispossession of their lands for the sake of White prosperity in the form of gold. While Jefferson and Jackson's view of Native Americans seem to contradict their views of natural rights and equality with universal freedom, they were products of the predominant Euro-American worldview. It was a worldview that was profoundly ethnocentric with a desire to insure prosperity that eluded many in Europe. That prosperity undoubtedly included the White expansion from the eastern to the western coasts.

President Jackson assured as much in his Indian Removal Act of 1830 that made provision for the U.S. government's sovereignty over Indian land.²⁹ After the discovery of gold on Cherokee territory in Georgia, for example, the policy's effect would be severely felt. While the Act made provision for the relocation of Native Americans its implementation was a deplorable example of U.S. domestic policy that led to the infamous Trail of Tears of the Cherokee in 1838.³⁰ After being an early victim of Jackson's Indian policy, Black Hawk (1767-1838) articulated a profound lack of understanding of the American way by contrasting it with the Indian, "Wherever the Great Spirit places his people, they ought to be satisfied to remain, and thankful for what He has given them; and not drive others from the country He has given them, because it happens to be better than theirs."³¹



In regards to land, contentment was not a character trait of White settlers or of the U.S. government. In an address on Manifest Destiny in 1846, Senator Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri summed up the belief of the U.S. government. It is at once theological and at the same time ethnocentric,

It would seem that the White race alone received the divine command, to subdue and replenish the earth: for it is the only race that has obeyed it— the only race that hunts out new and distant lands, and even a New World, to subdue and replenish

The Red race has disappeared from the Atlantic coast; the tribes that resisted civilization met extinction. This is a cause of lamentation with many. For my part, I cannot murmur at what seems to be the effect of divine law. I cannot repine that is this Capitol has replaced the wigwam— this Christian people, replaced the savages— white matrons, the red squaws Civilization, or extinction, has been the fate of all people who have found themselves in the trace of the advancing Whites, and civilization, always the preference of the Whites, has been pressed as an object, while extinction has followed as a consequence of its resistance³²

It would eventually be Ulysses S. Grant (1822-1885) who would impact the Native American cultures of the West. With a seemingly sympathetic posture toward the Indians, Grant desired to see their integration into the American Dream but did not consider such integration to possess native culture. He wrote, “The proper treatment of the original inhabitants of this land, the Indian . . . I will favor any course which tends to their civilization and ultimate citizenship.”³³ Grant seemed to understand the Native Americans as peaceable people who would not cause harm except for the fact that the White encroached on their land. Grant’s policy would be the domestication of Native Americans. Domestication would come by moving Native Americans to reservations in order to civilize them by making them leave their native lifestyle for one resembling the White. Reservations would be places where Native Americans would learn to farm and become artisans.³⁴

Along with the change of culture was a change of religion. In what would become known as “Grant’s Peace,” mission agencies attempted to evangelize the Native Americans as a means of civilizing and acclimating them to White culture. Reflecting on the impact of the White man’s religion, Chief Plenty-Coups (1848-1932) of the Crow stated in an interview in the early 1900s,

Their Wise Ones said we might have their religion, but when we tried to understand it we found that there were too many kinds of religion among white men for us to understand, and that scarcely any two white men agreed which was the right one to learn. This bothered us a good deal until we saw that the white man did not take his religion any more seriously than he did his laws, and that he kept both of them just behind him, like Helpers, to use when they might do him good in his dealings with strangers.³⁵

Grant pursued a policy of peace with Native Americans to the consternation of his two seasoned military generals: Sherman and Sheridan. He wrote from the horrid experience of the War Between the States, "Wars of extermination are demoralizing and wicked. Our superiority should make us lenient toward the Indian A system which looks to the extinction of a race is too horrible for a nation to adopt without entailing upon itself the wrath of all Christendom."³⁶ In spite of Grant's sympathy toward Indians, which was indeed refreshing in light of the policies of Jefferson and Jackson, the U.S. military policy regarding the Native American might be summarized by a letter from General Sherman to General Sheridan with the order to kill and punish them. Sherman wrote, "The more we kill this year, the less we would have to kill next year."³⁷ It was not only the killing of Native Americans, General Sheridan practiced the killing of bison to ensure lasting peace. If the resources of the indigenous people were eliminated then they would have no other choice but to take the provisions of the U.S. government. Chief Standing Bear (1834-1908) summed up how he saw such policies, "The white man considered natural animal life just as he did the natural man life upon this continent, as pests."³⁸

Lessons for Relations with Indigenous People

European Christianity was largely ineffective in reaching the Indian and understandably so. After all, the Euro-American was intrinsically tied to the suppression of native culture as well as to Christianity. Their appetite for consuming the land communicated a worldview that was foreign to native people. In the midst of such a conflict of worldviews there was little hope in an attempt to understand each other's cultures. With the belief of Manifest Destiny as a divine law, the Euro-Americans acted on their convictions. With the belief of the oneness between Indian and land the native people did likewise.

From my perspective a hundred plus years after the Indian Wars it is easy to be critical of the manner in which both engaged the other. Nevertheless, there are important lessons to be learned from the interactions of Euro-Americans and native peoples that are applicable at a time in the history of the West when a neo-colonial Manifest Destiny exists sometimes disguised as capitalism. To these I now turn my attention.



First, theology can be undermined when connected to the ambition of a nation-state and used to justify state actions. When the first White settlers arrived in the New World they had hopes and aspirations of no longer being religiously oppressed. Such hopes and aspirations were eventually tied to governing bodies. The Massachusetts Bay Colony charter (1629), for example, dealt as much with a form of government and economics as it did with religion. Expressed within the charter was the mandate to civilize and Christianize native people. Nearly two hundred years later, Grant's second annual message to congress would express similar hopes as he formulated his peace policy toward the Indians. He wrote,

Indian agencies being civil offices, I determined to give all the agencies to such religious denominations as had heretofore established missionaries among the Indians, and perhaps to some other denominations who would undertake the work on the same terms i.e., as a missionary work. The societies selected are allowed to name their own agents, subject to the approval of the Executive, and are expected to watch over them and aid them as missionaries, to Christianize and civilize the Indian, and to train him in the arts of peace.³⁹

This form of Christianization resulted in tremendous confusion on the part of Native people. For example, Chief Spotted Tail (1823-1881) of the Sioux related the difficulty of believing as the White man:

I am bothered what to believe. Some years ago a good man, as I think, came to us. He talked me out of all my old faith; and after a while, thinking that he must know more of these matters than an ignorant Indian, I joined his church and became a Methodist. After a while he went away; another man came and talked, and I became a Baptist; then another came and talked and I became a Presbyterian. Now another one has come, and wants me to be an Episcopalian. All these people tell different stories and each wants me to believe that this special way is the only way to be good and save my soul. I have about made up my mind that either they all lie, or that they don't know any more about it than I did at first. I have always believed in the Great Spirit and worshipped him in my own way. These people don't seem to want to change my belief in the Great Spirit, but to change my way of talking to him. White men have education and books, and ought to know exactly what to do, but hardly any two of them agree on what should be done.⁴⁰

The Christian theology and political ideology emerging out of the United States in the first two hundred years from the colonial period until the end of the Civil War was ethnocentric. Its focus was on the superiority of the White as God's chosen instrument to bring civilization. Naturally when tied to the government there is a sense of destiny, as expressed by Benton for example, that the United States is God's provision for subduing and replenishing the earth in spite of the impact that such would have on ethnic groups. At times even the genocide of native peoples was viewed as divine blessing.⁴¹

Theology and political ideology are powerful motivators for government intervention and justification. However, when theology is connected to a state there is little hope for sustained peace when the state seeks to exercise such theological views and impose them on its citizenry. Christian theology was never intended to be a state theology. There is no theological mandate to spread democracy or capitalism as a particular Christian ideal of civilization. Instead the mandate has been to proclaim the peace of Christ (Eph 2:11-15).⁴²

This leads to the second lesson, ethnocentric fanaticism is detrimental to sustained peace. Jefferson, as we saw, was as ethnocentric in his views of the White European as anyone has ever been. Such ethnocentrism provoked government policies with little regard to their impact on the indigenous population. While he seemed to hold out hope that the Native Americans would be enfolded into the United States, he also knew that this would mean the extinction of Native American culture. In the same period, there was certainly a belief that Native Americans were somewhat less than human. They were indeed thought of as savages who were "Satan's associates in his intensifying war against Christian order."⁴³

Christian theology is clearly ethnically diverse. In fact, Jesus Christ himself came inclusively for all people (2 Cor 5:19). His example of crossing racial barriers with the Romans and Samaritans is the model of Christian behavior today (John 3-5). He did not impose a superior Jewish ethnicity. Instead, he broke that dividing wall that prohibited the intermingling of Jews with others (Ephesians 2). Now in Christianity, as St. Paul articulated, there is no Jew or Greek, slave or free (Gal 3:28). In other words, instead of the exclusive insistence that Christianity is the White man's religion, ethnic barriers should no longer divide people for indeed Christianity is broad enough to include all ethnic groups.

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) might here serve as an example. His seven years of missionary service at Stockbridge, Massachusetts could be thought of as formative in his theological understanding of Indians specifically and other religions generally.⁴⁴ Early in his thoughts about Native Americans, Edwards believed them to be "beasts." However, as he came to know many Indians during his mission to the Mahicans he came to believe that the Indian people often exhibited a morality that was absent from Euro-Americans. As an ethnically distinct group he



saw no reason for their exclusion from the hope of the gospel. As Gerald McDermott noted,

Edwards, in contrast, proclaimed to his Indian hearers, "We are no better than you in no Respect." His forefathers, he asserted, were once in spiritual darkness like the Indians, and were given light only by the kindness of God. So the English too had been heathen once, and now had religious knowledge only because of God's gratuitous favor. Now it was the Indians' turn to receive that same kindness and light.⁴⁵

The third lesson gleaned from U.S. relations to Native Americans is the significance of cultivating understanding when worldviews differ so dramatically. A lack of cultural, religious and ethnic familiarity with the other produces tensions that, unless reduced, will result in social and geographic displacement of the other if not war itself. Of particular importance in U.S./Native American relations was the significance of the land. Indian belief in land was well stated by Chief Standing Bear (1834-1908) of the Sioux, "The Indian, as well as all other creatures that were given birth and grew, were sustained by the common mother-earth. He was therefore kin to all living things and he gave to all creatures equal rights with himself. Everything of earth was loved and revered."⁴⁶ Exploiting the land of its natural resources for self-advancement was something foreign to the Native American.⁴⁷

Contrastingly, Euro-Americans believed it was their God-given right to subdue the land and manipulate it for their benefit. It was this motivation that led Euro-Americans to Georgia for gold as it was the same motivation for the migration westward to the Black Hills. Even today, as Michael Lawson pointed out, "the federal government persists in maintaining peremptory powers over tribal lands and continues to support White interests in decisions affecting native resources."⁴⁸ Having such a worldview was not only ethnocentric, it was also environmentally disastrous as unbridled exploitation has contributed to our current environmental crisis.

While it is true that the Jews were called into a covenant relationship with Yahweh that included the possession of land and displacement of people it is equally true that one of the conditions of possessing the land was to represent the Almighty and be a testimony to his faithfulness. They failed and lost the land. For Christians, there was no such land covenant. Christians, more so than others, should understand that the land, all land, is a part of God's self-revelation and it declares his glory in some form (Ps 19:1-6; Rom 1:20). It will at some point in the future

be redeemed as will all of God's creation (Col 1:19-20). It cannot be possessed by humans because it is already God's. As such, there is a stewardship that is entrusted to us that demands its care.

God is no respecter of geo-political boundaries. All land is part of his creation. He allows people to arbitrarily divide his creation; however, this does not assume divine favor of such boundaries. Though governments are established and sustained by his sovereignty, this does not necessarily mean that such governments are just nor does it ensure that such governments will care for the indigenous people found within their boundaries. Being so, sustainable peace can only be achieved when humanity realizes its position before the creator of the land. Only when we understand that we are stewards rather than possessors can we fathom the responsibility of assuring peaceful co-existence.

Conclusion

The Euro-American relationship with Native Americans is only one example of how an ethnic group attempted to dispossess others of their land and culture because of a flawed ideology and lack of worldview understanding. This is not to suggest that the Native Americans are blameless. Their attempt to retain the land as their own possession betrays their understanding that the land was endowed to them by the Great Spirit.

It is true that the original European settlers of North America came for religious reasons, but it is equally true that commerce was a motivating factor as well. By the time of the formation of the colonies into the United States of America, immigration was motivated by the desire to possess a piece of the American Dream rather than religious freedom *per se*. The continuous expansion westward was not due to the desire to flee religious persecution (except for the case of the Mormons), but for the hope of land ownership and prosperity. What resulted was a profound ignorance of other worldviews that instigated a cycle of war and death for nearly three hundred years.

Unfortunately, wars will not cease. U.S. actions in the 18-19th century have provided and continue to provide ample justification for other nation-states to dispossess indigenous people of their rights to land.⁴⁹ Such justification without the desire to understand the worldviews of these people has led and will continue to lead to untold fighting and death. If there is any hope it remains that the United States of America must acknowledge culpability in its treatment of native peoples and make restitution by re-appropriating land to Native Americans if for no other reason than to be an example to other nation-states.⁵⁰ In this manner, perhaps there might be a chance to demonstrate what is certainly a part of a Christian worldview, "Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, gracious to each other just as God in Christ has been gracious to you" (Eph 4:32 my translation).



At a time when the Five Nations of the Iroquois were at war, so the legend goes, the Great Spirit sent a Peacemaker in their midst. He told them the following story and it is a good reminder for today:

Once there was a boy named Rabbit Foot. He was always looking and listening. He knew how to talk to the animals so the animals would talk to him.

One day as he walked out in the woods he heard the sound of a great struggle coming from a clearing just over the hill. So he climbed that hilltop to look down.

What he saw surprised him. There was a great snake coiled in a circle. It had caught a huge frog and although the frog struggled the snake was slowly swallowing its legs.

Rabbit Foot came closer and spoke to the frog. "He has really got you, my friend." The frog looked up at Rabbit Foot. "Waæhe! That is so," the frog said.

Rabbit Foot nodded, then said to the frog, "Do you see the snake's tail there, just in front of your mouth? Why not do to him what he's doing to you?"

Then the huge frog reached out and grabbed the snake's tail. He began to stuff it into his mouth as Rabbit Foot watched both of them.

The snake swallowed more of the frog, the frog swallowed more of the snake and the circle got smaller and smaller until both of them swallowed one last time and just like that, they both were gone.

They had eaten each other, the Peacemaker said. And in much the same way, unless you give up war and learn to live together in peace that also will happen to you.⁵¹

¹The United Nations estimates that there are more than 370 million indigenous people in 70 countries. In 2007 the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People was recognized by 143 member states. Noticeably not a part of the countries recognizing the non-binding declaration are Australia, Canada,

New Zealand and the United States. For more see: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=23794&Cr=indigenous&Cr1>

²See the most recent UN press release, "Human Rights Council defers decision on UN probe into Gaza conflict" (2 October 2009): <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=32407&Cr=palestin&Cr1=>

³The U.S. government currently recognizes 564 sovereign Indian nations representing 1.9 million people (see <http://www.doi.gov/bia/index.html>) and has 371 signed treaties most of which have been abrogated based on national interests. Treaty-making between the U.S. and Indian tribes ended in 1871 by an act of Congress (see N. Bruce Duthu, *American Indians and the Law* [New York: Penguin, 2008], 50).

⁴George Jennings noted, "On occasion the conquerors even relied upon biological warfare, sending the Indians clothing known to be infected with smallpox, diphtheria, or other diseases to which Indians had little resistance." See George J. Jennings, "A Model for Christian Missions to the American Indians," *Missiology: An International Review*, 11, no. 1 (1983): 60.

⁵David Naugle, *Worldview: The History of a Concept* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), xix.

⁶Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 89.

⁷*Ibid.*, 52.

⁸Fredrik Barth, "Introduction," in *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, ed. Fredrick Barth (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1969), 12-14.

⁹George A. de Voss, "Ethnic Pluralism: Conflict and Accommodation," in *Ethnic Identity: Creation, Conflict and Accommodation*, ed. Lola Romanucci-Ross and George A. de Voss (Walnut Creek, Calif.: AltaMira, 1995), 18.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 17.

¹¹Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Karen E. Fields (New York: Free Press, 1995): 44

¹²Geertz, *The Interpretation of Culture*, 90.

¹³Steve Bruce, *Religion in the Modern World: From Cathedrals to Cults* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 7.

¹⁴Jake Page, *In the Hands of the Great Spirit: The 20,000-Year History of American Indians* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 175. See also Francis Jennings, "Goals and Functions of Puritan Missions to Indians," *Ethnohistory* 18, no. 3 (1971): 197-212.

¹⁵See for example Alfred A. Cave, *The Pequot War* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1996) and John Mason, *A Brief History of the Pequot War* (1656; reprint, Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms, Inc., 1966).

¹⁶See Daniel K. Richter, *Facing East from Indian Country: A Native History of Early America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard, 2001), 103.

¹⁷Kevin Kenny, *Peaceable Kingdom Lost: The Paxton Boys and the Destruction of William Penn's Holy Experiment* (New York: Oxford, 2009).

¹⁸Chief Standing Bear, "The Symbol of Extinction," in *Cry of the Thunderbird: The American Indian's Own Story*, Charles Hamilton, ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1950), 215.



¹⁹Report of Henry Knox on the Northwestern Indians (June 15, 1789) *American State Papers: Indian Affairs*, I: 13-14.

²⁰Joyce Appleby, *Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Henry Holt, 2003), 105.

²¹Anthony F. C. Wallace, *Jefferson and the Indians: The Tragic Fate of the First Americans* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 1999), 11.

²²Appleby, *Thomas Jefferson*, 3.

²³*Ibid.*, 18.

²⁴Article 2 of the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide states that genocide relates to any act that is committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group. See <http://www.hrweb.org/legal/genocide.html>. Among acts of genocide are 1) killing group members, 2) causing serious bodily or mental harm to group members, 3) deliberately inflicting conditions that would result in physical destruction of a group either in whole or in part, 4) imposing birth control, 5) forcibly transferring a group's children to another group. According to the convention, the U.S. treatment of Native Americans was genocide.

²⁵Wallace, *Jefferson and the Indians*, 206.

²⁶President Thomas Jefferson to Governor [of Indiana Territory] William H. Harrison (February 27, 1803).

²⁷Wallace, *Jefferson and the Indians*, 239.

²⁸Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek and Seminole people made up the Five Civilized Tribes due to the fact that they adopted many of Euro-American customs.

²⁹It should be noted that many Christian mission agencies and missionaries spoke out against the Indian Removal Act often at great personal risk. See R. Pierce Beaver, *Church, State and the American Indians: Two and a Half Centuries of Partnership in Missions Between Protestant Churches and Government* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1966); John A. Andrew III, *From Revivals to Removal: Jeremiah Evarts, the Cherokee Nation, and the Search for the Soul of America* (Athens: University of Georgia, 1992); Bradley J. Gundlach, "Early American Missions from the Revolution to the Civil War," in *The Great Commission: Evangelicals and the History of World Missions*, ed. Martin I. Klauber and Scott M. Manetsch (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2008), 66-88. Special thanks to Prof. Gundlach from drawing my attention to the missionary efforts of ABCFM missionaries. Even though they imposed Euro-American Christianity on native people, they demonstrated the will to actively engage the political authorities on behalf of the Indians.

³⁰What makes the Indian Removal Act especially deplorable is the fact that several Indian tribes had been assimilated, in some degree, into Euro-American culture. Jackson, who did not favor tribal rights and was known by the Indians as Sharp Knife, assured their removal in spite of the Act's unconstitutionality.

An estimated 30,000 Native Americans perished under Jackson's policy. See Peter Nabokov, *Native American Testimony: A Chronicle of Indian-White Relations from Prophecy to the Present, 1492-2000* (New York: Penguin, 1999), 145-151.

³¹Black Hawk, "A Tour of the East," in *Cry of the Thunderbird: The American Indian's Own Story*, Charles Hamilton, ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1950), 217.

³²Thomas Hart Benton, *Congressional Globe*, 29:1 (1846), 917-18

³³Josiah Bunting III, *Ulysses S. Grant* (New York: Henry Holt, 2004), 117. Citizenship was not granted to Native Americans until 1924.

³⁴Reservations continue to be a place of discontent for many Native Americans. In 2005 the unemployment rate on the reservations was 49 percent. Twenty-nine percent of those employed live under the poverty level. See American Indian Population and Labor Force Report (2005) at <http://www.bia.gov/idc/groups/public/documents/text/idc-001719.pdf>

³⁵Chief Plenty-Coup, "The Character of the White Man," in *Cry of the Thunderbird: The American Indian's Own Story*, Charles Hamilton, ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1950), 213-214.

³⁶Bunting III, *Ulysses S. Grant*, 120.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 119.

³⁸Chief Standing Bear, "The Symbol of Extinction," in *Cry of the Thunderbird: The American Indian's Own Story*, Charles Hamilton, ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1950), 214-215.

³⁹Ulysses S. Grant, "Second Annual Message to Congress," December 5, 1870 in Francis Paul Prucha, eds., *Documents of United States Indian Policy*, 3rd ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2000), 134.

⁴⁰Chief Spotted Tail, "Confusion of the White Man's Religion," in *Cry of the Thunderbird: The American Indian's Own Story*, Charles Hamilton, ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1950), 241.

⁴¹See for example David E. Stannard, *American Holocaust: The Conquest of the New World* (New York: Oxford, 1992).

⁴²See Stephen P. Kennedy, "From Religious Rights to Indigenous Rights: Protecting the Rights of Native Peoples to Religious Worship," in *Perspectives on Post-Christendom Spiritualities*, ed. Michael T. Cooper (Sydney: Morling, forthcoming).

⁴³Kenneth M. Morrison, *The Embattled Northeast: The Elusive Ideal of Alliance in Abenaki-Euramerican Relations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 50.

⁴⁴See for example Gerald R. McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods: Christian Theology, Enlightenment Religion, and Non-Christian Faiths* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁴⁵Gerald R. McDermott, "Jonathan Edwards and American Indians: The Devil Sucks Their Blood," *New England Quarterly*, 72, no. 4 (1999):539-557. Special thanks to Prof. McDermott for sharing this article with me.



⁴⁶Chief Standing Bear, "The Symbol of Extinction," in *Cry of the Thunderbird: The American Indian's Own Story*, Charles Hamilton, ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1950), 215.

⁴⁷Ritcher, *Facing East from Indian Country*, 55-59.

⁴⁸Michael L. Lawson, *Damned Indians: The Pick-Sloan Plan and the Missouri River Sioux, 1944-1980* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1994), xxviii.

⁴⁹Consider for example Adolf Hitler who touted the superiority of the Aryan race as expressed by the fact that wherever they went they eventually overcame obstacles. It seems apparent that to Hitler the Jews should succumb to the same fate as the Native Americans, "We must bear in mind that in the time when the American continent was being opened up, numerous Aryans fought for their livelihood as trappers, hunters, etc., and often in larger troops with wife and children, always on the move, so that their existence was completely like that of the nomads. But as soon as their increasing number and better implements permitted them to clear the wild soil and make a stand against the natives, more and more settlements sprang up in the land." (*Mein Kampf*, trans., Ralph Manheim [Boston: Mifflin, 1999], 304). John Toland noted, "Hitler's concept of concentration camps as well as the practicality of genocide owed much, so he claimed, to his studies of English and United States history. He admired the camps for Boer prisoners in South Africa and for the Indians in the wild west; and often praised to his inner circle the efficiency of America's extermination - by starvation and uneven combat - of the red savages who could not be tamed by captivity." *Adolf Hitler* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976), 702. See also Stannard *American Holocaust*, 150.

⁵⁰In 1980 the Supreme Court in *United States v. Sioux Nation of Indians* recognized the illegal seizure of Indian lands and awarded the tribe \$85 million in compensation which they summarily refused with the claim that their land, the Black Hills, was not for sale. (see *United States v. Sioux Nation of Indians*, 448 U.S. 371 [1980]. Supreme Court's ruling that established reparation for illegally seized Indian lands). "As of this week [2-6 AUG 2002] the money held in trust by the United States Government for Docket 74B is \$623,968,858 million. The money allocated for Docket 74A is \$88,435,465 million. This brings the total monetary award owed to the Sioux Nation to \$712,404,323 million." See Tim Giago, "Black Hills Claims Settlement Revisited," *Lakota Journal* (August 2002). Information from http://www.dlncoalition.org/dln_issues/black_hills_articles.htm. Accessed 26 September 2009.

⁵¹Joseph Bruchac, "Rabbit Foot: A Story of the Peacemaker," in *On the Wings of Peace: Writers and Illustrators Speak Out for Peace in Memory of Hiroshima and Nagasaki*, ed. Sheila Hamanaka (New York: Clarion Books, 1995), 69-71.