

## Resource 2: Europeans Views of Native Americans

### Word Box

- noble - having or showing fine and admirable qualities
- savage - animal like; fierce, violent, and uncontrolled
- treacherous - likely to betray trust; marked by hidden dangers

### What Did Europeans Think About Native Americans?

You may recall that when Columbus first set foot in America in 1492. He thought that he landed in a part of Asia known as the Indies - an area that Marco Polo wrote about. You may also recall that this mistake caused Columbus to name the people he met in America “Indians.” They called themselves Taino.

One effect of naming the people Indians was that this led people who read about Columbus’ voyages to think that all people in the Americas were the same, that they were all Indians who looked alike, lived alike. Some people still think about Native Americans this way. But there are and were many differences among the people who we now call Native Americans, American Indians, or Indigenous people. They had different names, different customs, different beliefs, different languages, and different ways of living. The map below shows just some of the major Native American groups that lived in the area that became our country - the United States before Columbus arrived. There were different tribes and they often lived in very different ways.



### How Did Those Views Change and Why Did They Change?

News of Columbus’ “discovery” started a massive movement of people from Europe to America. As time passed, different Europeans came in contact with many different Native American groups. Europeans gradually began to meet very different groups of Native Americans.

Due to the different Native Americans they met, their experiences with them, and what others read about those experiences, Europeans began to think about “Indians” in two different ways. One way involved viewing Native Americans as “noble savages” and “simple children of nature.” In other words, people who had admirable qualities but lived

more like animals. While this was the more positive way of thinking about Native Americans, it was still part of a way of thinking that considered Native Americans as “savages” or “simple children.” In other words, even this more positive way of thinking about Native Americans involved thinking about them as inferior to Europeans.

The other way of thinking about Native Americans was much more negative. From this point of view, Native Americans were “treacherous savages” and “dirty savages” who lived more like animals and could not be trusted.

### **Why Did Europeans Think About Native Americans in These Ways?**

A major reason is because Europeans judged Native Americans based on how Europeans lived, how Europeans defined “civilized” and “civilization.” Their thinking was so heavily influenced by what they did and liked that they did not consider the possibility that “other” people who lived differently were also civilized and equal, not inferior. They just preferred living differently.

The Europeans point of view about being civilized had certain characteristics that included:

- wearing “proper” clothing
- speaking a language that Europeans understood
- having a language that allowed them to write as well as speak
- living in “orderly” ways
- living in permanent houses
- farming to grow and have food
- being Christians (Calloway, p. 81)

When the Europe and arrived, they saw that the people in America had none of the following:

- sailing ships
- guns
- metal tools
- printing presses
- vehicles with wheels
- churches
- steel weapons such as swords on knives

They also saw that many Native Americans lived in wigwams (tents or small huts) and hunted and fished for their food rather than farming and raising animals like pigs. And when they did see Native Americans growing crops such as corn on farms, Native women were working the farms. Men did this work in Europe, not women. So, the Europeans concluded the Native American men were lazy. (Calloway, p. 81)

**Source:** Calloway, Colin G. (2012) First Peoples: A Documentary Survey of American Indian History. Fourth Edition