

Other Voices—

Red Men

Set the Pattern

Have you ever thought much about what makes the United States so distinctly different from any other country on earth? It's because of the Indians. This is why America is not a carbon copy of the European countries where most of our people originally came from. Nearly everything that is distinctively different about this country is Indian from A to Z. Cigarettes, chewing gum, rubber balls, popcorn, corn flakes, flapjacks, maple syrup—American disrespect for the eternal authority of parents, presidents and would-be dictators.

And the lack of peasants on American soil was all inherited from our Indian predecessors. Scholars are just beginning to learn that the effect of Indian culture on white customs far overshadows the effect that white methods have had on Indian practices. For instance, four-sevenths of our national farm produce today is made up of plants which were tamed by the Indians long before Columbus ever thought of sailing the ocean blue

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'I may not agree with you but I will defend unto death your right to say it.' - Voltaire

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in 1492. Take away corn, tobacco, white potatoes, sweet potatoes, beans, peanuts, tomatoes, pumpkins, chocolate, cotton and rubber, and we're practically out of business. That's over half of our national farm income, and we got them all from the Indians.

Ask if anyone should ask you about Irish potatoes, Turkish tobacco, India Rubber and Egyptian cotton, you can tell him they're nothing but respectable old world names for American Indian products. It seems that in the old days things American were not looked upon with a great deal of favor by the self-styled superior Europeans, so they gave the new world products some old world names. And if it had not been for the rich Indian democratic traditions, it's hard to tell what kind of government we might have today. Voting for women, the idea of several states within a state (Federalism), the belief that Chiefs are servants of the people rather than their masters, and the insistence that the community must recognize the difference between men and their dreams and respect it, all were in practice here before Columbus landed. The Indians knew about hybrid corn, and when we finally woke up to it, it increased the yield 40 per cent.

Take the field of medicine. Where did we get quinine, cocaine, cascara, ipecac, witch hazel, oil of wintergreen, petroleum jelly and amica? All from the Indians! For 400 years physicians and botanists have been examining and analyzing the flora of America and they've yet to discover a single medicinal herb that was not known and used by the Indians.

Our love of the outdoors...the sun, water, tanned complexion, bodily beauty, athletic prowess and cleanliness can be added to the list. In fact, the first thing Queen Isabella attempted to do in her plan to civilize those so-called savages was to restrict them from bathing so often!

Playing ball was a game we learned from the Indians, and now psychiatrists are learning the Indians also had a lot on the ball when it came to child care. Anyway, it's interesting to learn that we taught the Indians a lot less than they taught us. When the first settlers saw the red men burning weeds and inhaling the smoke, they thought they were crazy: but that was a custom that caught on, too, and now millions of men and women all over the earth are daily following this quaint Indian practice.

By absorbing a lot of the Indian culture, attitudes and abundant products, the United States is completely different and unique as a nation, and the people are different, too, and the effect of the American Indian changed the manners and customs of people all over the world.

-From the St. Christopher's Mission bulletin, Bluff, Utah.

-The NAVAJO TIMES