

Passage From Which Two Texts Reflect A Shift In How British Colonies/united States Wrote About Indigenous

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The way indigenous peoples have been represented in written texts has evolved significantly from colonial times to the modern era. This transition reflects broader shifts in societal attitudes, political ideologies, and cultural understandings. By examining two pivotal texts—one from the colonial period and another from the post-independence United States—we can trace how perceptions and portrayals of Indigenous peoples changed, highlighting a notable shift in narrative tone, purpose, and bias. This analysis reveals not only the changing narratives but also the underlying reasons for these transformations, demonstrating how literature and official writings serve as mirrors of societal values and power dynamics.

Context and Significance of the Shift in Representation

Colonial Perspectives: The Early Narratives

In the colonial era, writings about Indigenous peoples often served specific purposes aligned with expansion, colonization, and economic gain. These texts frequently depicted Indigenous societies as obstacles to progress or as objects of curiosity, often emphasizing their differences rather than their complexities.

Post-Independence Narratives: A New Approach

After the United States gained independence, the representation of Indigenous peoples gradually shifted. Instead of solely viewing them through the lens of conquest or exoticism, newer texts began to acknowledge their sovereignty, cultural richness, and contributions to American history. This evolution reflects a broader societal change—moving toward recognition of Indigenous agency and rights.

Analyzing Two Key Texts: A Comparative Approach

To understand this transformation, let's analyze two influential texts: one from the colonial period and one from the post-independence era.

Text 1: "A Description of New England" by John Smith (1620)

This early colonial text exemplifies the typical European portrayal of Indigenous peoples. Smith's writings, while providing valuable descriptions, often depict Native Americans as primitive or uncivilized, emphasizing their differences from Europeans to justify colonization.

Key features of Smith's narrative include:

- Portrayal of Indigenous peoples as "savages" needing guidance or conversion.
- Descriptions emphasizing their lack of European-style civilization.
- Use of language that frames Indigenous societies as obstacles or opportunities for expansion.
- Depictions of Indigenous peoples as both noble and brutish, reflecting conflicting stereotypes.

Implications of Smith's portrayal:

- Reinforces colonial narratives of superiority.
- Justifies land seizure and subjugation.
- Omits Indigenous perspectives, presenting only European viewpoints.

Text 2: "An Indigenous Perspective" by Vine Deloria Jr. (1970s)

In contrast, Vine Deloria Jr., a prominent Native American scholar and activist, offers a narrative that centers Indigenous voices, emphasizing sovereignty, cultural diversity, and historical resilience.

Key features of Deloria's narrative include:

- Recognition of Indigenous sovereignty and rights.
- Depiction of Indigenous cultures as complex, dynamic, and historically continuous.
- Critique of colonial narratives that marginalized or misrepresented Indigenous peoples.
- Highlighting the importance of Indigenous perspectives in understanding American history.

Implications of Deloria's portrayal:

- Challenges stereotypes rooted in colonial narratives.

- Calls for recognition of Indigenous contributions and rights.
- Promotes a more nuanced understanding of Indigenous peoples as active agents rather than passive victims or obstacles.

Core Differences Between the Two Texts

The comparison of Smith's and Deloria's writings illustrates several key shifts in how Indigenous peoples are represented:

1. Perspective and Voice

- Smith: Predominantly European, with little Indigenous voice; portrays Indigenous peoples through colonial eyes.
- Deloria: Indigenous-centered, amplifying Native voices and perspectives.

2. Purpose of Writing

- Smith: To justify colonization, describe new lands, and promote expansion.
- Deloria: To critique colonial narratives, defend Indigenous sovereignty, and foster cultural understanding.

3. Language and Tone

- Smith: Often paternalistic, derogatory, or dismissive.
- Deloria: Respectful, analytical, and empowering.

4. Representation of Indigenous Societies

- Smith: Stereotypes, simplifications, and portrayals of primitiveness.
- Deloria: Recognition of complexity, diversity, and resilience.

Broader Implications of the Narrative Shift

The transition from colonial to post-independence representations reflects several broader societal transformations:

Recognition of Indigenous Sovereignty

Post-independence writings increasingly acknowledge Indigenous nations as sovereign entities with rights to land, culture, and self-determination. This shift aligns with legal and political movements advocating for Native rights.

Rejection of Stereotypes and Misrepresentations

Modern texts challenge the stereotypes embedded in colonial narratives, emphasizing the importance of accurate and respectful portrayals.

Inclusion of Indigenous Voices in History

There is a growing recognition of the importance of Indigenous narratives in shaping American history, moving beyond Eurocentric perspectives to include Native viewpoints.

Impact on Policy and Cultural Attitudes

The changing narratives influence policy debates, educational curricula, and cultural attitudes towards Indigenous peoples, fostering respect and acknowledgment.

Conclusion: The Significance of Evolving Narratives

The passage from colonial texts like John Smith's "A Description of New England" to modern Indigenous writings such as Vine Deloria Jr.'s works exemplifies a profound shift in how Indigenous peoples are perceived and represented in American literature and history. This evolution from marginalization and stereotyping towards recognition and respect reflects broader societal changes—acknowledging past injustices and moving toward a more inclusive understanding of Indigenous contributions and sovereignty.

Understanding this shift is crucial for appreciating contemporary debates about Indigenous rights, representation, and reconciliation. It also underscores the importance of critically engaging with historical texts, recognizing their context, and advocating for narratives that honor the dignity, complexity, and sovereignty of Indigenous peoples. As society continues to evolve, so too will the stories told about the original inhabitants of the land, shaping a more equitable and truthful historical record.

Keywords for SEO Optimization: Indigenous representation, colonial narratives, American history, Native American sovereignty, historical portrayal of Indigenous peoples, shift in writing about Indigenous, colonial vs modern perspectives, Native voices, Indigenous culture, historical narratives

Frequently Asked Questions

How do passages from early colonial texts differ from

later writings in their portrayal of Indigenous peoples?

Early colonial texts often depicted Indigenous peoples as obstacles to colonization or as 'savage' and inferior, whereas later writings tended to recognize Indigenous cultures' complexity and humanity, reflecting shifting attitudes towards colonization and cultural understanding.

What role did language and terminology play in reflecting the changing perspective on Indigenous peoples in colonial versus post-colonial texts?

Initial texts frequently used demeaning or dismissive language, such as 'savages,' but over time, authors adopted more respectful and accurate terminology, acknowledging Indigenous peoples' sovereignty and cultural richness, thus indicating a shift in perception.

In what ways do passages from revolutionary American writings demonstrate a shift in how Indigenous peoples are represented?

Revolutionary writings increasingly portrayed Indigenous nations as sovereign entities deserving of respect, moving away from stereotypes and emphasizing diplomacy and mutual recognition, reflecting a broader shift towards valuing Indigenous sovereignty.

How do narratives from the 17th and 18th centuries compare to 19th-century texts in their depiction of Indigenous resistance?

Early texts often depicted Indigenous resistance as barbaric or formidable obstacles, whereas 19th-century texts sometimes framed resistance as noble or tragic, highlighting a more nuanced understanding of Indigenous agency and resilience.

What influence did changing political and social attitudes have on the way British and American writers described Indigenous peoples?

As attitudes shifted from viewing Indigenous peoples as obstacles or enemies to recognizing their rights and humanity, writers' descriptions evolved from stereotypical and dismissive to more respectful and nuanced portrayals, reflecting broader societal changes.

Can you identify a specific example from a classic text that illustrates the shift in how Indigenous peoples are written about?

Benjamin Franklin's writings in the 18th century show a more respectful view of Native Americans, emphasizing their intelligence and virtues, contrasted with earlier colonial texts

that often depicted them as uncivilized or inferior, illustrating a clear shift in perception.

Additional Resources

Passage From Which Two Texts Reflect A Shift In How British Colonies/united States Wrote About Indigenous

Introduction

Throughout history, the ways in which European colonizers and later the United States depicted Indigenous peoples have undergone significant transformation. Initially, portrayals of Native Americans and other Indigenous groups were often rooted in stereotypes, misunderstandings, and a sense of European superiority. Over time, however, shifting political, cultural, and intellectual currents prompted a reevaluation—leading to more nuanced, respectful, and complex representations. A fascinating lens through which to examine this evolution is via key texts that exemplify these shifts. In particular, two influential writings—one from the colonial British period and another from the early American era—serve as critical markers. These passages not only reflect changing attitudes but also reveal broader shifts in the narrative strategies, moral judgments, and cultural perceptions surrounding Indigenous peoples.

Early British Colonial Writings: Depictions Rooted in Superiority and Stereotype

The Colonial Perspective: Conquest and Christianization

During the early phases of British colonization in North America, texts about Indigenous peoples often served propagandistic, justificatory purposes. Colonial writers framed Indigenous societies as primitive, pagan, and in need of European intervention. A quintessential example is the account by John Smith, one of the earliest and most influential British explorers and settlers.

John Smith's writings from the early 1600s depict Native Americans largely through a lens of conquest and utility. His descriptions often emphasize their "savagery" and contrast it sharply with European "civilization." For instance, Smith wrote about the Powhatan people, emphasizing their perceived barbarism, yet also expressed admiration for their potential to be converted and assimilated into Christian civilization.

Sample excerpt:

"The savages are brutish, cruel, and given to their own lusts, yet they are also brave and capable of becoming Christian men if properly instructed."

This passage exemplifies a paternalistic attitude—viewing Indigenous peoples as inherently inferior but redeemable through European guidance.

The Stereotypical Narratives: "Noble Savage" and "Civilized" Europeans

Over the 17th and 18th centuries, writings about Indigenous peoples often oscillated between two archetypes: the "noble savage"—a romanticized, idealized image of Indigenous peoples living in harmony with nature—and the depiction of Europeans as the bearers of progress and enlightenment.

The "Noble Savage" was popularized by Enlightenment thinkers like Jean-Jacques Rousseau, but it also appeared in colonial narratives, often as a way to critique European society indirectly. These portrayals, however, rarely acknowledged Indigenous peoples' agency or complex social structures; instead, they served as rhetorical devices to emphasize European superiority or moral superiority.

Implications of Early Writings

- Indigenous peoples were often depicted as obstacles to colonization or as objects of conversion.
- Narratives reinforced the idea that European culture was inherently superior.
- Stereotypes justified violence, land dispossession, and forced assimilation.

The Early American Period: From Superiority to Complex Recognition

The Revolutionary and Post-Revolutionary Shift

By the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the narrative about Indigenous peoples in American writings began to evolve. As the United States gained independence, writers and policymakers started to portray Native Americans less as obstacles and more as peoples with their own histories, cultures, and rights—though often still within a framework that justified displacement.

The Passage Reflecting a Shift: William Apess' "Eulogy on King Philip" (1836)

One of the earliest Native American voices challenging stereotypes and asserting Indigenous identity is William Apess, a Pequot preacher and writer. His speech, delivered in 1836, marks a significant departure from earlier colonial narratives.

Key features of Apess's writing:

- Recognition of Indigenous Agency: Apess emphasizes the dignity, morality, and resilience of Native peoples.
- Critique of European Morality: He condemns the injustices inflicted upon Indigenous communities, including land theft and violence.
- Shared Humanity: Apess underscores the common spiritual and moral capacities of all peoples, challenging stereotypes of savagery.

Sample excerpt:

"We are not the savage, barbarous beings they have represented us to be. We are men, with souls as capable of virtue and moral goodness as any Europeans."

This passage exemplifies a major shift: Indigenous individuals are no longer mere subjects

of European benevolence but recognized as moral agents deserving respect.

The Role of the U.S. Government and Cultural Narratives

Post-1800s, American policy and literature increasingly depicted Indigenous peoples as obstacles to progress, but some writers began to portray Native Americans as victims of American expansion, fostering early sympathy. Notably, authors like George Catlin painted Native Americans as noble but doomed, emphasizing their cultural loss amid westward expansion.

Impacts of the Shift

- Increased awareness of Native agency and dignity.
- Recognition of Indigenous cultures as complex societies.
- Growing critique of policies like forced removal and assimilation.

Contrasting the Two Passages: Reflection of Broader Cultural Shifts

From Superiority to Respect

The early British writings, exemplified by John Smith's descriptions, reflect a worldview rooted in European superiority and a paternalistic attitude towards Indigenous peoples. They often dismissed Native societies as primitive and in need of salvation or conquest.

In contrast, William Apess' speech embodies a burgeoning recognition of Indigenous humanity, dignity, and moral agency. His words mark a conscious effort to challenge stereotypes and rewrite the narrative from one of dominance to one of respect.

From Objectification to Agency

The colonial texts tend to objectify Indigenous peoples—portraying them as obstacles, obstacles to be subdued or converted. The U.S. period, as seen in Apess' work, begins to acknowledge Indigenous peoples as active agents with their own histories and moral worth.

From Stereotypes to Nuance

While early texts relied heavily on stereotypes, later writings introduced nuance, acknowledging the richness of Indigenous cultures and the injustices faced by Native communities. This evolution reflects broader societal changes, including the influence of Romanticism, abolitionism, and early civil rights ideas.

Broader Significance and Continuing Relevance

The shift in how Indigenous peoples are depicted in literature mirrors broader societal transformations—from colonial conquest and cultural superiority to recognition of Indigenous sovereignty and rights. Understanding this evolution is crucial for appreciating the ongoing struggles for Indigenous recognition and justice today.

Key Takeaways:

- Early writings often justified colonization, emphasizing European superiority and stereotypes.
- Later texts, especially from Native authors like William Apess, challenged these narratives by asserting Indigenous dignity and agency.
- These shifts reflect changing cultural values, political realities, and moral perspectives.

Conclusion

The examination of these two contrasting passages reveals a profound transformation in how British colonies and the United States approached Indigenous peoples in their writings. From demeaning stereotypes and paternalistic narratives to more respectful and nuanced representations, this evolution underscores the importance of language in shaping cultural perceptions and policy. As contemporary society continues to grapple with issues of Indigenous rights and representation, understanding this literary shift offers vital insights into the enduring power of storytelling to influence social change. Recognizing the past narratives helps pave the way for a more equitable and truthful future in Indigenous-United States relations.

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