When Christopher Columbus came ashore in the Bahamas, North America alone was home for an estimated two to ten million people. The Spanish admiral, believing he had found the long-sought western passage to the Asian mainland, made the notorious error of dubbing them "Indians." By then these Native American peoples had developed some three hundred distinct cultures and spoke over two hundred different languages. In North America their numbers were most concentrated along the coastal strip that is now California—about fifty-six people every fifty square miles. The Southwest was a second major population center—nearly fourteen inhabitants per fifty square miles—while east of the Mississippi lived an average of nine natives per fifty square miles.

Like human societies everywhere, these Indian cultures had not been standing still. By 1492 North America had already seen the rise and fall of an array of Native American civilizations. From Canada to Florida, from the Atlantic Coast west to California, archeologists have discovered many thousands of pre-Columbian earth mounds, the result of the work of tens of thousands of Native Americans. Some of the earthworks were foundations of temples built by Ohio and Mississippi River valley peoples who also produced striking art in pottery, copper, and shell. Other mounds were burial sites, constructed by farming groups who flourished over three thousand years ago. Excavations at Cahokia, Illinois, near present-day East St. Louis, have uncovered the remains of a prehistoric city, which once contained, it is estimated, from forty to sixty thousand inhabitants. And throughout the canyons and mesas of southern Colorado and northern New Mexico, pre-Columbian apartment-house remains can still be visited, stone-and-adobe terraced dwellings skillfully built up to four and five stories in height. Erected by the fabled Anasazi, centuries before the arrival of the white man, they were the homes of highly religious and relatively peaceful farming societies.

Some of these cultures had disappeared entirely by the end of the fifteenth century. Others were undergoing profound social transformation. It is intriguing to imagine what civilizations might have developed if the natural evolutionary process had been allowed to continue. Nonetheless, the white explorers and settlers who brought it to a halt found an impressive range of Indian groups. The word "tribe" does not do justice to the extreme variety of their political organizations, methods of food-gathering, cultural and religious patterns, and population size.

In the Northeast the first whites arrived after the five Iroquoian tribes had established a permanent political union. Their Great League, founded in the late fifteenth century by the legendary Hiawatha and Deganawidah, became so formidable that the French and British were forced to negotiate with them as an equal sovereignty. In the Southeast, whites encountered the thousands of loosely knit Muskogean-speaking Indians who came to be known as the Creek Confederacy. In Louisiana they met the last remnants of the aristocratic Natchez, whose hierarchical society was ruled by an absolute monarch known as "The Sun." In Virginia they discovered that the Powhatan Confederacy linked together two hundred villages and thirty different tribes. In California they stumbled upon a seemingly endless succession of independent, isolated groups with widely different languages, and bands so small they are better classified as "tribelets."

These native bands, tribelets, pueblo city-states, nations, and confederacies were as culturally different from each other as the nations of Europe. Most had developed elaborate mythologies with stories for the origin of the rivers, mountains, and valleys in their region. In both the East and the West their territories were covered with "traces," networks of narrow, moccasin-worn paths, trails that had been followed by hunters and warriors for generations. In the Midwest and on the Great Plains their lands were crisscrossed with wider, equally ancient thoroughfares along which entire tribes intercepted migrating buffalo and cut through mountain ranges.

Thus North America was well discovered by the time Columbus and his kind set foot on its shores. And actually Columbus was not the first European to arrive. In fact, some scholars suggest that the first non-Indians came from Asia. There are Buddhist texts that tell of five beggar priests who sailed from China in A.D. 458. Drifting on the Japanese Current, they are believed to have landed either in Mexico or in Guatemala, a realm they called the Kingdom of Fu-Sang. And it has definitely been established that sometime between A.D. 1006 and 1347, Viking seafarers from Scandinavia fought and traded with the natives of Greenland, Labrador, and Nova Scotia.

In practically every corner of North America one can find tribal stories anticipating the white man's coming. On what is today Martha's Vineyard, an Indian seer said a great white whale would foretell the coming of a strange white race who would crowd out the red men. In Mexico there existed the myth of the bearded white god, Quetzalcoatl, who would return to reclaim his kingdom. Indeed, only a few years before 1519, when the first of the Spanish conquistadores, Hernando Cortez, arrived in Mexico, the

Aztec emperor Montezuma saw ghostly people in his polished, volcanic-glass mirror: they seemed to be "coming massed, coming as conquerors, coming in war panoply. Deer bore them on their backs."

It is possible that some tribes received advance word of early Indian-white meetings, then turned these rumors into predictions. When you read the examples that follow, it is important to remember that "first contact," as the initial encounters between Native Americans and whites are termed by anthropologists, occurred at different times in different places. Generally, the more eastern and southern the locale, the earlier was the first contact. Thus the Hopi Indians of Arizona and the Hurons of eastern Canada had both experienced their first meeting with Europeans by about 1540. But the Sioux of the Dakota plains would not have firsthand knowledge of them for another one hundred and fifty years, and the Wintu of northern California for a half century after that.

Indian society was on the eve of what was to be the most catastrophic confrontation in its history. The Wasco Indians of Oregon have a prophecy story in which a wise old man dreams of strangers with hair on their faces coming from the direction of the rising sun. When he awakens, he gives this advice to his fellow tribesmen: "You people must be careful."

1

HE WILL USE ANY MEANS TO GET WHAT HE WANTS

Dan Katchongva—his Hopi surname means White Cloud Above Horizon—was a revered spiritual leader from Hotevilla, one of Arizona's twelve Hopi towns. When he repeated this prophecy in 1955, during testimony at a Washington congressional hearing, he was in his eighties. Within the oral tradition of the "peaceful ones," as the Hopi call themselves, are narratives foretelling the future of mankind. They often mention the Bahana, the Hopi's lost white brother, who vowed to return to the Hopi to establish peace and spread wisdom. Some Hopi say they wait for him still.

IN ANCIENT TIMES it was prophesied by our forefathers that this land would be occupied by the Indian people and then from somewhere a White Man would come. He will come either with a strong faith and righteous religion which the Great Spirit has also given to him, or he will come after he has abandoned that great Life Plan and fallen to a faith of his own personal ideas which he invented before coming here. It was known that the White Man is an intelligent person, an inventor of many words, a man who knows how to influence people because of his sweet way of talking and that he will use many of these things upon us when he comes. We knew that this land beneath us was composed of many things that we might want to use later such as mineral resources. We knew that this is the wealthiest part of this continent, because it is here the Great Spirit lives. We knew that the White Man will search for the things that look good to him, that he will use many good ideas in order to obtain his heart's desire, and we knew that if he had strayed from the Great Spirit he would use *any* means to get what he wants. These things we were warned to watch, and we today know that those prophecies were true because we can see how many new and selfish ideas and plans are being put before us. We know that if we accept these things we will lose our land and give up our very lives.

DAN KATCHONGVA, *Hopi*

2

WHITE RABBIT GOT LOTSA EVERYTHING

In 1939, Lucy Young, a member of the Wintu tribe of northern California, told a local historian her life story. Although she was nearly blind from cataracts and over ninety years old at the time, her storytelling gifts remained sharp. The humorous, poignant events she recalls here probably took place in the 1840s, just before gold was discovered in Humboldt and Mendocino counties. Later in her reminiscences Mrs. Young describes her family's terrible experiences during the gold rush itself. The gold rushers and homesteaders who flooded into California then were responsible for murdering over fifty thousand Native Americans between 1848 and 1870 alone.

warriors are driven forward like a herd of antelopes to face the foe. It is on account of this manner of fighting—from compulsion and not from personal bravery—that we count no *coup* on them. A lone warrior can do much harm to a large army of them in a bad country."

It was this talk with my uncle that gave me my first clear idea of the white man.

CHARLES ALEXANDER EASTMAN, *Santee Sioux*

2

BEFORE THEY GOT THICK

This tale of the Lipan Apache reads like a southwestern version of the story of the Plymouth Colony legend: Native Americans help white pioneers survive by bringing them gifts of pumpkin and corn seeds and showing them how to plant them. Related by Percy Bigmouth in 1935, it describes events that probably took place in the early nineteenth century when his ancestors were living near the Texas-Louisiana border. During the Indian wars in the Southwest (1845–56), when official policy in Texas called for the brutal extermination of all Indians, the Lipan hid in Mexico. Eventually they made their home with their kinsmen, the Mescalero Apache, in New Mexico.

MY GRANDMOTHER used to tell this story; she told it to my mother. It is about the time when they lived near the gulf. She says that they lived at a place called "Beside the Smooth Water." They used to camp there on the sand. Sometimes a big wave would come up and then they would pick up many seashells. Sometimes they used to find water turtles. They used to find fish too and gather them and eat them.

One time they had a big wave. It was very bad. They thought the ocean was going to come right up. It came up a long way. Living things from the water covered the bank, were washed up. Then, when the sun came out and it was hot all these things began to swell and smelled bad.

One day they looked over the big water. Then someone saw a little black dot over on the water. He came back and told that he had seen that strange thing. Others came out. They sat there and looked. It was getting larger. They waited. Pretty soon it came up. It was a boat. The boat came to the

shore. The Indians went back to the big camp. All the Indians came over and watched. People were coming out. They looked at those people coming out. They saw that the people had blue eyes and were white. They thought these people might live in the water all the time.

They held a council that night. They were undecided whether they should let them live or kill them.

One leader said, "Well, they have a shape just like ours. The difference is that they have light skin and hair."

Another said, "Let's not kill them. They may be a help to us some day. Let's let them go and see what they'll do."

So the next day they watched them. "What shall we call them?" they asked. . . .

Some still wanted to kill them. Others said no. So they decided to let them alone.

The Lipan went away. After a year they said, "Let's go back and see them."

They did so. Only a few were left. Many had starved to death. Some said, "Let's kill them now; they are only a few." But others said, "No, let us be like brothers to them."

It was spring. The Lipan gave them some pumpkin seed and seed corn and told them how to use it. The people took it and after that they got along all right. They raised a little corn and some pumpkins. They started a new life. Later on the Lipan left for a while. When they returned, the white people were getting along very well. The Lipan gave them venison. They were getting along very well. After that, they began to get thick.

PERCY BIGMOUTH, *Lipan Apache*

3

SILMOODAWA GIVES A COMPLETE PERFORMANCE

Following the example set by Christopher Columbus, the Spanish conquistador Hernando Cortez continued the ritual of sending Indians to Europe in order to parade them before royalty. At the court of Charles V, Aztecs posed for artists and juggled for gawking lords and ladies. Later, in the eighteenth century

EXCHANGE BETWEEN WORLDS

Cree trappers bringing beaver skins to the Hudson's Bay post at Fort Pitt in Saskatchewan, Canada

At the time of the Creation, the Cherokee say, the white man was given a stone, and the Indian a piece of silver. Despising the stone, the white man threw it away. Finding the silver equally worthless, the Indian discarded it. Later the white man pocketed the silver as a source of material power; the Indian revered the stone as a source of sacred power. This prophetic story underscores the profound differences in Indian and white value systems. In time the Indian would be forced to use the white man's currency as his medium of exchange, but the white man would never appreciate the Indian's sense of the spiritual potential of an ordinary pebble.

Long before the coming of "the makers of hatchets," as whites were called by the Iroquois, Indians throughout the continent of North America had traded with each other. In the Far West a popular trading spot was the present-day Oregon town of The Dalles. Here a salmon-rich stretch of boiling rapids on the Columbia River divides the world of the Pacific Coast from that of the inland Plateau. To this hub of thriving Indian commerce, controlled by Chinook Indian traders who even exacted tolls along the river, came goods from the Northwest, the Great Plains, the Great Basin, and sometimes from as far away as the Great Lakes. Dealings were conducted in a universal trading language, the "Chinook jargon," which was a potpourri of Salish, Nootka, Chinook, and, later, English words.

In California the Pomo bartered their homemade strings of disk shell beads for abalone and dried kelp from the coastal Yuki, fiber cord and sinew-backed bows from the forest-dwelling Patwin, and furs and iris cord from the inland Yuki. Farther east, Native American trade was just as active. The agricultural Hurons routinely exchanged their corn with the northern Nipissing, a hunting people, for fish and venison. Copper from northern Michigan found its way to tribes in Virginia. Throughout the plains, obsidian, red pipestone, colored slate, flint, and salt were transported over long distances, from village to village.

The first commercial exchange between Indians and whites probably took place in the eleventh century, when natives of Nova Scotia received Viking knives and axes in return for gray fox and sable pelts. In the years ahead, this swap—the exchange of furs for metal—would become the core of Indian and white commerce.

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, as timber, fur-bearing animals, and other natural resources became scarcer in the Old World, Europeans looked across the seas for raw materials. The majority of the renowned early explorers of North America—men like John and Sebastian Cabot (1497), Jacques Cartier (1534), and Henry Hudson (1609)—were actually business agents on the lookout for new markets. Before long, the French, the English, the Dutch—and later the Americans—were competing for exclusive trading privileges with Indian tribes, enticing them with bribes of trinkets, liquor, and guns.

Indians guided Europeans to salt, tobacco, wood, and fish which they then managed to harvest and ship back across the Atlantic. But in collecting

furs and hides, native expertise and manpower were essential. Indians possessed skills to lure and trap animals and techniques for skinning and soft-tanning hides. Next they transported these semifinished goods to white trading posts or waterfront docks. As Indians were encouraged to abandon intertribal trade and devote themselves exclusively to cleaning out the hidden stream dens of mink, marten, ermine, otter, sable, and muskrat, it was the beaver which came to enjoy highest value. Europe's hatmakers were building a multimillion-dollar industry. Whether for their furs, in the North, or for tanned deerskins, the main native commodity in the South, Indians received a range of new goods they quickly found indispensable: knives, the popular tomahawk, scissors, awls, needles, woolen cloth, mirrors, hawk bells, German silver to pound into ornaments, sheet metal to file into arrowheads and lance heads, brass kettles, "demon rum" (from the English), brandy (from the French), and above all, muskets, powder, and shot. By the mid-seventeenth century, such items had become an integral part of woodland Indian life.

Preferring to do business via the rivers, the French fur traders stowed their goods in forty-foot-long birchbark cargo canoes. The English packed their stores on muleback and rode overland to bargain with Indians. Eventually, toward the end of the eighteenth century, individual peddler-traders would be largely replaced by companies that operated strings of frontier trading outposts. Indians hauled their prime winter pelts to these posts in the spring, or bartered with company agents who caught up with tribes on the move.

All this trade transformed patterns of Indian life that had existed unchanged for centuries. Suddenly tribes found themselves competing for white business. As trapping sites were stripped of beaver, Indians battled among themselves for more westerly, fur-rich lands. Commercial agreements between the French and Huron Indians, for example, so angered the Iroquois that they joined forces with both the Dutch and the British, getting ample supplies of firearms in return. This alliance not only contributed decisively to British victory in the French and Indian War, it also enabled the Iroquois to ruthlessly dominate the northeastern fur trade.

When the rebellious colonies—the "thirteen fires" as the Iroquois called them—won independence from England, the United States entered this commercial war. Some posts along the Missouri River profited, but northward the Canadian Blackfoot refused to do business with the Americans. They resented the American habit of sending out white trappers—the legendary mountain men who were indebted to Indians for learning to maneuver in the wilderness—to compete against them in their own territory.

By 1840 high silk hats had become the fashion, and the fur trade was drying up. The Rocky Mountain beaver was nearly extinct. For a while a market in buffalo hides filled the vacuum, but soon white hunters with .50-caliber rifles made those animals just as rare. Between 1872 and 1874 over three and a half million buffalo were slaughtered for their hides, the meat left to rot on the plains.

Thanks in large part to the Indian, North America's natural resources greatly enriched European and American lives and pocketbooks. But white goods had a far more profound effect on the Indian world. In the Northeast, for example, traditional intertribal commerce was shattered in large measure by the new intense focus on one commodity—furs. With the animals gone, the prosperity that Indians had enjoyed as a result of trade with whites was followed for many by dependency on white goods, especially on the powder and shot they now needed to protect themselves and to hunt for food. Meanwhile many white traders had proved themselves unscrupulous, manipulating their Native American customers with watered-down liquor spiced with tobacco and red pepper and dealing in shoddy, mass-produced goods.

Farther west, on the Great Plains, Native American life had been transformed by the arrival of the horse. When Antonio de Espejo first rode into Hopi land in 1583, the Indians—who had never before seen a horse—paved the ground with ceremonial kilts for the sacred beasts to walk upon. By the end of the seventeenth century, Wyoming Shoshonis were getting horses from Colorado Utes who had stolen them from Spanish settlements in New Mexico. The eastern Sioux, a canoeing people in the 1760s, were a mounted people thirty years later. The rapid spread of the horse throughout the Plains caused the flowering of an entirely new Indian way of life characterized by the Appaloosa-riding, war-bonneted warrior who would symbolize American Indianism around the world.

For the crop-raising Pueblo Indians along the Rio Grande in the Southwest, metal hoes and shovels made life a little easier but had no deeper effect upon tribal customs. The Navajo way of life, however, was eventually transformed by Spanish sheep and goats. Originally a hunting people, the Navajo became expert shepherds, making their livelihood by trading animals they had bred and blankets from the wool they had woven. Along the Northwest Coast the traditional wood carvings grew brighter as artisans applied European housepaints to their cedar totem poles. On the Plains, silk

ribbons, pearl buttons, English red and blue cloths, and Venetian glass beads greatly embellished native costumes. But trade goods sometimes hastened the decline of some ancient crafts, such as pottery and porcupine-quill embroidery.

The western trading posts gave migratory groups a new focal point for their wanderings, as well as expanded contact with neighboring tribes. In the spring Indians who might otherwise be blood enemies would pitch camp side by side, and bargain away their stocks of prime winter pelts. Later it was often at these same stockaded trading posts that defeated Indian leaders met governmental representatives of the United States to discuss terms of surrender and treaties of peace. By then the Indians' principal source of wealth—furs and hides—had been exhausted. All they had left that interested the white man was their land, which could usually be acquired without fair exchange.

The selections that follow offer glimpses of various Native American responses to white goods and frontier commerce.

1

THUNDER, DIZZYING LIQUID, AND CUPS THAT DO NOT GROW

The white man's magical offerings—guns and metal utensils and liquor—all play a part in this Menominee folktale. The time is around the 1660s; the "sea" in the story is probably Lake Michigan; the Frenchmen are very likely traders who followed in the wake of the French missionary-explorer Jean Nicolet; the speaker is named Waioskasit.

As their trade with the French blossomed, the Menominee exchanged their mixed-economy, which blended hunting, gardening, and harvesting wild rice, for a seminomadic life focused around fur-trapping. This bound them more tightly to the French, who encouraged them to buy goods on credit against future payment in furs. Yet the partnership, strengthened by extensive intermarriage, also made the Menominee a dominant power in the Great Lakes area.

WHEN THE MENOMINEE lived on the shore of the sea, they one day were looking out across the water and observed some large vessels, which were near to them and wonderful to behold. Suddenly there was a terrific explosion, as of thunder, which startled the people greatly.

When the vessels approached the shore, men with light-colored skin landed. Most of them had hair on their faces, and they carried on their shoulders heavy sticks ornamented with shining metal. As the strangers came toward the Indians, the latter believed the leader to be a great manido [spirit], with his companions.

It is customary, when offering tobacco to a manido, to throw it into the fire, that the fumes may ascend to him and that he may be inclined to grant their request; but as this light-skin manido came in person, the chief took some tobacco and rubbed it on his forehead. The strangers appeared desirous of making friends with the Indians, and all sat on the ground and smoked. Then some of the strangers brought from the vessel some parcels which contained a liquid, of which they drank, finally offering some to the Menominee. The Indians, however, were afraid to drink such a pungent liquor indiscriminately, fearing it would kill them; therefore four useless old men were selected to drink the liquor, and thus to be experimented on, that it might be found whether the liquid would kill them or not.

The men drank the liquid, and although they had previously been very silent and gloomy, they now began to talk and to grow amused. Their speech flowed more and more freely, while the remainder of the Indians said, "See, now it is beginning to take effect!" Presently the four old men arose, and while walking about seemed very dizzy, when the Indians said, "See, now they are surely dying!" Presently the men dropped down and became unconscious; then the Indians said to one another, "Now they are dead; see what we escaped by not drinking the liquid!" There were sullen looks directed toward the strangers, and murmurings of destroying them for the supposed treachery were heard.

Before things came to a dangerous pass, however, the four old men got up, rubbed their eyes, and approached their kindred, saying, "The liquor is good, and we have felt very happy; you must try it, too." Notwithstanding the rest of the tribe were afraid to drink it then, they recalled the strangers, who were about to return to their boats.

The chief of the strangers next gave the Indians some flour, but they did not know what to do with it. The white chief then showed the Indians some biscuits, and told them how they were baked. When that was over, one of

the white men presented to an Indian a gun, after firing it to show how far away anything could be killed. The Indian was afraid to shoot it, fearing the gun would knock him over, but the stranger showed the Indian how to hold it and to point it at a mark; then pulling the trigger, it made a terrific noise, but did not harm the Indian at all, as he had expected. Some of the Indians then accepted guns from the white strangers.

Next the white chief brought out some kettles and showed the Indians how to boil water in them. But the kettles were too large and too heavy to carry about, so the Indians asked that they be given small ones—cups as large as a clenched fist, for they believed they would grow to be large ones by and by.

The Indians received some small cups, as they desired, when the strangers took their departure. But the cups never grew to be kettles.

WAIOSKASIT, *Menominee*

2

KEEP YOUR PRESENTS

A Pawnee, Curly Chief, recollects here a fellow tribesman's rejection of European wares. Actually a federation of four central Plains peoples, the hunting-and-farming Pawnee lived in large earth-lodge villages along the Platte River in Nebraska. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, their lands lay in the path of American pioneers whose wagons were rolling toward the Southwest. This contact with whites brought them social dissolution and disease—in 1849 they lost a fourth of their people to smallpox and cholera. In 1875 the tribe was moved to northern Oklahoma. There is no record of which treaty session Curly Chief is remembering here.

I HEARD that long ago there was a time when there were no people in this country except Indians. After that, the people began to hear of men that had white skins; they had been seen far to the east. Before I was born, they came out to our country and visited us. The man who came was from the Government. He wanted to make a treaty with us, and to give us presents, blankets and guns, and flint and steel, and knives.

Curly Chief (front row, third from left), *in a portrait by the noted Western photographer William Henry Jackson*

The Head Chief told him that we needed none of these things. He said, "We have our buffalo and our corn. These things the Ruler gave to us, and they are all that we need. See this robe. This keeps me warm in winter. I need no blanket."

The white men had with them some cattle, and the Pawnee Chief said, "Lead out a heifer here on the prairie." They led her out, and the Chief, stepping up to her, shot her through behind the shoulder with his arrow, and she fell down and died. Then the Chief said, "Will not my arrow kill? I do not need your guns." Then he took his stone knife and skinned the heifer, and cut off a piece of fat meat. When he had done this, he said,