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*“I am an Indian”: Reading Robert Beverley’s The
History and Present State of Virginia*

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“I am an Indian”:

Reading Robert Beverley’s *The History and Present State of Virginia*.

Published in London in 1705, *The History and Present State of Virginia* by “A Native and Inhabitant of the Place” was the most extensive description of a mainland British colony in America to appear prior to independence. It presented the history of British settlement as a series of blunders and missed opportunities, while describing in detail the colony’s natural environment and native inhabitants. It drew on an earlier literature of chorography dedicated to improving the colony and it prefigured the regional pride displayed in Thomas Jefferson’s post-independence *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1784). Conscious that travellers “are of all men, the most suspected of insincerity,” the author of the *History*, Robert Beverley, nevertheless insisted that his local knowledge of the interaction between men (European and indigenous) and the natural environment of Virginia allowed him to conclusively refute the “prodigious phantasms” peddled to the common people of England by ignorant metropolitan authors: canards such as “that the servants in Virginia are made to draw in cart and plow, as horses and oxen do in England, and that the country turns all people black who live there.”¹ Paradoxically, the more local detail and passion Beverley and other colonial writers brought to their descriptions the more their veracity was questioned by patronising metropolitan readers. Three years after Beverley’s *History* appeared, John Oldmixon scornfully claimed in the introduction to his *British Empire in America* (1708) that although he had never been to the western hemisphere he “durst not depend entirely on the Sincerity” of those who had because for the colonial “Every Province was the best, the most advantageous, the most

¹ Robert Beverley, *The History and Present State of Virginia* ed. Susan Scott Parrish, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press/Omohundro Institute, 2013) [hereafter Beverley *History*], 7; Preface to Second Edition, Beverley *History*, 307-8.

inviting.”² It was, Oldmixon presumed, the job of the judicious metropolitan author to sift through colonial claim and counter-claim and establish a true picture of the western hemisphere. Beverley read a manuscript copy of Oldmixon’s *British Empire* during a trip to London in 1703-4. *The History and Present State of Virginia* by “A Native and inhabitant of the Place,” inspired by outrage, presented the most sustained attack on the patronising metropolitan stance of Oldmixon and others yet published. (It was not to be the last. Three generations later Jefferson found it necessary to devote large sections of *Notes on the State of Virginia* to a laborious refutation of metropolitan theories of new world inferiority). Thus while the data Beverley assembled to paint his “true picture” is of considerable interest, the text’s exemplification of the dilemmas of colonial identity and expression is still more valuable. Throughout the *History*, Beverley attempted to establish a distinction between native Americans, “the English” and a third undefined but (presumably white) category of “native and inhabitant” that cultural expectation tempts the reader to identify as “American.” This effort produced one of the most cryptic self-fashioning statements in the American canon, indeed in literature written in English as a whole. In the third paragraph of the *History*’s Preface, seeking to preempt criticism of his literary “style” by metropolitan readers Beverley announced: “I am an *Indian* and don’t pretend to be exact in my language: but I hope the plainness of my dress, will give [the reader] the kinder impression of my honesty, which is what I pretend to.”³

Literary critics have generally reckoned Beverley’s authorial pose to be rooted in the soil of the new world and therefore “American” (in the sense of being exotic to Britain). But they have puzzled over the larger meaning of this positioning. Myra Jehlen summarising critical approaches in *The Cambridge History of American Literature* for example, notes that while Beverley was “certainly not” identifying himself with actual Indians, the *History*

² Cited in Beverley *History*, xv.

³ “To the Preface,” Beverley *History*, 7-8.

“seems to point toward the topos of the American man of nature.” In Jehlen’s finely-balanced view, Beverley’s text was the first to distinguish an American man of nature from “the European man of nature by painting a picture of a natural man.”⁴ Ralph Bauer has located Beverley’s Indian pose within an American rhetoric of “primitive eloquence.”⁵ The idea that plain living grounded in a pastoral setting and productive of a modest civility, what David Shi dubbed “the simple life,” somehow defines the difference between Americans and non-Americans has also held enduring appeal for historians -- on both sides of the Atlantic. In the most influential statement of this topos, Frederick Jackson Turner’s “Frontier Thesis,” frontier conditions created simple, inherently democratic, American society and with the closing of the frontier a distinct phase of American development came to an end.⁶ Although Beverley was educated in England, did not describe himself as either a frontiersman or an American and never quite defined what it is that distinguishes a “native and inhabitant of” Virginia from Indians on one hand and the English on the other, his text, since it became widely available in 1947, has been read by historians as presenting a new, simple, modest and self-consciously American identity. As Beverley’s first editor, Louis B. Wright put it, “Beverley adopted a plain style as best suited to the expression of historical truth, which he determined to write without circumlocution or adornment.” Although he was “a man of broad

⁴ Myra Jehlen, “The Literature of Colonization,” in *The Cambridge History of American Literature: Volume One 1590-1820*, ed. Sacvan Bercovitch, (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 98. See also, Robert D. Arner, “The Quest for Freedom: Style and Meaning in Robert Beverley’s *History and Present State of Virginia*,” *Southern Literary Journal* VIII (1976), 79-98; J. A. Leo Lemay, “Robert Beverley’s *History and Present State of Virginia*” in *American Letters and the Historical Consciousness: Essays in Honor of Lewis P. Simpson* eds. J. G. Kennedy and D. M. Fogel (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1987), 74-110.

⁵ Ralph Bauer *The Cultural Geography of Colonial American Literature* cited in Beverley *History*, xxv.

⁶ David E. Shi, *The Simple Life: Plain Living and High Thinking in American Culture* (New York: OUP, 1985); Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” in *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Holt, 1920).

reading...his work never smells of the lamp.”⁷ Explaining Beverley in these terms distinguished the *History* from texts such as Cotton Mather’s *Magnalia Christi Americana* (1702), a work which certainly does smell of the lamp, and which, in the hands of Perry Miller and his followers, was seen as evidence that the bone marrow of American identity was nourished by transnational, demanding, and even doctrinaire systems of thought.⁸ In contrast Beverley’s *History* has little to say about religion and appeared to its first interpreters to espouse transcendent “democratic” sentiments rooted in an American pastoral rather than a European intellectual tradition. For Louis B. Wright, Beverley was American, and an instinctive democrat, not because he owned a plantation producing a cash crop for an imperial market but because he lived a simple life close to nature and wrote, as an “Indian” in a “straight from the shoulder” style.

In an age in which, for example, the homespun wisdom of Harry S. Truman was widely admired and many Americans regarded Franklin D. Roosevelt’s plain-speaking rhetorical style as more important than his privileged background, the authorial posture of a plain-talking man of nature seemed almost self-explanatory. However, the interpretation popularised by Wright says much about the needs and values of mid-twentieth-century American cultural fashioning. While the subject matter of the *History* is southern, the text makes few explicit references to slavery or race. The *History* was therefore well-adapted to further the mid-twentieth-century reintegration of the South into articulations of American national identity; explanations or celebrations from which the South had been excised as a legacy of the Civil War. Prominent manifestations of this reintegration saw construction work on the Jefferson Memorial in Washington D.C. begin in 1939. (Jefferson’s home, Monticello,

⁷ [Robert Beverley] *The History History and Present State of Virginia* ed. Louis B. Wright, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina/Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1947), xxi.

⁸ See Perry Miller, *The New England Mind from Colony to Province*, (Cambridge and London: Harvard UP, 1953 and reprints).

had featured on the five cent piece from 1938). Building on Virginia's indisputable claim to be the first permanent British settlement in America, the Rockefeller foundation poured money into the preservation and reconstruction of Williamsburg, the Old Commonwealth's second capital. In 1947 a scholarly edition Beverley's *History* became the first book printed under the colophon of the newly created Institute of Early American History and Culture, the research and interpretation arm of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. ("The Institute" would eventually publish the standard edition of the works of Captain John Smith, arguably a more famous Virginian than Beverley, but it is suggestive that project was not realised until 1986.)⁹ Wright, and a first generation of interpreters, did not ask whether the "Indian" Beverley's text was vitiated by deficiencies of style or objectivity because the *History*'s ambition and sophistication suggested that from an early date America possessed an emergent (and laudable) cultural identity. Beverley, the native and inhabitant of Virginia, the "Indian," seemed to exemplify a near fully developed American culture, one distinct from British or creole systems

Where mid-twentieth-century interpretations of the text did little more than assert Beverley's "American" characteristics, more recent interpretations have refined and contextualised the identity espoused by *History*. J. A. Leo Lemay's 1987 interpretation, written as scholarly interest in the ideological world-view of Americans was reaching its peak, saw Beverley as speaking for all Americans and developing a political ideology that helped explain the existence of a American identity while at the same time greatly encouraging its assertive claims.¹⁰ And yet modern historians continue to follow America's revolutionary generation in showing little interest show little interest in the world that Beverley grew up in and saw transformed. The revolutionary generation, which one might

⁹ See Philip L. Barbour ed., *The Complete Works of Captain John Smith* 3 vols (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina/ Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1986).

¹⁰ Lemay, "Robert Beverley's *History and Present State of Virginia*", 83, 101.

expect to have been taken by the prominence of British opposition ideology in Beverley's historical analysis instead largely eradicated from its cultural memory the period after Virginia's chaotic founding but before the establishment of a stable provincial culture. Writing a century after Beverley, the expatriate Irishmen John Burk denounced in *his* history of Virginia Beverley's failure to organize the history of seventeenth-century Virginia around an uplifting master-narrative. An ardent Jeffersonian, Burk argued that Virginia had from its inception served as an "asylum for oppressed humanity" and accordingly dismissed Beverley as "a mere annalist of petty incidents" who had put together his *History* without method or "any graces of style".¹¹ Burk's judgement naturally reflected that of his patron, Jefferson, who found particular fault with Beverley for not driving his discussion of Bacon's Rebellion toward the conclusion that it formed a dress rehearsal for the events of 1776. Both stances reflect in turn the extent to which, within a century of the publication of Beverley's *History*, white Virginians had constructed, on the back of a slave society, a white culture replete with appeals to liberty and independence and possessed of its own putative histories, from within whose confines the ambiguous and uncertain world Beverley described seemed utterly alien and even primitive. More modern historians, assuming that the first three generations of settlers had few values beyond that primitive accumulation exemplified by the transformation of a staple-producing society with slaves into a slave society producing staples, have shown little interest in the values of Beverley's anglo-Virginian cultural world. Since Beverley had little to say about why, even how, Virginia became a slave society it is not surprising that modern historians have told the story of Bacon's Rebellion or the adoption of slavery without reference to the values and concerns of the culture revealed in the *History*. If Jefferson among others had hailed Beverley's *History* as the first self-consciously American work produced in

¹¹ John Burk, *History of Virginia From Its First Settlement to the Present Day*, 2 vols., (Petersburg, VA, 1804), I:ii; Thomas Jefferson to John Daly Burk, Feb. 21, 1803, Library of Congress.

Virginia, modern historians might be tempted to lionise Beverley. But the revolutionary generation, partly because they were after all revolutionaries, did not venerate Beverley, or William Bradford or even Cotton Mather. So why should we read the *History and Present State of Virginia*?

The publication by “the Institute” of a revised standard scholarly edition of Beverley’s *History* edited by Susan Scott Parrish, coming as it does at the end of a decade of historical investigation of the “Atlantic World,” offers an invitation to reflect, once more, on whether and how the text speaks to a geographically and historically distinct culture; a culture distinct from that of the seventeenth-century metropolis and distinct from that later established by Virginia’s planter class. That culture was forged in polemic; created by countless doomed and the desperate attempts to resolve the very nearly irresolvable contradictions of colonial life. To live in a staple producing colony like seventeenth-century Virginia was to live in a state of dependence. Dependence in the case of Virginia on production of an inedible crop of declining value for which there was no internal or regional market; on England for markets, for encouragement and for superior expressions of the cultural values which residents of the colony presumably shared with the mother country; dependence on governors, merchants, neighbours or, in the case of slaves and servants, one’s master to set some limit to their greed in order that systems of imperial authority, primitive capitalism, consensual governance and coerced labour could function. Such dependence produced frustration. Even as tobacco was establishing itself as the dominant crop in Virginia, and the colony’s circulating medium, George Sandys assured English correspondents that if he could get by without planting tobacco he would. William Capps, an “ancient planter” likened growing tobacco in the hopes

of making enough money to return to England as akin to rooting in the earth like a hog.¹² A generation later, in his *Discourse and View of Virginia* (1663) Sir William Berkeley confessed “we know not how to excuse forty years [spent] promoting the basest and most foolish vice in the world” and admitted that Virginians had placed themselves in “that extremity [where] they can neither handsomely subsist with [tobacco], nor without it.”¹³ By putting all their eggs in the tobacco basket Virginians rendered all manner of other cherished objects impracticable or unattainable. Tobacco cultivation also gave rise to a hunger for land that made harmonious relations with Virginia’s native peoples all but unattainable and a hunger for labour that introduced into society another personification of colonial status, the enslaved African-American. Dependence begat frustration and frustration begat the polemical pursuit of fundamental questions: who or what was to blame? What could or should be done? Addressing these questions let alone answering them, involved conjuring a root and branch reform of the colony. During the starving time and its aftermath, following the collapse of the Company and the assumption of Crown control, during the English Civil War and immediately following the Restoration, during Bacon’s Rebellion and later following the Plant-Cutter Riots, Virginians and Englishmen did indeed argue that whatever had been achieved in Virginia could be undone and that which had been left undone could or should now be set in train. But the flip side of polemic was resignation, a sense that the colony’s problems were just too big to solve. A first step to a new reading of Beverley’s *History and Present State of Virginia* involves recognising the origins of this trope in order to better understand how it created a peculiarly anglo-Virginian political worldview.

¹² George Sandys to Samuel Wrote, March 28, 1623, in *Records of the Virginia Company of London*, ed. Susan Myra Kingsbury, 4 vol. (Washington DC: GPO, 1905-35) [hereafter RVC] IV: 64-68; William Capps to Dr. Thomas Wynston, March or April, 1623, RVC 4:37-9.

¹³ Berkeley to ?, March 30, 1663, London,] Egerton Mss. 2395, British Library, [hereafter BL] fol. 362-4. Berkeley “A Discourse and View of Virginia,” Egerton Mss. 2395, BL, fol. 356.

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In his *Generall History* Captain John Smith wondered why God had sent disease to New England to clear it of native inhabitants while at the same time sparing Virginia's Indians who then nearly exterminated the white settlement in the "massacre" of 1622. He speculated that the massacre showed God's anger that Virginia "had been made a stage where nothing but murder and indiscretion contends for victory." Smith, the pragmatist's pragmatist, thought he knew why. Hubris on the part of the Virginia Company engendered arrogance in its officials and the delusion that they were creating and governing "kingdoms" on the order of Scotland and Ireland. In consequence company officials had created more empty offices than there were labourers. Trying to make sense of Company instructions from London that were themselves the product of dreams, company officials in Virginia milled around, enforcing empty ceremonial but doing nothing to advance the colony.¹⁴ By the time Smith published his *Generall History* this view had become widely accepted even among company insiders.¹⁵ On such insider, John Pory, was perhaps the first writer to attempt the authorial approach to it that Beverley's *History and Present State* perfected.

Pory, an intimate of Richard Hakluyt, Jnr. and Samuel Purchas and an experienced European traveller, first came to Virginia in 1619 as secretary to Governor Sir George Yeardley. Like Beverley he soon "went native" in his admiration for and impatience with his new surroundings. In a letter to his patron Sir Dudley Carleton, Pory frankly admitted that Virginia had largely to live up to the "ends of colonization" as laid out in countless English

¹⁴ Captain John Smith, *The Generall Historie of Virginia, New England and the Summer Isles*, cited in Alexander B. Haskell, *King. Commonwealth & The People's Love* (University of North Carolina Press/Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, forthcoming) 284, 286

¹⁵ See for example Secretary John Ferrar's commentary on William Bullock's reform pamphlet *Virginia Impartially Examin'd* (1647) in Peter Thompson, William Bullock's 'Strange Adventure': A Plan to Transform Seventeenth-Century Virginia, "*William and Mary Quarterly* LXI (Jan. 2004), 107-128.

speeches, sermons and pamphlets; that Virginians had failed to bring civility to the Indians or even to themselves; that they had failed to supply England with any exotic staple other than tobacco; and that they as yet showed little interest in ensuring an adequate home-grown supply of foodstuffs. Nevertheless Pory stressed Virginia's potential, assuring Carleton that the colonists would "produce miracles out of this earth" and "maugre both Spaniards and Indians." Three generations later Beverley subtitled his account of the colony's "natural productions" "of Virginia in its improv'd state, before the English went thither." "If we consider the improvements in the hands of the *English*," Beverley wrote, "it cannot upon that score be commended, but if we consider its natural aptitude to be improved, [Virginia] may with justice be accounted one of the finest countries in the world." As early as 1619 John Pory asked the question that so engaged Beverley. Why were the English failing to improve their surroundings? Where typically Virginia's budding Jeremiahs tended to blame their colony's troubles on native American neighbors, greedy English merchants and mariners, workshy servants and an unhealthy climate – in short anyone but themselves – Pory, like Captain John Smith and Patrick Copland, instead attributed the ravages of death, disease and famine in a land plenty to the moral failings of the English settlers and God's propensity to "scourge" a disobedient people.¹⁶ Three generations later Beverley condemned greenhorn settler and long term residents alike: they "depend altogether on the liberality of nature without endeavouring to improve its gifts by art or industry. They sponge upon the blessings of a warm sun and a fruitful soil, and almost grutch [grudge] the pains of gathering the bounties of the earth. I should be ashamed to publish this slothful indolence of my

¹⁶ John Pory to Sir Dudley Carleton, Sept. 30, 1619 in, Lyon Gardiner Tyler, *Narratives of Early Virginia, 1606-1625*, (New York: Scribners, 1907), 282-87. On Pory's place within early Virginian literature, see Richard Beale Davis, *Intellectual Life in the Colonial South* 3 vols (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press/ American Council of Learned Societies, 1978) I: 31-32 and passim. Writing in 1622 Patrick Copland quite frankly attributed the disasters that befell Virginia to impiety and idleness, arguing that their failure to convert the Indians or grow food made the colonists suitable victims for the "rod" of mortality, Copland, *Virginia's God Be Thanked*, 23-5, 28.

countrymen, but that I hope it will rouse them out of their lethargy and excite them to make the most of all those happy advantages which nature has given them. And if it does this, I am sure they will have the goodness to forgive me.”¹⁷ Whoever they blamed, living with the knowledge that they had failed to exploit the potential of the colony marked its residents. As Pory told Carleton:

At my first coming hither the solitary uncouthness of this place, compared with those parts of Christendom or Turkey where I had been; and likewise my being sequestered from all occurrences and passages which are so rife there, did not a little vex me...in these five months of my continuance here, there have come at one time or another eleven sail of ships into this river; but freighted with more ignorance than any other merchandise. At length being hardened to this custom of abstinence from curiosity, I am resolved wholly to mind my business here, and next after my pen, to have some good book always in store, being in solitude [in] the best and choicest company. Besides among these crystal rivers and odiferous woods I do escape much expense, envy, contempt, vanity, and vexation of mind. Yet good my lord, have a little compassion upon me, and be pleased to send me what pamphlets and relations of the Interim since I was with you as your lordship shall think good....¹⁸

English ships brought ignorance, isolation brought a simpler life, and relief from vexations of the mind. Yet Pory wanted Carleton to send him more journals and articles from England. He engaged in an international correspondence predicated on the assumption that he, as a native and inhabitant, was possessed of empirical truths that held out the prospect of a partnership between inhabitants of the western and the eastern shores of the Atlantic. He busied himself with schemes to aid Rev. George Thorpe’s missionary work among the Indians, he requested a copy of John Gerard’s *Herball* in order to establish a botanical garden, he undertook to establish salt-beds modelled on those he had seen in France and Italy, and he sent home specimens of “silk grass” along with a stream of letters advising officials on when ships

¹⁷ Beverley *History*, 252.

¹⁸ John Pory to Sir Dudley Carleton, Sept. 30, 1619 in, Lyon Gardiner Tyler, *Narratives of Early Virginia, 1606-1625*, (New York: Scribners, 1907), 282-87.

should sail to Virginia and what kind of settlers and supplies they should carry.¹⁹ Pory found Virginia “uncouth” compared even to Turkey. Yet although he asked for compassionate understanding of the limitations of life in a backwater Pory enjoyed his residence among its odiferous woods. He reputedly translated the classics as he watched the colony go to wrack and ruin, thereby establishing a figure that persisted in the southern letters until at least William Walker Percy’s, *Lanterns on the Levee* (1941).²⁰ Pory retained his interest in the politics of the colonial relationship; returning to London with Yeardley in 1621 to fight to preserve the Company’s charter and returning to Virginia in 1623 as part of the commission on inquiry into the state of the colony. In 1624 however Pory left Virginia and never returned to its woods.

Robert Beverley, educated in England, familiar with the classics and yet apparently possessed of the literary style of a rustic “Indian” was, like Pory, at ease on his secluded plantation, Beverley Park, located on the upper reaches of the Mattaponi amid Virginia’s forests. Like John Pory and Captain John Smith before him, Robert Beverley lavished praise on Virginia’s flora, its crystal rivers and its vast potential. Residents of Virginia, Beverley wrote, “enjoy all the benefits of a warm sun...all their senses are entertained with an endless succession of native pleasures. Their eyes are ravished with the beauties of naked nature. Their ears are serenaded with the perpetual murmur of brooks...the merry birds too join their pleasing notes to this rural consort.” Unlike Pory, Beverley was born and died in Virginia. By identifying himself as “native and inhabitant of the place” Beverley meant to insist that his account of Virginia’s natural wealth was a reliable and necessary corrective to the “shiploads of ignorance” that criss-crossed the Atlantic. Beverley stressed that he knew for a fact that

¹⁹ George Thorpe and John Pory to Sir Edwin Sandys, May 15 and 16, 1620, RVC III: 446-47. Pory’s successful cultivation of silk grass was praised by Patrick Copland in *Virginia’s God Be Thanked* (1622). On salt, see Pory to Sandys, June 12, 1620, RVC III:304.

²⁰ On the myth of the isolated planter translating the classical literature in first generation Virginia see, Richard Beale Davis, *Intellectual Life*, I: 30-5.

grape-vines and fruit trees produced a greater quantity of better fruit in Virginia than in England, that English grains, rice, and all many of livestock thrived in the colony, and that flax and silk-grass flourished “spontaneously”.²¹ He wished readers to understand that *he* (unlike the greenhorn English) did not wear thick clothes in summer and curse the heat. Long-term residents distinguished themselves from English greenhorns by dressing appropriately and drinking in moderation. They possessed a local knowledge that lent weight to their observations. However, while noting that white “native and inhabitants” fared better than English newcomers, mindful of the danger of appearing to endorse a potentially degenerate accommodation with the new world environment Beverley treated the question of whether their success depended on abandoning English “cultural baggage” with extreme caution. For example, on Beverley’s account white residents managed to integrate local and inherited knowledge of their surroundings:

The Planters...have several Roots natural to the Country, which in this case [that of Agues] they cry up as Infallible. They have the Happiness to have very few Doctors, and those such as make use only of simple Remedies, of which their Woods afford great Plenty. And indeed, their Distempers are not many, and their Cures are so generally known, that there is not Mystery enough, to make a Trade of Physick there, as the Learned do in other Countries, to the great oppression of Mankind.²²

Here at least Beverley sought to have his cake and eat it, criticising the “oppressions” of the old world while distancing himself from claims made on behalf of the new. His countrymen had not gone native, but they could be distinguished from representatives of “the *English*” such as the military garrison sent to Virginia after Bacon’s Rebellion, several of whom, by

²¹ Smith, “Of such Things that are Naturally in Virginia....” *Generall Historie* Book Two; Beverley *History*, 237; 248-51.

²² Beverley *History*, 237, 242-3.

eating “the Jamestown weed,” turned themselves into “holy fools.”²³ Like John Pory before him, Beverley’s ambivalent approach to the Virginia’s environment informed his approach to transatlantic politics.

Beverley was almost bred to represent the interests of the Virginia patriot. His English-born father, Robert Beverley Snr., an avowed Royalist, relocated to Virginia in 1663. He befriended the royal governor, Sir William Berkeley, and was a staunch partisan of Berkeley’s during and after Bacon’s Rebellion. Despite accusations that he had enriched himself by plundering rebel estates, Robert Beverley, Snr., was elected Clerk of the house of Burgesses in February 1677, where he endeared himself to fellow planters by refusing to turn over the colony’s legislative journals to the royal commissioners sent to inquire into the causes of the rebellion. In consequence the Privy Council in London ordered that he be barred from office, a sentence that Beverley ignored. He was once again accused of enriching himself at his neighbors’ expense during the planter-cutter crisis of 1682 and, in 1684, was arrested and stripped of office for his “evil fame”. Royal governors now began to assert a charter right to appoint the man who recorded the proceedings and acts of Virginia’s assembly – the clerk. The assembly contested this on the grounds that an appointee could not be trusted to keep debate in the assembly confidential and that therefore the assembly’s right of free speech was compromised. From the perspective of James II and his gubernatorial appointees, since the colonies’ “little parliaments” already abused charter privileges of assembly and debate to obstruct imperial centralization, and check on their pretensions was welcome. Although Beverley Snr., was ultimately pardoned and re-elected to the House of Burgesses, he was definitively banned from all civil offices by the King in 1686. He was preparing to contest this sentence when he died in 1687. Robert Beverley, Jnr. entered this

²³ Beverley *History*, 105; The Jamestown weed incident is discussed in Joseph Ewan and Nesta Ewan, *John Banister and His Natural History of Virginia* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1970), 396, 380-1.

milieu in 1688 when he trained as a copyist, swiftly moving to become clerk of King and Queen County, chief clerk of the General Court and clerk “extraordinary” to the Council and General Assembly in 1696. In October 1698 Virginia’s statehouse caught fire. Robert Beverley and his half-brother Peter saved what they could and were tasked with putting the surviving documents in order. Over the next seven years Beverley also served as register of the Virginia Court of Vice-Admiralty, Burgess for Jamestown and finally clerk of the House of Burgesses.²⁴ Few men had a greater knowledge of the legislative and administrative history of Virginia or a greater pride in it.

Beverley’s particular *bête noires* were Governor Francis Nicholson and his “creature” Virginia’s customs agent Colonel Robert Quarry. In the *History* Beverley was at pains to stress that he accepted the imperial connection and therefore respected the offices of governor and even customs collector, provided they in return respected the integrity and wisdom of Virginia’s legislature and its legal record. Beverley pictured Nicholson’s predecessor, Sir Edmund Andros, as a loyal crown servant attempting to carry out misguided policies (such as insisting on the primacy of English statute law over Virginian law) but at the same time respecting Virginia’s institutions. It was Andros who ordered Beverley to organise and preserve Virginia’s legal papers. In contrast Nicholson and Quarry, Beverley believed, lacked bottom and were essentially corrupt. Nicholson in particular struck Beverley as a throwback to the vainglorious but ineffectual leadership cadre which had irritated Capt. John Smith three generations before and nearly brought about the collapse of the colony.²⁵ Nicholson for example moved the seat of government from Jamestown to a model city (Williamsburg)

²⁴Beverley *History*, xix-xx.

²⁵ Beverley admired “the Care, Labour, Courage, and Understanding that Capt. John Smith showed in the Time of his Administration: who not only founded, but also preserved all these Settlements in good Order, while he was among them. And without him, they had certainly all been destroyed...” Beverley *History*, 28.

centred on an ornate governor's mansion. Beverley noted scornfully that Nicholson ordered the streets to be laid out in the shape of a W (to suck up to William III) but that "this imaginary city is yet advanced no further, than only to have a few Publick Houses and a Store-house, more than were built upon the Place before."²⁶ Whereas Andros had at least encouraged the development of alternatives to tobacco cultivation, albeit while also enforcing imperial policies that doomed such attempts to failure, Beverley denounced Nicholson for reporting to London that the price of tobacco was so low that planters couldn't clothe themselves while at the same time recommending the suppression of cloth production in the colonies. Beverley's animosity reached boiling point in 1703 when he journeyed to London to plead before the Privy Council his side in a land dispute. While there Beverley found "letters, memorials and characters" written by Nicholson and Quarry to the Board of Trade and other policy makers that represented Virginia's assembly as "a Pack of rude, unthinking, wilfull, obstinate People, without any regard to her Majesty or her interest." These, Beverley alleged, proved that Nicholson sought to reduce the colonies of North America to one government, under a single viceroy and to keep its inhabitants cowed by means of a standing army. Beverley sent some of Nicholson documents back to Virginia's House of Burgesses, along with letters warning that the prospect facing Virginia was "slavery" and "utter ruine" while that facing the Burgesses was a servant rebellion.²⁷ Nicholson responded by ordering a brutal rebuke to be entered into the record of Council and removing Beverley from the clerkships of King and Queen county and the assembly.²⁸ Soon after this exchange, the

²⁶ Beverley *History*, 79. The move also had the effective lessening the value of Beverley's property in Jamestown.

²⁷ Beverley *History*, xx, xix.

²⁸ The rebuke read: "As to Mr. Beverley's letter and Narrative they are part false, part scandalous and part Malitious, but I could not expect otherwise from a man of his universal ill character but I suppose his Pride, ambition, vanity, unsettledness in all his conditions and his Poverty make might him hope to make a Sedition in the Country. The advice I give him is to get himself close shaved, and make friends with the Governors of...[Bedlam] to get a place

publisher Robert Parker asked Beverley to comment on a manuscript copy of Robert Oldmixon's *The British Empire in America* and, fired by a desire to set both Oldmixon and Nicholson straight, Beverley wrote the *History and Present State*.

The "politics" of Beverley's text seem straightforward. He had no fundamental objection to Virginia's position as an asset within an empire ruled by a monarch. The *History*'s frontispiece presented the arms of the four kingdoms of the British Isles with the latin tag "Virginia makes the fifth." The *History* was dedicated to the slippery Whig panjandrum Robert Harley, who in 1700 had sponsored a bill that would have mandated a trial in England for colonial governors accused of malfeasance in office. In his dedicatory epistle Beverley spoke of his intention to defend Virginia and "the colonies" from "some People" who "upon very mistaken Principles of Policy," were "for loading them with heavy Impositions, and oppressing them with Rapacious and Arbitrary Governors."²⁹ Beverley's targets were the corruption, ignorance, posturing, and short-term thinking that prevented the establishment of a mutually reinforcing and beneficial relationship between colony and metropole. The text suggested that such integration would require Virginia to become something more than a producer of tobacco, but while Beverley criticised governors and greedy English merchants and bemoaned the low price of tobacco, he was restrained in his criticism of the Navigation Acts, commenting more on the Cromwellian malice behind them

there: and there he may meet with real chains instead of the imaginary ones that I was preparing...[for] Virginia." Ibid. xx

²⁹ Beverley, *History*, Epistle Dedicatory "To Sir Robert Harley". "Slippery" because during the 1690s Harley, while battling what Whigs took to be such abuses of Court prerogative as the advancement of placemen in the House of Commons, Harley established himself as a master of parliamentary procedure and precedent. He abused the rule book in the eyes of enemies, defended the integrity of Parliament in the eyes of his friends. By 1705 Harley had established a *rapprochement* with leading Tories and the Court faction and was serving simultaneously as Speaker of the House of Commons and Secretary of State with responsibility for England's North American colonies.

than on their economic effects.³⁰ Even more strikingly, in a substantial work purporting to rehearse objectively the “condition of Virginia,” Beverley’s *History* devoted just three pages to the other structural foundation of Virginia’s then current position: slavery and indentured servitude. While admitting that “some distinction is made between them in their clothes and food” Beverley insisted that both servants and slaves worked no harder than overseers, freemen and planters. “I can’t forbear affirming that the work of their servants and slaves is no other than what every common freeman does. Neither is any freeman required to do more in a day than his overseer. And I can assure you with a great deal of truth, that generally their slaves are not worked near so hard, nor so many hours in a day, as the Husbandman and day-labourers in England.”³¹ Where Jefferson would later attempt to picture slavery as something thrust on Virginia by greedy traders, some of them in receipt of royal backing, Beverley presented slaves and indentured servants as crucial to Virginia’s well-being and therefore any attempt to hinder their import was injurious. Beverley described, for example, the levy on imports of “Christian servants” and “negroes” through which Nicholson proposed to pay for building the Capitol as a “pernicious duty” “because ‘tis a great Hindrance on the Increase of that young Colony, as well as a very unequal Tax upon their Labour.”³² Targeting corruption,

³⁰ In 1661 John Bland wondered whether Virginia was to be thrust into “Egyptian slavery” by English “tobacconists and engrossers of that trade.” As late as 1703 the colony’s agent, William Byrd II, characterised a proposal to boost English manufactures by forbidding Virginians from making their own clothing as threatening a “Bondage worse than ever was known in Egypt or Algiers.” Blair cited in “Virginia and the Act of Navigation,” *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 1 (1893), 141-54, 155. See also “Suggestions for the Enlargement of the Tobacco Trade,” 1656?, Rawlinson Mss., A38, fol. 703, Bodleian Library, Oxford, in which Virginia’s planters lamented that they were “slaves” to English tobacco merchants. Byrd cited in Lemay, “Robert Beverley’s *History and Present State of Virginia*,” 76. Beverley *History*, 49-50.

³¹ Beverley *History*, 216-8.

³² [Thomas Jefferson] Draft of the Declaration of Independence in *The English Literatures of America 1500-1800* eds. Myra Jehlen and Michael Warner, (New York and London: Routledge, 1997); Beverley *History*, 80.

short-term thinking and arbitrary government seemingly positioned Beverley as a “country whig.”

Yet Beverley’s political outlook owed at least as much to local knowledge as to British ideology and this of course greatly complicated the question of what qualities a Virginian country whig might possess and express. The *History*’s treatment of William Byrd I, the author’s father-in-law, is indicative of one aspect of this association of values. Byrd was portrayed as exemplifying the successful integration of wisdom derived from a partial adaptation to local conditions within cultural frameworks that remained recognisably English: an integration that distinguished the anglo-Virginian from the greenhorn Englishman. In a discussion of “Conjuration” in the ethnographic section of the *History*, Beverley recounted the story of a drought “Some few years ago” on the upper reaches of the James river where “Collonel *Byrd* had several Quarters of Negroes.” An Indian “who pretended great kindness for his Master [Byrd]” approached one of Byrd’s overseers with an offer to produce rain over the colonel’s tobacco fields in return for two bottles of rum. Half an hour later, after a “*Pauwawing*,” a black cloud appeared over Byrd’s fields and showered them with rain while leaving his neighbors’ dry. When Byrd next came to the falls of the James the Indian claimed his reward. “At this,” Beverley told his readers, “the Collonel, not being apt to believe such Stories, smil’d, and told him, he was a Cheat, and had seen the Cloud a coming, otherwise he could neither have brought the Rain, nor so much as foretold it.” The Indian -- “much troubl’d” -- told Byrd that he had saved Byrd’s crop because he loved him and defied Byrd to explain how neighboring fields had been left untouched if he had not, in fact, conjured a rain storm into being. The conclusion Beverley supplied to this tale suggests something of the terms on which he might have justified his own authorial pose as English gentleman who was also a representative “native and inhabitant” and as such distinct from “the *English*.” “The Collonel,” Beverley reported, “made sport with [the Indian] a little while, but in the end

order'd him the two Bottles of Rum, letting him understand however, that it was a free Gift, and not the consequence of any Bargain with his Overseer." Byrd was not inclined to believe in conjuration, and indeed made sport of the Indian, but he was flexible enough to recognise the service done him and to reward the Indian, albeit on his own terms. Byrd's status as an, absentee planter, a "master" in the eyes of the Indians, and an owner of slaves, afforded him the luxury of developing his holdings with a success "the *English*" could not match, while at the same time allowing him to distance himself, somewhat in the manner of an English country gentleman, from the means by which this result was achieved.³³

However, as with the "I am an Indian" pose, Beverley's *History* subverted the identities it ostensibly assumed. Just how much Beverley's Virginia experience distorted any simple model of country Whig opposition to create in turn a distinct Anglo-Virginian cultural politics becomes apparent if we look once more at the *History*'s discussion of population and labour; a discussion which sharply distinguishes "the English" from native Americans and a third group of whites, namely anglo-Virginians. Beverley's analysis on this point proceeds from an ascriptive reference to the native American population. Here he pictures Virginia's native Americans as "Happy, I think, in their simple state of nature, and in their enjoyment of plenty without the curse of labor. They have on several accounts reason to lament the arrival of the Europeans... The English have taken away a great part of their country, and consequently made everything less plenty among them. They have introduced drunkenness and luxury amongst them, which have multiplied their wants and put them upon desiring a thousand things they never dreamt of before."³⁴ From this position Beverley castigated the propensity of "the English" for a "greedy grasping" at the Indian trade. It was not only

³³ Beverley introduced this anecdote with a similar act of distancing: "This Gentleman [Byrd] has for a long time been extreemly respected, and fear'd by all the *Indians* round about, who, without knowing the Name of any Governour, have ever been kept in order by Him"; Beverley *History*, 161.

³⁴ Beverley *History*, 184.

immoral, it threatened the security of the colony by escalating petty trade disputes into national quarrels.³⁵

Having set “the English” up as the subverters of Indian innocence and independence, Beverley’s analysis moved on to the role of “the English” in retarding the development of Virginia. Here Beverley linked demography and chorography. The first white settlers, Englishmen of course, were, he wrote, “chiefly single men.” Encouraged by James I’s revocation of the Virginia Company’s charter, which Beverley presented as an unalloyed blessing, adventurers “flocked” to Virginia and “took up Land by Patent” to their liking. “Not minding any thing but to be Masters of great Tracts of Land,” Beverley wrote, “they planted themselves separately on their several Plantations.” This dispersal of population was exacerbated by the headrights granted to indentured servants on completion of service. However, “This liberty of taking up land, and the ambition each man had of being lord of a vast, though unimproved territory...has made the country fall into such an unhappy settlement and course of trade; that to this day they have not any one place of cohabitation among them, that may reasonably bear the name of a town.” “By reason of the unfortunate method of the settlement, and want of cohabitation,” Beverley concluded, “they cannot make a beneficial use of their Flax, Hemp, Cotton, Silk, Silk-grass, and Wool, which might otherwise supply their necessities, and leave [instead] the produce of Tobacco to enrich them, when a gainful market can be found for it.” When they had settled, these adventurers “grew

³⁵ “In the interval of these ships returning from England, the English had a very advantageous Trade with the Indians; and might have made much greater Gains of it, and managed it both to the greater Satisfaction of the *Indians*, and the greater Ease and Security of themselves; if they had not been under any Rule, or subject to any Method in Trade, and not left at Liberty to outvie or outbid one another; by which they not only cut short their own Profit, but created Jealousies and Disturbances among the *Indians*, by letting them have a better Bargain than another: For they being unaccustom’d to barter, such of them as had been hardest dealt by in their Commodities, thought themselves cheated and abused; and so conceived a Grudge against the *English* in general, making it a National Quarrel.” Beverley *History*, 23.

sensible of the misfortune of wanting wives.” Those that had family in England sent for them. Some others overcame their English class scruples and prejudices to extent of acquiring English brides even when these could not supply a dowry. The remainder scorned, because they were “English,” what Beverley regarded as an obvious means of securing the colony’s stability: taking Indian brides. As a result the “peopling” of the country rested until mid-century when people of “better Condition” began emigrating to Virginia to escape religious persecution or the upheavals of the Civil War.³⁶ But even then there were still far too many feckless, rootless young men of no condition in the colony who corrupted not only the Indians but also the white natives and inhabitants. From mid-century promoters of Virginia had attempted to attract industrious English family men to the colony and supply them with accurate information as to what they might expect there. William Bullock’s *Virginia Impartially Examined* (1649), for example, had provided potential Royalist emigrants with detailed and largely accurate advice on when to sail for Virginia, how to establish themselves, and the steps necessary to avoid being dependent on a tobacco crop. Where Beverley argued that life for a labourer in Virginia was better than it was in England only insofar as he could expect less in the way of hard work, writers like William Bullock argued that *through hard work*, an English day laborer could free himself from want, acquire a wife and live like a gentleman. The Virginian R[oger] G[reen], in *Virginia’s Cure* (1655) thought it required an “Oedipus” to solve the riddle of why a hard-pressed laborer in London would not wish to relocate to the Chesapeake and advance himself there. But for whatever reason Virginia wasn’t getting the right kind of settler, those who William Penn was describing at about the

³⁶ Beverley *History*, 228, 44, 252, 228. The idea that peace and population increase for the colonies could be obtained by intermarriage was still being floated as Beverley wrote. At the close of the seventeenth century the English sociologist Sir William Petty proposed that white American men should be allowed to buy Indian girls under the age of seven, use them as wives, and be allowed a regulated polygamy in order to increase America’s population and preserve Britain’s. Sir William Petty, “Advices about American Plantations” in *The Petty Papers: Some Unpublished Writings of Sir William Petty. Edited from the Bowood Papers by the Marquis of Lansdowne* ed. Marquis of Lansdowne, rep. (New York, 1967), 2:113.

same time as “men of universal spirits that have an eye to the good of posterity..that both understand and delight to promote good discipline and just government among a plain and well intending people” and who would “look for a winter before a summer comes.”³⁷

Beverley’s father-in-law, William Byrd I endeavoured to encourage Huguenot families exiled from France by the Edict of Nantes (1682) to settle in Virginia. Beverley grudgingly praised the Huguenot’s achievements but concluded pessimistically that they would have continuing need of Colonel Byrd’s protection from legal chicanery “lest the land which they have improved by their industry from wild woods, should hereafter be unjustly taken away from their Children” by short-term, feckless and opportunistic locals.³⁸

Beverley was not the first Virginian, and would not be the last, to castigate his white neighbors’ venality, stupidity and lack of enterprise. Sir William Berkeley, for example, had a generation earlier lamented the fact that even arable farming was apparently beyond Virginians: “It is thought too much for the same man, to make the wheat, and grind, bolt it and bake it. And it is too great a charge for every planter, who is willing to sow barley, to

³⁷ William Bullock, *Virginia Impatially Examin’d* (1647); R[oger] G[reen] *Virginia’s Cure* (1655); William Penn, “Some Account of the Province of Pennsylvania” (1681) in *William Penn and the Founding of Pennsylvania 1680-1684: A Documentary History* ed. Jean R. Soderlund (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), 58-65, citation at 64.

³⁸ Byrd’s continuing patronage was necessary because, Beverley wrote, “When several hundred families of men, women and children are set ashore naked and hungry, in a strange land, they have not only necessity to struggle with, but like wise with the envy of ill natured people, who fancy they come to eat the bread out of their mouths” Beverley *History* 224-5. Earlier in the century John Ferrar warned William Bullock that existing planters were unlikely to help newcomers bent on diversifying the colony’s economy; Thompson, “William Bullock’s ‘Strange Adventure.’” The Huguenot minister James Fontaine who visited Robert Beverley at his estate, Beverley Park, in King and Queen County, Virginia, some ten years after the *History* was first published, believed Beverley was not above a little chicanery of his own. He pressed Fontaine to drink more wine, and that of poor quality, than the minister wished to take. He delayed Fontaine’s leave-taking, while all the time trying to sell him indifferent land on less than advantageous terms. See Ann Maury, ed., *Memoirs of a Huguenot Family: Translated and Compiled from the Original Autobiography of the Reverend James Fontaine* (New York: Putnams, 1853), 265-7.

build a malt-house and brew-house too, or else to have no benefit of his barley.”³⁹ As Beverley well knew, his countrymen’s failure to establish towns and diversify their economy may have been “unfortunate” but it reflected, through inactivity, their preference as much as it did external English pressure. Thus Beverley’s *History*, while it suggests that the colony possessed the natural resources to establish iron-works or sericulture, differs from previous treatises on the condition of Virginia by offering little assurance to its readers that native and inhabitants would in fact establish towns or diversify their economy. Owning a plantation allowed some white “natives and inhabitants” a claim to be improving the colony in a manner that was beyond “the *English*” while at the same appropriating the status of a gentleman. But a striking feature of the *History* is the decidedly half-hearted nature of its praise for plantation life. For example, in a discussion of “Edibles, Potables and Fewel” Beverley stated:

The Families being altogether on Country-Seats, they have their Graziers, Seedsmen, Gardiners, Brewers, Bakers, Butchers, and Cooks within themselves: they have a great Plenty and Variety of Provisions for their Table; and as for Spicery, and other things that the Country don’t produce, they have constant supplies of ‘em from *England*. The Gentry pretend to have their Victuals drest, and serv’d up as Nicely, as at the best Tables in *London*.”

Yet, as Beverley’s reference to the gentry’s pretensions suggested, the dearth of brewers, bakers and the like in Virginia undermined this model. Moreover, as he noted in a discussion of the new brick houses Virginia’s gentry were currently building, “All their Drudgeries of Cookery, Washing, Daries &c are performed in Offices detach’t from the Dwelling-Houses” by enslaved Africans.⁴⁰ Rev. Peter Fontaine’s account of his visit to Beverley Park suggests

³⁹ Sir William Berkeley to Charles II, July 22, 1668, *Calendar of State Papers: Colonial*, 595.

⁴⁰ Beverley *History*, 232, 231.

some of the reasons why Beverley, anxious to present himself as a gentleman, may have been reluctant to assert the superiority of the plantation. “This man lives well,” Fontaine noted:

but though rich, he has nothing in or about his house but what is necessary. He hath good beds in his house, but no curtains; and instead of cane chairs has stools made of wood. He lives on the product of his land.

Beverley may in fact have been self-sufficient but Fontaine found that his vineyard at least was “poorly managed,” that he knew little about viticulture, and had only entered into production in an attempt to win a substantial wager.⁴¹ Well-run plantations, Beverley seems to suggest, offered the best model of economic and social development available to Virginians from an unappealing list.

Beverley was not breaking new ground when he argued, in effect, that emigration by the wrong sort of Englishmen, and they armed with inappropriate assumptions, had stunted Virginia’s development (indeed this argument continues to influence modern scholarship)⁴² What is remarkable though is just how willing Beverley was to root a corrosive, toxic “Englishness” at the heart of Virginia’s history and present state. This willingness deepens and complicates the apparently straightforward “Country” values of Beverley’s political outlook and sets up an alternative reading of Beverley’s ethnography and “I am an Indian” apologia.

⁴¹ Maury, *Memoirs of a Huguenot Family*, 265-7.

⁴² Bernard Bailyn, “Politics and Social Structure in Virginia,” in *Seventeenth-Century America: Essays in Colonial History* ed., James Morton Smith (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1959), 90-118.

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By asking in Book Three, subtitled “The Native INDIANS, their Religion, Laws and Customs in War and Peace,” what responsibility Virginia’s Indians bore for their own decline, the ethnographic sections of the *History* serve to set up another contrast absolutely fundamental to Beverley’s reading of the condition of Virginia and his own position within it: that between the Indians, who were unlikely to change, and white natives and inhabitants like Beverley and his friends, who might change if they could only break free of the impress of “the *English*.” Several of the set-piece descriptions in Book Three, presented to the reader with the author’s cast-iron assurance that they were the product of first-hand knowledge, pointed uncomfortable morals for an audience more accustomed to finding in ethnography an exotic confirmation of their own cultural superiority.

Beverley absolutely rejected the view, which he ascribed to Baron Pierre Lahontan, that Indians possessed “refin’d Notions” of religion and he was as dismissive of native “idolatry” as any “Englishman.” “In this state of nature,” Beverley wrote with feigned surprise, “one would think they [the Indians] should be as pure from superstition, and overdoing matters in religion, as they are in other things: but I find it is quite the contrary; for this simplicity gives the cunning priest a greater advantage over them, according to the *Romish* maxim, *ignorance is the mother of devotion*.”⁴³ Beverley offered his readers an account of his own investigation of a native temple (*Quioccosan*) to prove the point. Beverley and some friends came upon the temple when the “whole town” it served “were gathered together in another place, to consult about the bounds of the land given them by the *English*.”

⁴³ Beverley *History*, 166-7. Helen C. Rountree, *The Powhatan Indians of Virginia. Their Traditional Culture* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989), 6 and *passim*.

They broke their way in and eventually plucked up courage to pass behind a partition at the end of the room where they found three rolled mats with objects inside them. They ripped the mats open finding human bones in one, in another “some *Indian Tomahawks* finely [engraved] and painted...they resembled the wooden faulchion used by the prize fighters in *England*,” and, in the third, “something we took to be an idol” that “wanted putting together.” They put it together, found it was not very “venerable” in the dark but discovered, on opening a curtain placed in the partition, that it made a “strange representation:” one capable of teaching those “poor people” to “worship with a devout ignorance.” They speculated that a “conjurer” jiggled the image during a rite while “a priest of authority stands in the [main] room with the people, to keep them from being too inquisitive.” Satisfied and “fearing we might be caught offering an affront to their Superstition,” Beverley and his friends rewrapped and replaced their finds.⁴⁴ Population decline allowed Beverley to evade the question of whether “natives and inhabitants of the place” like him would distinguish themselves from “the English” by treating indigenous peoples more humanely, although he must have had grounds for believing that they would not and his reference to giving “affront to superstition” suggests a certain unease. Investigating a temple only to denounce the culture that produced it bolstered Beverley’s authority as a describer of Virginia and titillated his readers while pandering to their cultural superiority.

Such vehemently expressed antipathy to priestcraft and idolatry, with its all too obvious and troubling implications for organised religion in white societies, was of a piece with a sustained meditation on cultural transmission and agency Beverley offered in an account of *huskanaw*: a rite of initiation in which young boys were prepared for positions of responsibility in manhood. The ceremony involved boys being taken into the woods for a period that could last up to a month. There under the charge of older, initiated, “keepers” they

⁴⁴ Beverley *History*, 154. See also Plate 11.

were fed a potion that eventually stripped them of all memory and led them to insanity, at which point they were confined by their keepers in a latticework cage and gradually weaned off the drug. As Helen Rountree relates:

Before they had recovered completely, they were brought home again, where their zombielike behavior was taken as a sign that they remembered nothing of their former lives as boys. They were now retrained as ‘men’ by their ‘keepers.’ If a boy made the mistake of showing any memory of his earlier life, even a recognition of his parents, he was taken to the woods and put through the *huskanaw* again, a procedure that usually killed him...Only initiated men were considered sufficiently attuned to the needs of the nation, rather than of their families, to be eligible for positions as councillors to their rulers...it can fairly be said that success bred success among the Powhatans: boys who were superior hunters (i.e. able to produce much wealth) – and who thus stood to acquire more wealth-producing wives – went through the *huskanaw* earlier and became councillors sooner, which gave them access to yet more wealth and not a little power.⁴⁵

The ceremony clearly fascinated Beverley (and it did previous English writers). Beverley claimed to have met a recently huskanawed man and seen an example of the cage in which initiates were confined. Beverley ordered the engraver Simon Gribelin to add an (out of proportion) conical huskanaw “pen” to a plate entitled “A Priest and A Conjuror,” itself based on two entirely separate De Bry originals.⁴⁶ His account does not exaggerate the ritual

⁴⁵ Rountree, *The Powhatan Indians of Virginia*, 82 and passim.

⁴⁶ Beverley *History*, Plate 4, 129. The figure to the left of Gribelin’s plate 4 labeled “A Priest,” is taken from the figure depicted to the left of De Bry’s “On [sic] of the Religious men in the towne of Secota”; Hariot, *A briefe and true report* Plate V. The caption, presumably written by Hariot, accompanying De Bry’s plate stated: “They are notable enchanters, and for their pleasure they frequent the rivers, to kill with their bows, and catche wild ducks, swanes, and other fowles.” The figure to the right of Gribelin’s plate 4, labeled

and is the more measured for his author's admission that he at first misunderstood its purpose.

Beverley recognised that huskanawed youths tended to be from wealthier families. This at first led him to the conclusion that the ceremony was a device to deprive these "younkers" of their property by erasing their memory of possession. That he came to a less cynical view was largely because he considered the benefits to initiates ("their reason may act freely, without being bypassed by the cheats of custom and education,") but above all the benefits to their society: "by this means...they become qualified, when they have any public office, equally and impartially to administer Justice, without having respect either to friend or relation." *Huskanaw* produced men not so dissimilar from the free-thinking iconoclast Robert Beverley, Jr. or his father-in-law William Byrd I, the protector of the Huguenots. Hence he praised the "keepers" who conducted the ceremony and re-educated the boys.

However, this praise was offered within the context of an ethnography which saw native peoples as doomed largely because of an attachment to superstition and custom that *huskanaw* strengthened. The extent to which Beverley was willing to at least consider whether and how white "natives and inhabitants" of Virginia might undergo a form of *huskanaw* (a question that might easily have engaged a man sent to England as a boy to receive his education), suggests the manner in which Beverley simultaneously embraced and rejected his own hybrid status in ways that must ultimately have prompted acts of self – description such as "I am an Indian." It was one thing for Indians to "unlive their former lives, and commence men, by forgetting that they ever have been boys" (the phrase is lifted almost verbatim from the naturalist John Banister's *Natural History of Virginia*) but, despite repeated negative references to "the English," Beverley did not use the *History and Present State of Virginia* to issue a programmatic statement urging white "native and inhabitants of

"A Conjuror" is taken from a second De Bry engraving entitled "The Conjuror," *ibid.*, Plate XI. Both De Bry engravings are reproduced in Alexander, ed., *Discovering the New World*.

the place” to divest themselves, in a manner akin to *huskanaw*, of some or all of the “English” values of the colony’s childhood and recommence as Virginian men. In his own prose Beverley described *huskanawed* youths in terms that suggest, ultimately, white “natives and inhabitants” would be better advised to look to the beaver’s lodge for an allegory of effective social organisation:

When the Young men come to themselves again, their Reason may act freely, without being byass’d by the Cheats of Custom and Education. Thus they also become discharg’d from the remembrance of any ties by Blood, and are establisht in a state of equality and perfect freedom, to order their actions, and dispose of their persons, as they think fit, without any other Controul, than that of the Law of Nature.⁴⁷

Even so, Beverley’s analysis suggested, they would still need the guidance of a figure comparable to the overseer of the beaver’s lodge. For Robert Beverley, gentleman, litigant and slaveowner, it was inconceivable that white “natives and inhabitants” of Virginia could or should escape the cultural impress of “the English,” live in a state of equality and renounce the ties of blood. Beverley’s *History and Present State of Virginia* is not as some have suggested, the first expression of a distinctively American consciousness but rather the finest expression in American letters of a hybrid, colonial, and, in this case, anglo-Virginian cultural identity.

⁴⁷ Ewan and Ewan, *John Banister and His Natural History of Virginia*, 381; Beverley *History*, 164-5.