

Indians and Europeans on the Northwest Coast: Historical Context

Directions: Read & annotate this piece, paying particular attention to how the native and European peoples first interacted based on previous conceptions of one another and each of their cultural and economic background.

The history of the late 18th and early 19th centuries in the Pacific Northwest is in many ways a story of **convergence**. It is the story of two groups of people—one European and one Indian—converging on the land that we now call home. Each group possessed its own social and political structures, economies, and ways of interacting with the natural environment. In addition, each group had its own ways of thinking about and representing the events that took place. The convergence of different groups, and of different ways of doing and thinking about things, created a diverse community of people who found ways to live together in a new and altered world. This story of convergence took place over many decades, and it continues into the present.

The year 1774 marked the beginning of documented contact between Europeans and Indians on the Northwest Coast, and the year 1812 marked the beginning of a new phase of development, when overland fur traders took center stage. It was during this brief but pivotal period that Indians and Europeans met and developed a trading relationship that laid the groundwork for future social, political, and economic interactions. This was the era when ships from Spain, England, America, France, Russia and Portugal visited the Northwest Coast and first met the Nuu-chah-nulth, Makah, Salish, Kwakwaka'wakw, and Haida peoples.

This introductory essay is divided into three parts: Imagining, Meeting, and Living Together. The Imagining section provides a glimpse of the ways in which some Europeans and Indians imagined each other before they actually met. The Meeting portion describes some of the cultural baggage that each group brought to their encounters. Essentially, this section explains why Europeans came to the Pacific Northwest in the first place, and why Indians chose to trade and socialize with Europeans. Because the meeting of these cultures was both enabled and limited by geography, this section also describes some of the different ways in which each group responded to the natural environment. Finally, the Living Together segment gives examples of the ways in which each culture learned about the other. It focuses on economic and political aspects of the process of learning to live together. Sometimes this learning took the form of peaceful accommodation, and sometimes it took more violent forms. Yet by the start of the 19th century, each group had a much more realistic sense of the other than they had possessed a mere 30 years before.

In some respects, the story of cultural contact in the Northwest resembles that of Christopher Columbus's famous voyages to the New World beginning in 1492. But by the time Europeans came to the Northwest almost 300 years had passed, and European explorers had traveled to and mapped nearly all parts of North and South America—except the Pacific Northwest. Here in the Northwest, the story of contact and convergence began around the time of the American Revolution, when American colonists had settled no farther west than the Ohio River valley. While some American colonists certainly cherished dreams of westward expansion, no one yet dreamed of a nation that stretched from sea to sea.

As the movement for independence took hold along the eastern seaboard of what is now the United States, the aboriginal people of the Pacific Northwest went about their business undisturbed. They had little or no knowledge of what was going on in Europe or its American colonies, just as Europeans and American colonists had little or no knowledge that the Pacific Northwest even existed—it was a gaping hole in their maps of the world. Yet, for many European explorers, entrepreneurs, and heads of state, this blank space on the map held infinite promise. Wealth, fame,



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and adventure beckoned from that unknown geographic space, and their lure was compounded by legend.

Imagining

The legend of the Northwest Passage particularly enthralled Europeans. This passage, sometimes referred to as the Strait of Anian, was a waterway that supposedly connected the Pacific Ocean to the Atlantic. Such a waterway would have greatly facilitated trade and communication between Europe and eastern Asia because travel between these locations mandated choosing among three unattractive options. One had to undertake either an arduous overland journey along the Silk Road, or a long and hazardous sea voyage westward around either the tip of South America or eastward around Africa and across the Indian Ocean. Thus in the 18th century European traders cherished the hope of finding an easily accessible waterway across North America. They based their hopes on legendary accounts about the Northwest Passage.

One of the most mysterious and influential of these accounts was that of Juan de Fuca. In 1596 an elderly Greek pilot by the name of Apostolos Valerianus (a.k.a. Juan de Fuca) confided a strange and wonderful tale to Michael Lok, the British ambassador at Aleppo, Syria. Lok subsequently submitted the story for publication. De Fuca claimed that in 1592 he had been a member of a Spanish sea voyage along the Pacific Coast north of Mexico. The expedition had sailed to about 47 degrees north latitude, at which point de Fuca's boat had turned eastward into a strait that seemed to cut deep into the North American continent. De Fuca said that the expedition had sailed for 20 days in the strait and come out in the Atlantic Ocean, at which point it retraced its route to Mexico. De Fuca claimed that the natives living near the strait were rich in gold, silver, and pearls.

Of course, the Strait of Juan de Fuca does not cross the North American continent, and the Native people of the Northwest were never in possession of large quantities of gold, silver, or pearls. Yet, like the legend of El Dorado, the fabled Northwest Passage caught the imagination of many Europeans and persisted in the minds of explorers. In 1786 Englishman Charles Barkley discovered the entrance to a large strait at approximately the latitude de Fuca described, and he named the Strait of Juan de Fuca after its 16th-century promoter.

Just as Europeans were confused about the geography and natural resources of the land they were so eager to explore, Indians were initially confused by the ships and people who met them on the Pacific coast. While conducting research among the Clatsop people during the late 19th century, ethnographer Franz Boas heard a story about the Clatsops first contact with Europeans. The storyteller claimed that an old woman was walking along the Oregon coast one day and saw the first European ship to visit the area. Because she had never seen a ship before, she conceived of the strange object as a monster that looked like a whale with two trees sticking out of it. A creature resembling a bear with a human face came out of the monster. She then went home to tell her strange tale. Many Clatsop people came to the ocean to see the strange thing she described, and they met the bear-like Europeans on the beach. The Europeans wanted water, and in the confusion one Clatsop man went aboard the ship, while his relatives set fire to it. The Clatsops were apparently able to salvage much of the copper and iron from the ship, as they became rich by trading these goods with their neighbors inland and along the coast. The riches and celebrity that the Clatsops gained in their encounter with a European ship could have served as incentive for other Indian peoples to greet and trade with ships that came to their homes. In this way, the promise of riches encouraged both Europeans and Indians to trade with each other.

Meeting

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In the 1770s, when sustained contact between Europeans and Indians in the Pacific Northwest began, European explorers, traders, entrepreneurs, and national governments were playing a tricky game of international chess. Europeans came to the Northwest intending to claim territory, make a profit, win intellectual glory, convert souls, and maintain peace with their neighbors—all at the same time. The game that they played had certain rules, the most fundamental of which was the right of first discovery and possession. The way in which these two words were defined, however, led to much confusion and diplomatic hedging by all parties.

For example, shortly after Columbus arrived in the New World in 1492, the **papacy** drew up a document known as the Treaty of Tordesillas. The treaty asserted that Spain had a right to claim all lands west of a certain point in the Atlantic Ocean—basically, most of the unexplored continents of North and South America. At that time, the Pope was a major power broker among the Christian European nations, and he therefore negotiated this treaty not between Spain and the people of the New World, but between Spain and Portugal, the two most avid colonial powers of the 15th century. Partially as a result of this agreement, Spain became the wealthiest country in Europe in the 16th century because of the gold and silver extracted from its colonies in present-day Mexico and Peru. Because they were busy administering their enormous empire in South America and Central America, Spanish leaders did not deem it necessary to immediately inhabit, or even explore, all the territory allotted to them in the Treaty of Tordesillas. Nearly 300 years later, the Spanish presence in the Pacific Northwest was still negligible. The Spanish were additionally secure in their claim to lands on the Pacific Ocean due to Balboa's 1513 trek across the Isthmus of Panama. Upon sighting the blue waters of the Pacific, Balboa claimed the ocean for Spain. Of course, the Chinook and Makah and Salish and other peoples of the Pacific Northwest in no way considered themselves Spanish subjects, nor did they even know that Spain had laid claim to their land.

The Russians did know about the pretensions of Spanish land claims in the New World, but they had no intention of letting those claims go unchallenged. Backed by Catherine the Great, a Russian expedition led by Vitus Bering set off from St. Petersburg in 1725 and marched toward the Pacific Coast. Sent in part to establish whether or not Asia and North America were actually separate continents, this expedition discovered the Bering Strait in 1728. The explorers then sailed toward Alaska but never landed. Nonetheless, the expedition laid the groundwork for the fur trade with China. Vitus Bering and his successors soon did establishing trading posts at various points along the coast of what is now Alaska. This activity alarmed the Spanish, who had hoped that the Northwest Coast would lie undisturbed by European powers until the Spanish Empire had the time and resources to colonize it. It was in this climate of suspicion that the Spanish launched the Perez Expedition of 1774 from the naval base at San Blas, Mexico, to the Northwest Coast.

Perez and his men were sent to spy on Russian traders, but they were also specifically instructed to take possession of the land as far as 60 degrees north latitude. For the Spanish, taking possession of the land entailed erecting a large wooden cross onshore and burying a glass bottle at its foot, containing written documentation of Spain's claim. Adverse weather prevented Perez from taking these actions, but his expedition did meet with the people of the Northwest at two locations.

First, he met the Haida people of the Queen Charlotte Islands (now a part of British Columbia). After spreading feathers on the water near Perez's boat, the Haida proceeded to trade with Perez's crew. The Haida offered sea otter skins, hats, blankets, and other items made from cedar trees in exchange for metal goods from Perez's boat. This boat-to-boat trade



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was repeated about a month later with some unidentified people (probably the Nuu-chah-nulth) off the coast of Vancouver Island.

Although Perez and his men forged tentative economic bonds with the people of the Northwest Coast, they failed to meet their political objective, which had been to take effective possession of the land in the face of other imperial competitors. In addition to facing competition from the Russians, the Spanish also had to contend with the English, who did not acknowledge the validity of the Treaty of Tordesillas and who were busy looking for lands that seemed outside the realm of actual Spanish control. The Spanish believed that the best way to keep competitors out of their territory was to keep their maps, sea logs, and explorations secret from other European powers. Since the Spanish did not publish records of their explorations, the only way to prove their claims was to leave some sign on the land. Unsatisfied with the results of the Perez expedition, the Spanish sent the Bodega-Hezeta expedition of 1775 to make landfall and establish Spanish claims to the Pacific Northwest with more authority. This expedition did reach land and plant crosses, fulfilling the Spanish government's goals.

The Spanish had good reason to be nervous about the **encroachments** of other European powers. In addition to the Russians, who were expanding their Alaska-based fur trade southward, western European nations—such as France, the Netherlands, and especially Great Britain—were becoming stronger colonial powers and threatening Spain's leading role in the colonization of the New World. In 1745, and more extensively in 1774, the British Parliament promised to handsomely reward the person who discovered a Northwest Passage across North America—a passage widely believed to exist smack in the middle of the land claimed by the Spanish throne.

While Europeans fretted and schemed, the Indian people of the Pacific Northwest were concerned with their own affairs. The people of the Northwest coast lived in orderly, hierarchical societies based on extended family groups. Several of these groups might be on particularly friendly terms because of intermarriage, for example, and be allied against other groups. Southern peoples (those near and below the 49th parallel) particularly feared encroachment by their powerful neighbors to the north (especially the Haida). Conflict between various groups occasionally broke out, but these conflicts were not especially bloody by European standards.

Because these Native societies were quite hierarchical, leading families sought to maintain and advance their social positions by accumulating and then distributing material wealth. In addition, accumulation of wealth and displays of power and prestige often prevented encroachment by neighboring groups. Overall, trading for services and material goods was a vital component of Indian life on the Northwest Coast. When Europeans arrived with trade goods, coastal Indians saw the opportunity for advancement within their own societies by accumulating rare and exotic European goods such as copper, beads and iron blades. In return the Europeans sought furs, and it became relatively simple for powerful Native leaders to take control of the acquisition, preparation, and trade of furs within a given area. Leaders such as Chief Maquinna of Nootka Sound and Chief Wickeninish of Clayoquot Sound exercised control over trading empires in the interior, organizing labor and setting the terms for trade at the coast. As their wealth grew, so did their prestige, because they were able to redistribute more and more goods.

For most coastal people of the Pacific Northwest, wealth was acquired and distributed through the *potlatch* system. Under this system, extended families would vie for prestige in the community by accumulating vast amounts of trade goods and then giving them away in ceremonies called potlatches. Potlatches were held to commemorate special occasions of importance to the host family. They were generally ceremonial celebrations involving hundreds of people and often lasting up to two weeks. Guests at the potlatch would witness and, by their presence, attest to the importance of the host family and the commemorated event. In return, the host family would give away, its accumulated wealth—the more goods it gave away, the higher its social prestige rose. In this way, wealth was redistributed throughout the

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community. European goods were perfect for potlatching, and they therefore became quickly integrated into the local economies.

Like the Europeans, the Native people of the Northwest Coast were participants in a materialist, **acquisitive**, and wealthy economy. By the late 18th century, the exchange of prestige goods (mainly non-food items) among the coastal peoples of the Pacific Northwest was extensive and competitive. For most coastal groups, material wealth and social status were closely linked. The Europeans who came to the Northwest Coast in the late 18th century understood this acquisitiveness because it had parallels in their own economic system. Thus, the exchange of goods over the side of boats made sense to all involved. But here the similarities between the two economic structures ended.



For most Europeans and Americans of the 18th century, wealth was acquired and distributed in a global capitalist economy. This economy was not exactly like the one we know today, where most governments perceive free trade as positive. In the 18th century, global capitalism mostly functioned around the principles of **mercantilism**, an economic philosophy that held the amount of wealth in the world to be finite. Because there was assumed to be only a certain amount of wealth to be shared by all, nations competed against each other for the largest portion of that wealth. Wealth was often based in natural resources, so nations sought to claim large tracts of land all over the world. Trade was generally tightly controlled by national governments, and trade protection in the form of tariffs, embargoes, and privateering (a polite term for piracy) was the order of the day.

Mercantilist ideas also helped produce a system of **colonialism**. European nations like Spain, England, France, and Portugal sought to increase their wealth by establishing colonies in Africa, Asia, and the Americas. Some of these colonies were settlement colonies, and some were for trade alone, but all revolved around the central idea of increasing the wealth of the mother country by generating portable raw materials. (Colonies also increased the wealth of mother countries by providing markets for European goods, a function that became increasingly important during the 19th century.) Mother countries often imposed trade restrictions on their colonies, so that their inhabitants could only trade with representatives of the mother country. Naturally, the black market was rather large, as were the number of ways to circumvent trade restrictions.



Mercantilist capitalism and colonialism fueled European nations' interest in the Americas, and the desire to accumulate prestige goods drove coastal Indians to trade with the Europeans. In this way, the common ground of trading brought the two people together.

However, when European travelers traded for furs—and for fish and fresh vegetables to relieve illnesses like scurvy that plagued sailing crews—they unwittingly exposed Indian populations to European diseases like influenza and smallpox. There are various theories about how smallpox was introduced to the Northwest Coast, but most historians agree that this deadly disease first began to ravage Indian populations in the region between the mid-1770s and early 1780s. Because Native peoples had never before been introduced to the disease, they had no natural immunity, and a virgin-soil epidemic ensued. In combination with other diseases such as influenza and malaria, smallpox wiped out roughly 65 to 95% of Northwestern Indian populations by 1840. Though there is a great deal of dispute about pre-contact Native populations, it seems fair to say that the Indian population of the Pacific Northwest (including present-day Alaska, British Columbia, Washington, and Oregon) fell from over 500,000 in 1750 to somewhere around 100,000 by 1850. By way of comparison, the 14th-century Black Plague in Europe

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and Asia claimed the lives of one-third of the population there. Smallpox and other diseases did kill some Europeans in the Pacific Northwest, but not nearly at the same rate as the illnesses decimated Native populations. In addition, the Europeans who died were replaced by a growing stream of travelers and traders from Europe and the United States.

Just as the environment affected Europeans and Indians differently at a biological level, these groups also responded to their surroundings in different ways. Indian groups on the coast made extensive use of cedar trees and salmon, for example. Cedar bark, with its long, malleable fibers, was perfect for weaving baskets, hats, and clothes. Cedar was also used for constructing housing, canoes, and boxes. For coastal peoples, as well as their neighbors in the interior, salmon provided a food staple and functioned in a ceremonial capacity as well. Indian people also actively shaped their environment, often using fire to clear the land and make it more favorable for hunting and gathering food.

For many Indian people of the Northwest, the natural environment was **animate**. That is to say, the animals and specific locations on the land were alive with meaning and formed the center of an oral literature common to the people of a specific language group. Stories about Coyote, Raven, Eagle, and Beaver are good examples of these types of oral literature. Though Europeans certainly had some literature describing animate landscapes (the Grimm Brothers' fairy tales, for example), they approached the Pacific Northwest in a different way.

The 18th-century intellectual and cultural movement called the Enlightenment shaped the perspectives and values of many European explorers. Philosophers, scientists, and politicians imagined the world as a giant laboratory in which everything worked according to rational, scientific principles. In this logical world, all ills could be cured by the accumulation of knowledge and the application of logic. One of the goals that Enlightenment thinkers set for themselves was the attainment of complete knowledge of the natural world. To this end, European nations sent botanists, astronomers, cartographers, linguists, and other scientists to the far corners of the world to collect knowledge and to enhance the prestige of their respective states. To these men, the Pacific Northwest was a wilderness to be explored, catalogued, and named. Unlike most Northwest Coast Indian peoples, for whom the land and animals were active participants in daily life, Enlightenment-era scientists viewed the natural world as an object for study. The English, French, Spanish, and Americans all sent scientific exploring expeditions to the Pacific Northwest during the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Additionally, many military expeditions also carried scientists aboard.

The giant tract of unmapped land in the Pacific Northwest appears to have been like a siren song for these scientific explorers—not only would they have the opportunity to discover new plants, animals, languages, climates, and ways of life, but they also harbored hopes of discovering riches as well. These men made detailed maps of the area, noting good anchorages where trade might be facilitated, as well as fertile cropland and the location of abundant game. Their sponsoring governments made use of this information to choose which lands were most valuable and which could be negotiated away to the other European powers. No European power wanted to give away the Northwest Passage inadvertently, simply because no thorough survey of the land had been made. Therefore, although the pure accumulation of knowledge was their stated goal, scientists also served political ends.

Scientists were not the only Europeans interested in the environment and geography of the Northwest, however. European traders and travelers of all kinds observed and remarked upon the vast forests, the waters thick with marine life, and above all, the weather. Visitors to the Northwest often described their surroundings in terms of commodities—forests were wood lots where masts for ships could be procured, animals were skins that could be traded in China for tea and silk. Almost all visitors wrote about the Northwest as a wilderness, even though they sometimes stressed its park-like qualities. They did not perceive the ways in which Native peoples managed and shaped the landscape, instead imagining that the Northwest was a wilderness untouched by human intervention.

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Living Together

The Indian people of the Northwest Coast and the European travelers to this region both came from materially acquisitive, trade-oriented cultures, and they quickly discovered this common ground. The language of trade was easily comprehensible to all parties, and formed the basis for the earliest relationships between Indian and non-Indian people in the Northwest. Beginning with the Perez Expedition of 1774, trade goods were exchanged over the sides of boats, apparently to the mutual satisfaction of all parties. It seems that for Indians and Europeans alike, the goods that were exchanged were initially curiosities—interesting, decorative, and occasionally useful items, but nothing that drastically changed the lives of parties on either side of the exchange. This type of relatively disinterested trade lasted less than a decade.



Captain James Cook's 1778 visit to the Northwest Coast marked a turning point in the economic and social history of the region. Cook was on a mission of exploration for the English government, and he stopped at Nootka Sound to get fresh water and trade for food. He and his men met the Nuu-chah-nulth people who lived around the sound, and the two sides engaged in trade. As part of these exchanges, Cook's men took aboard several sea otter pelts. Cook's sailors did not perceive the pelts to have any great value, and they used them for bedding on the voyage to China. At the port of Canton, however, it soon became clear that fashionable Chinese women coveted the furs; merchants offered to pay outrageous prices for the suddenly stylish pelts. Cook's men made a small fortune and almost mutinied over their desire to return to Nootka Sound to pick up more furs. Word of the value of sea otter pelts spread among traders, and by 1785 James Hanna had made a fortune trading iron bars for furs in Nootka Sound and then selling the furs in Macao. Other merchants followed in his wake, and the Northwest Coast soon became inundated with traders of many nationalities.

Faced with so many traders seeking to buy their sea otter pelts, the Indian people of the Northwest Coast responded shrewdly. As the demand for furs increased, the prices set by Indian traders skyrocketed in the years after Cook's initial voyage. Just as the influx of gold, silver, and other goods from the New World had transformed the European economy in the 16th century, Native economies in the Pacific Northwest were transformed by contact with European colonialism and capitalism.

At first, the region's Native peoples used European imports within the context of their own economies, saving up trade goods for later **potlatches**, and bartering for iron tools and ornaments that had preexisting purposes in their societies. But over the course of a few decades, the economies of coastal peoples began to center around the production of furs for export. For example, the Indian people who handed the furs over the sides of European boats were not the same people who went hunting for sea otters, or even the same people who prepared the pelts for trade. Yet because these coastal traders were the first to receive compensation for the furs, they began to organize the production of furs and to compete with other traders for the resources of the hunters and pelt-curiers. This reorientation toward the export of raw materials laid the groundwork for future extractive industries that would come to characterize the economy of the Pacific Northwest.

The sea otter trade restructured Native economies, but it impacted whites' economic practices as well. European and American traders had to change their methods to comply with Native norms, because Indians set the terms of the fur trade—both in terms of method and price (as the skyrocketing price of furs indicated). European traders wanted to come to the coast, rapidly take on a full cargo of furs, and depart just as quickly to China, where they could exchange the precious furs for a cargo of silk, tea, and spices before returning to Europe or America. The Indian peoples of the Northwest Coast preferred to trade in the context of an elaborate and more slow-moving establishment of social relations. They often refused to

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trade substantial quantities of furs unless the European merchants came ashore to their villages, where a celebration of eating, drinking, dancing, and singing ensued. These ceremonies sometimes stretched on over weeks and months, and many European traders were forced to spend the winter on the coast in order to collect enough furs to fill their cargo holds. Indian fur traders also quickly learned that Spanish, English, American, and Dutch merchants competed with one another. Indian traders played these groups off one another, encouraging competition until they had obtained the highest possible price for their furs.

As Europeans and Indians lived together in Nootka Sound and elsewhere in the Northwest, their political activities and hierarchies became intertwined. The infamous Nootka Controversy demonstrated the extent to which Europeans and Indians had become invested in each other's lives. In late 1789, British, American, and Spanish vessels met in Nootka Sound—much to the frustration of the Spanish, who claimed sole possession of the Northwest Coast. The actions of Estéban José Martínez, commander of the Spanish fort at Nootka, precipitated the crisis. Under orders to keep British or Russian interlopers out of Nootka Sound, Martínez seized an English ship under the command of Captain James Douglas. Douglas protested and argued that because his ship was funded by Portuguese interests, it was therefore nominally Portuguese. He also claimed (falsely) that he had only sought refuge in Nootka Sound to repair his ship. After spending a week under arrest, he was allowed to leave the sound.

These events disturbed Maquinna, Wickeninish, and other aboriginal leaders who were allies of the English. Sighting other English vessels approaching Nootka Sound, Chief Maquinna sent out canoes to warn the approaching traders that trouble was afoot with the Spanish. The warnings fell on deaf ears, and the hotheaded James Colnett sailed his ship directly into the sound. Neither Martínez nor Colnett possessed the diplomatic skills to negotiate a solution to the ensuing confrontation. Colnett's ship was undeniably English, and Martínez's orders clearly stated that he was to detain all English vessels on the coast. Both men flew into a rage, insulting and threatening one another, and Martínez arrested Colnett and his crew. Some English sailors were allowed to go ashore, and these men complained to Maquinna that the Spanish had no right to prevent the British from trading at Nootka. One of Maquinna's relatives, Chief Callicum, loudly protested against Martínez's actions and asked him to release the captives. Martínez responded by firing a gun at Callicum. Although he missed, one of his crew did not. Callicum fell dead in front of his wife, child, and dozens of European and Native witnesses. Maquinna and his followers responded by withdrawing inland and refusing further contact with the Europeans for many months.

Once news of Colnett's and Martínez's actions reached Europe, Spain and England stood poised for war over Nootka Sound and the Northwest Coast. The Spanish claimed the right of first possession, based on the Bodega-Hezeta Expedition's building of crosses in 1775. The English, citing Spain's tardy publication of these claims, claimed the right of first possession based on buildings constructed onshore by John Meares in 1789. Ultimately, the issue was decided by military strength. England had a strong navy and so did its ally, Holland. But when the Spanish turned to their traditional ally, France, they were disappointed. The French Revolution was in full swing, and Louis XVI could not aid the Spanish. French revolutionaries, inspired by the rhetoric of the American Revolution, were in no mood to help the Spanish monarch defend his colonial claims. By 1790 it became clear that Spain had to risk a naval conflict, which it had almost no hope of winning, or accept a diplomatic settlement dictated by the English. This settlement, known as the Nootka Convention, stated that Spain was to turn over to England all lands bought and occupied by Meares. After the location of these lands had been determined, a line would be drawn between lands that were in the sole possession of the Spanish and lands that were open to both nations.

In order to enforce the settlement decided by the Nootka Convention in 1790, representatives of England and Spain met at Nootka Sound in 1792. To investigate and establish their claims in the Pacific Northwest, the Spanish sent Don Juan Francisco de la Bodega y Quadra, and the English dispatched Captain George Vancouver. Unlike Martínez and Colnett, Vancouver and Bodega y Quadra were patient and level-headed men. Nonetheless, the two men had difficulty reaching an agreement since the terms of

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the 1790 Nootka Convention were ambiguous, partly because so much of the region's geography remained unknown. In addition, Vancouver and Bodega y Quadra heard conflicting reports about recent events from Nuu-chah-nulth and American traders who had been eyewitnesses. For example, Maquinna denied selling any land to Meares at all. Furthermore, Bodega y Quadra wanted to establish a clear boundary between Spanish and English claims, but Vancouver thought the Nootka Convention did not grant him the power to negotiate permanent borders. But instead of arguing, these men spent their time dining on each other's ships and being entertained in Nuu-chah-nulth villages. They reestablished cordial relations with Chief Maquinna, who returned to his home on Nootka Sound after he was assured that

Martínez was no longer in command there. The two captains also agreed to explore the region further and to share their geographic knowledge with each other.



Their explorations filled in many of the blank spaces on Europeans' maps. Bodega y Quadra and his party circumnavigated Vancouver Island, proving that it was not part of the mainland—as many previous explorers had thought. Vancouver's crew charted the Strait of Juan de Fuca and the interior waterways connected to it. His expedition demonstrated that the strait led to the Puget Sound, not to some mythical Northwest Passage. Because Vancouver and Bodega y Quadra shared information, both parties learned that Puget Sound could be a fantastic harbor for large ships. It became apparent that Nootka Sound was not the only good port north of San Francisco and that Nootka's strategic significance had been overrated. Bodega y Quadra subsequently turned the Spanish fort at Nootka over to the English. He moved his men south to Neah Bay to establish a fort

signifying the northernmost edge of Spain's possessions. (Although this fort lasted only a few months, it was the first European settlement in the area that would become the State of Washington.) Even though Bodega y Quadra and Vancouver did not resolve the Nootka Controversy themselves, they established the friendly relations and acquired the geographic knowledge that made a final settlement possible.

After the Nootka Controversy concluded, Nootka Sound gradually became less and less important to explorers, diplomats, and traders from Europe and the United States. Spanish and English negotiators ended their disagreement by signing the Second Nootka Convention in 1794. This agreement granted the Spanish sovereignty over the coastline south of Neah Bay. Areas to the north, including Nootka Sound, remained free ports where ships from all nations could land. Substantial numbers of European and American traders continued to visit Nootka until 1803, when violence erupted along the sound. The crew of the American ship *Boston* killed several Nuu-chah-nulth people, and its captain repeatedly insulted Chief Maquinna. The chief and his followers responded by boarding the *Boston* and killing its crew, sparing only two men, John Thompson and John Jewitt. Thompson and Jewitt lived as Maquinna's captives until 1806, when another American ship negotiated their release. The attack on the *Boston* made merchants extremely wary of landing at Nootka. Though trading did resume after Maquinna released Thompson and Jewitt, the trade was never again as vigorous as it had been in the late 18th century. Nootka Sound was once the most important place in the known Northwest, but today it is far removed from the economic centers of the region, and it is accessible only by boat or airplane.

Conclusion

After the Nootka Controversy, the main area of contact between Indians and Europeans moved to the south, centering on the mouth of the Columbia River. In 1792 American Captain Robert Gray became the first non-Indian to navigate and map the Columbia River. After Gray publicized his findings, many American traders began visiting the region around the Columbia. Even though English captains had initiated the maritime fur trade in the Northwest, the English became distracted by their military struggle

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with France after Napoleon's ascension to power during the late 1790s. Although the Spanish remained an occasional presence on the Northwest Coast, they, too, were distracted by domestic affairs and only dabbled in the fur trade. Thus, American traders came to dominate the maritime fur trade between 1795 and 1814. Americans concentrated on trading and generally stayed out of the political struggles among European nations. Both the Spanish and the English were willing to overlook Americans' presence in the Northwest, and the Americans capitalized on this neglect. In fact, they were so successful in the trade—and Northwest Coast Indians were such skilled hunters—that the sea otter was nearly extinct in the region by the first decade of the 19th century.

The maritime fur trade was only a short chapter in the history of the Northwest, and it gradually became supplanted by the land-based fur trade. Inspired by the overland voyages of Alexander MacKenzie, who became the first person to cross North America by land in 1793, and Lewis and Clark, who reached the mouth of the Columbia in 1805, overland fur traders began to look with interest at the Pacific Northwest. Fur-bearing land mammals, such as beavers and bears, were abundant in this region. During the first and second decades of the 19th century, the Canadian-based North West Company became the area's most powerful fur trading enterprise by establishing a network of trading posts throughout the interior of the Northwest. Seeking a foothold in the fur trade, John Jacob Astor, an American entrepreneur, established a trading company headquartered in what is now Astoria, Oregon. Established in 1811, the company functioned for only a short time because Astor sold out to the North West Company after the War of 1812. Though Astor's operation was short-lived, the overland trade in furs was just beginning. In 1821 the North West Company merged with its rival, the Hudson's Bay Company, and the resulting combination dominated the economy of the Northwest for the next 25 years.

As the overland fur trade replaced the maritime trade, the nature of the relations between Native and European peoples began to change somewhat. Not surprisingly, Indians and whites had learned from their early experiences with each other along the Northwest Coast, and their later relationships built on those forged in the early years of contact. Although episodes of violence periodically strained these relationships, the overland fur trade continued the generally peaceful patterns of interaction established during the maritime fur trade. However, the advent of land-based trading ensured that Europeans and Americans were no longer mere visitors who bought furs and soon returned home: land-based traders often lived in the Northwest for decades at a time. The permanence of their presence brought new twists to the relationships established with Native peoples. Many traders married Native women, and the children of these unions—known as the *métis*—often became fur traders themselves. Native peoples, Europeans, Americans, and the *métis* formed new and hybrid ways of trading and living together. These ways of living together persisted until the late 1840s, when the establishment of the Oregon Trail and the arrival of American settlers shattered the world made by the fur trade and opened a new chapter in the history of the Northwest.

Source: "Indians and Europeans on the Northwest Coast: Historical Context." *Center for the Study of the Pacific Northwest*. N.p., n.d. Web. 17 Sept. 2014.

Word Bank

convergence - process of coming together/meeting

papacy - the office or authority of the Pope

encroachments - intrusion on a person's territory, rights, etc.

pottlach - (among North American Indian peoples of the northwest coast) an opulent ceremonial feast at which possessions are given away or destroyed to display wealth or enhance prestige.

acquisitive - interested in acquiring money or material things.

Mercantilism - the economic theory that trade generates wealth and is stimulated by the accumulation of profitable balances, which a government should encourage by means of protectionism.

colonialism - the policy or practice of acquiring full or partial political control over another country, occupying it with settlers, and exploiting it economically.

animate - alive or having life